

Divine Timing

SOWING & REAPING IN GOD'S DIVINE TIMING

Focal Verses • ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8, 14-15

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EVALUATE** if there is a time for everything in our lives; feel **COMFORTED** that God's timetable provides balance in our lives; and **EXPLORE** the various ways in which God uses objectionable experiences to serve our good.

In Focus

When Cheryl left the kitchen, her 6-year-old daughter, Jasmine, turned from the window where she had been watching the fall leaves blow in the yard. "Mommy, why do leaves change colors?" Cheryl smiled and said, "Because God says it's time."

Suddenly, it was like talking to an adult. Jasmine said: "No, I mean *really*, Mommy. I told Rhonda's big sister that, but she says it's because the trees stop making stuff that makes their leaves green, something called Colorfill. Is that true?"

"Oh! You mean chlorophyll."

"Yes, ma'am, colorfill," her daughter said, repeating her version.

Cheryl sat down on the floor and tried a different answer. "Yes, it's true that when it gets cold, God takes green away. The red, orange, and yellow colors you see are always there, but the colors are covered by chlorophyll during the spring and summer."

Her daughter responded, "I wish God would let the colors stay all the time. Don't you, Mommy?"

"Sometimes," Cheryl answered. "But I think it's nice that God picks the time for the seasons."

Jasmine stroked her teddy bear and said, "Oh, just like it was nice that God picked the time for Granddad to die, because we would have wanted to keep him here with us. But instead, God knew it was time for him to go to heaven."

Cheryl smiled and thought about how much we can learn from the wisdom of a child. She said softly, "Jasmine, dear, you are absolutely right."

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon pondered God's design and divine timing. When we struggle with life's events, we must remind ourselves that everything happens in God's appointed time.

Keep in Mind

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven"
(Ecclesiastes 3:1, KJV).



Focal Verses

KJV Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

The People, Places, and Times

Ecclesiastes. The book of Ecclesiastes discusses the age-old question that many people continue to ask: “Is life worth living?” The writer was initially convinced that life was meaningless and without purpose. He reasoned that, much like riding a merry-go-round, so much of what we experience is repetitious, boring, and takes us nowhere except to the grave. In the language of the text, all “is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecclesiastes 2:26). How then are we to live life in a way that rises above the “vanity” Solomon ascribes to everything? The key is not to be found in the circumstances of life itself, because all things have validity in their own time. The key to life is only found “under heaven,” that is, under and in God Himself.

Why does life sometimes seem so empty (vain)? Is God responsible for meaninglessness? Of course not! The world we know is not the world as God created it. The world God created was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The world in its present condition is fallen and messed up by sin. That is why the mystery of life cannot be solved from within life itself.

We cannot see God’s complete purposes in life because we are finite (limited). There are some things that only God knows in His infinite (unlimited) wisdom. When we tried to pry into God’s exclusive knowledge, the result was the Fall of mankind (Genesis 3:1–19). Yet, God “has also set eternity in the human heart.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11b). Thus, we desire to live life on a higher level than the animals. There is meaning to life. But how can we know it? This is the question Solomon wrestles with in this passage.

Background

Ecclesiastes 3, which is probably the most often quoted portion of the book, announces an initial change in the writer’s perspective on life. Here the writer begins to think about the sovereign rule of God. Verses 1–8 are intended to remind the reader of God’s presence and His control over the affairs of mankind. While the experiences of life may toss us from one extreme to the other, we are not left dangling forever at one extreme. Things may seem erratic and arbitrary, but there is a degree of order and dependability about the events of our lives. God’s sovereignty and grace

arrange life's extremes in ways that give balance to what we experience.

Solomon shows us that the key to understanding life is to start with God's purpose and work out from there, because God has an appropriate time for all of life's activities (3:1–8). When we recognize this, we are able to deal with the issues life can throw at us, even if our understanding is not complete. The secret to peace of mind is to be yielded to God in all things; as the apostle Paul would say, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31, NIV).

At-A-Glance

1. The Seasons of Our Lives
(Ecclesiastes 3:1–8)
2. The Power Behind the Seasons
of Our Lives (vv. 14–15)

In Depth

1. The Seasons of Our Lives (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8)

The writer of Ecclesiastes uses verses 1–8 to illustrate God's sovereign activity in human affairs. The principle stated in verse 1 echoes the psalmist's testimony: "My times are in thy hand" (Psalm 31:15). In other words, the events of our lives are all under God's control and occur within the timeframe He determines.

Verses 2–8 are not intended to identify all the events that occur in one's life. Rather, they are intended to present the reader with a picture of the broad scope of God's involvement in human affairs and mankind's response to God's sovereignty.

Twenty-eight human experiences are listed. These experiences take place between the boundaries of birth and death, both of which

are under God's control. The experiences listed reflect human choice to be involved in either constructive or destructive activities. These activities, in turn, give rise to joys and sorrows, love and hate, at both individual and social levels.

The first set of activities speaks of birth and dying, and of planting and plucking up what is planted. One may ask, "In what sense is birth and dying an activity of God that requires some human response?" The time of birth and the time of dying are determined by God. Expectant parents often speak about when their child is due. The reality is that under normal circumstances children come forth from the womb according to God's timing, and parents respond accordingly. Our times are in God's hands.

In like manner, under normal circumstances, God determines the time of our dying and we respond to God's timing. "Planting" and "plucking up" are metaphors aimed at reinforcing the idea of birth and dying.

Just as birth and dying represent seasons of life, so also do killing and healing. Given the metaphorical use of "breaking down" and "building up"... "killing"... is probably not the best translation. A more helpful understanding is to think in terms of demolishing and repairing, which is further pictured in the idea of breaking down and building up. The common thread is destruction and construction.

Another universal experience is listed in verse 4, weeping and laughing, with the parallel experiences of mourning and dancing. Again, one might ask, "What is the divine activity referenced in weeping and laughing?" Psalm 30:11 gives the answer: "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness." What joy and encouragement there is in knowing that during our times of weeping and mourning, God comes at the appropriate time and turns our mourning into celebration.

While verse 5 refers to “a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together,” its meaning is difficult to decipher. Obviously, however, it is a reference to negative and positive action, or to destructive and constructive activity. We can be certain, however, that God can use both destructive and constructive events to serve His purposes and our good (Romans 8:28).

Verse 6 identifies an experience common to all: that of keeping for oneself and sharing with others. Knowing when one has enough and when to share with others is a virtue, the development of which requires prudence and a heart touched by the love of God.

Various interpretations have been given to verse 7. Some see it as a reference to mourning. Others see it as a reference to the breach and restoration of a relationship. In either event, we can be confident of God’s capacity to transform our mourning and any broken relationship into a thing of beauty.

Verse 8 focuses on the human experiences of love and hate, and war and peace. Again, we can be certain that whether love or hate, war or peace, God has the last word.

2. The Power Behind the Seasons of Our Lives (vv. 14–15)

While there may be differing interpretations of the antitheses cited earlier, they all have one thing in common—they are generalized descriptions of some of the events that constitute living under the rule and reign of God. We can be grateful that God, in His providence and grace, uses the events of our lives to accomplish His purposes. Thus, those who yield themselves to God will, by His grace, see beauty in all the events of life. Like the writer of Ecclesiastes, they will come to “know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him” (v. 14).

God can and does give beauty to the seasons of our lives. His activity in our midst is not new to our age. For “that which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past” (v. 15). Truly, our times are in God’s hands, and He can be trusted to make the good and the bad work together for our good.

Search the Scriptures

1. “A time to be born, and a time to _____” (Ecclesiastes 3:2).
2. “A time to _____, and a time to _____ from embracing” (v. 5).
3. “Whatsoever God _____, it shall be _____” (v. 14).
4. “That which hath _____ is now; and that which is to be hath already _____” (v. 15).

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways does God’s sovereignty benefit humankind?
2. According to the writer of Ecclesiastes, what gives meaning to the monotony of life?
3. What should be our response to God’s activity?

Liberating Lesson

All of us live on the edge of the unknown. While we may give considerable time, effort, thought, and prayer to planning certain events in our lives, some events happen without our planning and in spite of our expectations. Some events catch us by surprise and, at times when we are least prepared to handle them. Given the realities that are beyond our control, we would do well to put God center stage in our planning and in our lives. Our plans without God will inevitably send us in meaningless circles, drifting without purpose. We need not reinvent the wheel that the writer has already called to our attention. Let us learn

from His experience and affirm the truth that God uses both positive and objectionable experiences for His good purposes and to keep balance in our lives.

Application for Activation

Identify two positive experiences and two disappointing experiences you have had within the past month. Thank God for the blessings that emerged from the positive experiences. If you have not already discovered the silver lining in your disappointing experiences, ask God to help you to do so. Dare to believe that your times and all the events of your life are both known to Him and controlled by Him.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Archer Jr., Gleason L.; Harris, Robert; Waltke, Bruce K. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1980.

Say It Correctly

Parats. paw-RATS

Banah. BAW-naw

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 99

1 Kings 15-1

Psalm 40:9-13

DAY 100

1 Kings 18-20

Psalm 40:14-17

DAY 101

1 Kings 21-22

Psalm 41:1-6

DAY 102

2 Kings 1-5

Psalm 41:7-13

DAY 103

2 Kings 6-11

Psalm 42:1-7

DAY 104

2 Kings 12-14

Psalm 42:8-11

DAY 105

2 Kings 15-17

Psalm 43

Intimacy

A TRADITION OF INTIMACY AND LOVE

Focal Verses • SONG OF SOLOMON 4:8–5:1A

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCUSS the beauty and wonder of love in a committed relationship; REFLECT on our attitude about love and commitment; and EXPLAIN how to build a relationship that honors a marriage commitment.

In Focus

Craig and Miriam, both attorneys, celebrated their 27th wedding anniversary in two different hotels in two different states. They expressed their love via text message, each too busy to place a call. When they finally caught up with each other a week later, celebrating their anniversary was the last thing on their minds. Miriam's major elite athletic client was in a paternity suit, while one of Craig's corporate clients was embroiled in a messy federal probe.



They both were working when they got the news. Craig's best friend had died in a fiery car crash along with his wife and son. Miriam and Craig felt crushed. This friend was the same one who had set them up for a blind date in college. He recently reminded them to slow down and refocus their priorities. "Tomorrow is not promised," he warned them.

The accident was a wake-up call for Miriam and Craig. Finally, they felt compelled to act on their friend's advice.

Many priorities compete for a couple's attention, but nothing is as important as their devotion to God and each other. Building a relationship that honors a marriage commitment helps couples outsmart the "little foxes" that destroy marriages. The Song of Solomon gives us a godly perspective on intimacy in relationships. How do you prioritize for your most valued relationships?

Keep in Mind

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits"
(Song of Solomon 4:16, KJV).