

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 – He has made everything beautiful in its time

There are different seasons for everything

3:1-8

God has a proper and a perfect time for everything in our lives

Good and bad times - both will come

It is a mistake, like the one made by Job's friends – to assign too much or the wrong meaning to good times or to bad times...

Conversely – “To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!” (Prov. 15:23)

Knowing what to say and when to say it is a good thing. And sometimes – there is a time to say nowt.

Many things will happen in life – good and bad

Tim Keller – Don't let failure go to your heart and don't let success go to your head

It is important to recognise the seasons of life and how they change.

Many of us remain inflexible and unskilled in the wisdom of seasons

It is important to recognise the seasons and to live in the present – not the past or the future

We sometimes wrestle with the opposite poles of nostalgia and living constantly in the future When

(Being at school, a carefree student)

Ecclesiastes 7:10

“Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.”

Don't waste your season **(Old lady to me)**

Single / Single again / Married / Young / Old

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1

Growing old is not for cissies – Billy Graham

The adjustment of seasons challenges old and young alike. Many of our frustrations rise from our blindness to the change of season or to the pain or joy of them, and we struggle to adjust our expectations.

Wise people know and recognise what season of life they find themselves in.

Look at the farmer

A farmer has to learn to recognise, submit to, and plan accordingly for the seasons that rotate through their corner of land year upon year.

Wendell Berry

“After we planted a garden last Tuesday, Tanya spoke of how much she liked the idea that we had done it, not because of any convention or custom or law, but because it was time.”

The challenge of Ecclesiastes is to enjoy God's good gifts in **this season**... whatever is in your hand.

This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.

We are not in control – God is

God's ways at times seem baffling. As the Apostle Paul says, they are **inscrutable** (Rom. 11:33) or “**past finding out**”. That's why as Christians we encourage each other to trust in God's **providence**, to remember His invisible hand, and to rest in the knowledge that He orchestrates all things for our good (8:28).

Providence is: God governing and ordering all times, seasons, and events in all of his creation according to his wise and holy counsel, for his glory, and the ultimate good of his people.

When tragedy strikes. When joy surprises. When sorrow overwhelms. When opportunity knocks. When circumstances push us to the edge. When we have no answers. Somehow. Some way. As Christians, we know the solution lies deep in the providence of God.

God is ultimately in control

“Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” Proverbs 19:21

Don’t say tomorrow we will do this and we will do that

James 4:13-15 “Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

God is sovereign

We can’t control the seasons

But we can recognise them and live accordingly

God’s timing is perfect

3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time.

It seems puzzling to us. If you look at a tapestry up close, what do you see? All you can see is what is right there at the end of your nose... it might look like a blob or a mess – a few random cotton strands. But if you step back and see the entire tapestry, you can see a work of wonder and beauty.

We often cannot see the bigger picture.

Graham Kendrick

In your way and in your time/That's how it's gonna be in my life

**And though some prayers I've prayed/May seem unanswered
yet/You never come too quickly or too late/And I will wait and I
will not regret the time/In your time there is rest, there is rest**

Psalm 31:14-15 "But I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands"

We can't see to the bottom of everything. **Ecclesiastes 7:14** says God has made "**day of adversity and the day of prosperity,**" and we can't understand why... it's bewildering to us.

We cannot see the entire tapestry. We see with the limitations of living under the sun. We have our noses up against the tapestry.

BUT we can see by faith the kind of God who is governing all his creation and so entrust ourselves to him with the seasons and times of our lives.

At just the right time - *Kairos*

Jesus came – Galatians 4:4-5

"But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. **5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children."**

And in time – God will make all things right and crooked things straight = judgment

15-17 – Judgment will come – everything will be made right

“Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account. And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. I said to myself, “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.”

Judgment will come – **making right all things**

When we judge others, we will get bitter

When we judge ourselves, we will get despondent

God will judge all things in his time

Seasons are temporary but God and his love are eternal

This too shall pass

“All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

Julian of Norwich

3:18-20

¹⁸I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. ¹⁹Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

The unavoidable reality of death

And yet –

He has placed eternity in our hearts (verse 11)

And – as Christians – we are called to live life in light of eternity

James 5:7-8 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

We were not meant to die.

Suffering and death are so wrong to us.

But the Bible reminds us over and over – that what we are going through right now is absolutely nothing compared to the eternal glory that we will experience in the presence of God.

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)

Remember Paul's exhortation: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

It's Friday night and a young woman is waiting for her boyfriend to pick her up and take her out for dinner

He said he would be there around 6 o'clock, but as the clock ticks towards 6:30pm she starts to get agitated. I am obviously not that important to him, she fumes.

Finally, at 6:42 he knocks on the door. As the door opens he feels the cold blast of her icy welcome.

Where would you like to go? He asks.

I don't care? she says

How about soup and bagels? He asks.

“He could make a bit more effort” she thinks.

His Dad owns that restaurant.

At the meal he is very quiet - a sure sign of his disinterest

She eats her soup and her bagel – but each mouthful feels like a disappointment.

After the meal he asks

Shall we go to the beach? Oh no, she thinks. If I had known we were going casual and going to the beach, I wouldn't have worn this nice dress....

Could anything have changed this evening?

Well - when you know how the story ends, that changes everything...

Imagine the evening slightly differently...

It's 6 o'clock and a young woman is waiting for her boyfriend to pick her up and take her out for dinner.

The phone rings – it's one of her friends and she is all excited.

I've just seen your boyfriend in a jewellery shop – and he was picking out a ring!

Tonight is the night girlfriend!

The girls shriek and scream for a while and then hang up.

As the clock ticks towards 6:30pm her anticipation builds and her heart is full of love for her considerate and thoughtful boyfriend.

When at 6:42 there is a knock on her door, she thinks her pounding heart is going to give her away. He opens the door to the biggest hug and kiss he has received in a long while.

Where would you like to go.... He asks.

Oh, I really don't mind she says. Anywhere you like.

How about soup and bagels, he asks?

His dad owns that restaurant – there must be something special happening tonight if they are going there! It's going to be a family occasion!

That would be perfect she says.

He is such a romantic she thinks. Even the bagels are shaped like wedding rings. He orders two of them. She sighs.

He is quite quiet at the meal - a sure sign of his nervousness and him waiting for the right moment.

Every mouthful of soup is a delight – and she keeps checking to make sure she doesn't accidentally swallow a ring

After the meal he suggests they go to the beach.

This is it – she smiles. The sun is setting and she is so glad she put her nice dress on.

When you know the end - everything changes....

The Bible promises us that God will use every season for our good and for his glory. That kind of faith changes everything...

Romans 8:28 – And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

2 Cor. 4:16-18

How then should we live? (V. 12-14)

If this is true, our times and seasons are in God's hands, how should we live.

There is a moment in Lord of the Rings, when Frodo and Gandalf are talking and Frodo laments:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time" (receiving the ring and the perilous journey, etc.).

Gandalf's answer is a timeless wisdom that we all need to hear. It sounds like it could have fit into Ecclesiastes. He says:

"So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

We don't decide the time and seasons in which we live. That has been decided for us - by God. It has been given to us by God. So what do we do with the time given to us. Solomon tells us. Toward the end of our text, there are four exhortations that I think Solomon would give us.

1. Fear the Lord. (v. 14) → God's providence should evoke a healthy fear of the Lord. He is not in our hands... our lives are in his! Our living and dying and everything in between. So we ought to humble ourselves in reverent worship. Which frees us from a thousand other fears, doesn't it (like dying)?

2. Be joyful (v. 12).

¹²I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;

I actually think this is the foundation for an undaunted joy. But we need to understand something... I think we often mistake joy for

good vibes. We think joy and sorrow are mutually exclusive. Like you have sorrow on a certain day and another day you have joy.

But Paul says in **2 Corinthians 6: “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...”**

If you can have confidence that God means everything in your life for good, and you know how the story ends - you can have a serious, undaunted, glorious joy under the sun - because God is always good and all he does is good.

3. Do good as long as you live. (v. 12)

¹²I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;

What good has God put before you? This too is part of his providence. He's put it in front of you to do it! These are the good works which he prepares beforehand that we should walk in them.

4. Take pleasure in the good gifts God gives you (v. 13)

Also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Eat, drink, and take pleasure in your work. Because he truly has given them to you. And these things are to be received as gifts.

So how should we live under the sun? We are called to live joyful and productive lives in the fear of God, enjoying every good gift he gives us under the sun as long as we live, because he holds every season and time in his hands.

I want to close with the words of a hymn, written in 1835 called “My Times Are In Thy Hand”.

My times are in Thy hand; My God, I wish them there;

My life, my friends, my soul I leave; Entirely to Thy care.

My times are in Thy hand; Whatever they may be;

Pleasing or painful, dark or bright, As best may seem to Thee.

My times are in Thy hand; Why should I doubt or fear?

My Father's hand will never cause; His child a needless tear.

My times are in Thy hand, Jesus, the crucified!

**Those hands my cruel sins had pierced; Are now my guard and
guide.**

My times are in Thy hand, I'll always trust in Thee;

And, after death, at Thy right hand; I shall forever be.

Community group questions and discussion points:

1. What season of life are you in right now?

- Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Which of these “times” do you most relate to in this moment?
 - How does recognizing your current season help you respond to it with wisdom and faith?
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2. Why do we struggle to accept the changing seasons of life?

- Reflect on the quote: *“Many of us remain inflexible and unskilled in the wisdom of seasons.”*
 - What are some ways you've resisted or resented a season God placed you in?
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3. How can nostalgia or anxiety about the future rob us of joy in the present?

- Read Ecclesiastes 7:10 and 12:1.
 - How can you practice being fully present and grateful in today's season rather than idealizing the past or longing for the future?
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4. In what ways do we wrongly interpret suffering or success, like Job's friends did?

- How might we be tempted to assign too much meaning to a “good” or “bad” time?
 - What does this passage teach us about humility in interpretation?
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5. What does it mean that God “has made everything beautiful in its time”? (v. 11)

- Have you experienced something that only made sense *later* in life?
 - How does the “tapestry” metaphor help you trust God when life feels messy or painful?
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6. How does trusting in God's providence bring peace in uncertain times?

- Read Romans 8:28, Psalm 31:14–15, and Proverbs 19:21.
 - Share a story or situation where God's providence sustained you—or where you're struggling to believe it now.
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7. How can we avoid letting success go to our head or failure to our heart?

- Reflect on Tim Keller's quote.
 - How can grounding your identity in Christ, rather than in circumstances, help with this?
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8. What is the difference between godly joy and worldly happiness?

- Read Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 and 2 Corinthians 6:10.
 - How can we experience joy even in sorrow, and how is that a testimony to our trust in God?
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9. What are some “good works” that God has placed in front of you today?

- Based on Ecclesiastes 3:12 and Ephesians 2:10, what does “doing good” in your current season look like?

- Is there something you've been neglecting because it didn't feel "spiritual" enough?
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10. How does knowing the end of the story change how you live now?

- Reflect on the story of the woman waiting for her boyfriend and the comparison to the Christian hope.
- How does the certainty of Christ's return and future judgment (vv. 15–17) impact your choices, outlook, and patience today?