

Why Do I Feel Empty?
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Ecclesiastes Chapters 3, 4, and 5

Opening questions: Those who grew up in the Great Depression and World War II have been called the GREATEST GENERATION. **How were they different in dealing with life's "ups and downs" than later generations have been? What have many parents of today's kids done that has resulted in spoiled, entitled kids? How can we apply that to our relationship with our Heavenly Father?**

Here's the point: Everything we experience in life is a part of God's plan for us...even the unpleasant stuff. The key is to TRUST God and COOPERATE with His plan even when we don't understand it all.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 3, Solomon wrote some of the most familiar words in scripture. Some people think they are just the lyrics of a song by the Byrds. The Holy Spirit teaches us they convey a great secret to living life with JOY!
Solomon states his observation in verse 1:

Ecclesiastes 3:1–14 (ESV)

3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Then in verses 2-8 he observes the times of our lives in three areas: BODY; EMOTIONS; and SPIRIT. Some of these are obvious. Some a little less obvious. Let's look at just a few of them:

2 a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

What can the timing and process of farming teach us about life in general?

3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;

Any idea how killing and healing could be connected?

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

When are breaking down and building up a part of life?

Then Solomon addressed our EMOTIONAL life:

4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

The Bible teaches us to enjoy the FULL RANGE of emotions. Laughter is described as a medicine. We're to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn. Even Jesus wept. Psalm 30:11 says: *"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing... and clothed me with gladness,"*

- 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;

When would it be a time to REFRAIN from embracing?

- 6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

What phases of a person's life does verse 6 describe?

- 7 a time to tear, 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 for war, and a time for peace.

Is it ever a time for hate?

We all experience these different times and events of life.

**Humanly speaking, how do we tend to try to deal with what happens to us in life?
How can a follower of Christ have PEACE and JOY in both the good things and
the tough things in life?**

God has ordained every part of our lives for a reason and in his perfect timing. We can RESIST and RESENT; or we can TRUST and REST; knowing our Heavenly Father will use it ALL for our good and His glory.

Solomon tells us how this works...verse 9:

9 What gain has the worker from his toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

- Verse 11: The KEY to COOPERATING with God's plans instead of RESENTING them.
- First, the word "beautiful" also translates "proper" or "appropriate."
- **What does it say God has made "appropriate"? When? What does that mean?**
- **Some call this verse the Old Testament version of Romans 8:28...how so?**
- **How can the "bad" things in our lives (death; illness; loss;) have a good purpose?** (Annie's story about her grandparents)
- **Verse 11: God "put eternity into man's heart." What do you think that means?**

St. Augustine said,

"Thou has made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they learn to rest in Thee."

God has "wired" our souls with a hunger, a restlessness that can only be filled by HIM!

- So, HOW do we live that out and have PEACE and JOY through the ups and downs?

12 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.

- As we said last week, the only way to enjoy our labor and our blessings is to see them as a “gift” from God.
- **Question: How can NOT TRUSTING GOD to do what’s BEST for me, impact how we receive and enjoy the blessings He gives us?**
- When I’m trusting God, even when there are burdens I can STILL enjoy my family, my friends, my church, my time with God. Conversely, if I’m striving and fretting, I can’t enjoy those blessings with the same abandon unless I’m fully trusting in God through FAITH in Christ.
- Here, in verse 14, is the PERSPECTIVE we need:

14 I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.

Remember: Everything we experience in life is a part of God's plan for us...even the unpleasant stuff. The key is to TRUST God and COOPERATE with His plan even when we don't understand it all.

- In chapter 4, Solomon encourages us not to try to live this life journey alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 (ESV)

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

There’s an old Swedish motto that hangs in many a kitchen: *“Shared joy is a double joy. Shared sorrow is half a sorrow.”* **What do you think that means?**

Chuck Swindoll writes:

“It’s better to have someone alongside us in the battle. For that reason, during my days in the Marines, we were taught that if the command “dig in” were issued, we should dig a hole large enough for two.”

- Friends and family can’t INSULATE US from trouble; but they can apply the soothing medicine of SUPPORT and ENCOURAGEMENT when we’re going through it!
- As Paul Hahn says about Sunday School, people are not just looking for a “friendly” class...they’re looking for FRIENDS!
- As important as having relationships with others is, there is that relationship above all others: Turn to the first seven verses of chapter 5.

Ecclesiastes 5:1–7 (ESV)

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. 2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

4 When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

- When we approach our Heavenly Father we must remember WHO IS GOD and WHO IS NOT.
- The last few words of verse 7 summarize the point: "...God is the one you must fear."

David Jeremiah said it this way:

'We must decide which side we're on: Do we honor God as the Lord of life, or not? Do we trust Him in the rough times, or only when it's convenient?'

'When we come into the house of God, we're to draw near to hear, to understand, to learn, and to worship. We're to cultivate an attitude of reverence, expectation, and a holy sense of resignation to His will.'

[Jeremiah, David (2007-09-18). Searching for Heaven on Earth (p. 108). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.]

So, What's The Takeaway?

- Everything we experience in life is a part of God's plan for us...even the unpleasant stuff. The key to living with PEACE and JOY is to TRUST God and COOPERATE with His plan even when we don't understand it all.
- We can only have that through a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord.
- Life is not meant to be lived on our own. Godly family and friends soften the blows and enhance the joys of life!
- Finally, all these verses point us back to a SOVEREIGN GOD. We need to approach Him with REVERENCE knowing He can be TRUSTED even when we don't understand.
- This week, in the "ups and downs" of life, will we fume in frustration, or remember that God has ordained it all for our good and His glory?