

What Time Is It?
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Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Opening: The other day Susan expressed mock surprise when someone mentioned the “end of summer” and beginning of the school year. It’s hard to believe that the seasons are about to change again! Let’s take a poll – which season is your favorite? We live in an area that gives us a taste of all four seasons without a lot of extremes. Why is that appealing to some folks? Would you want to live where it’s always sunny and 75? Could there be a downside?

Speaking for myself, I look forward to the change in the seasons of the year. Just when I get tired of one, the next one is around the corner with different temperatures, scenery, holidays, and its own unique fun.

Our text today begins with a poem. The first verse states the reality Solomon is teaching us: *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”* [Now you have that song stuck in your head, right? 😊]

Life is really a “parade” of seasons. Some of them are happy, some are sad. Some seasons are easier and some are filled with difficulty. Some seasons are times of gain and growth and some seasons are times of loss and grief. Often I counsel discouraged leaders with these words: *“Remember, this is a season; it won’t last forever.”* Those of us who are followers of Christ understand that every season in life from birth to death and eternity beyond comes from the hand of God. For reasons we don’t really understand God has ordained that human life “under the sun” is made up of seasons. We call that God’s “providence.”

Here is the truth that should change us this week: Life is a collection of seasons. God determines the seasons and allows us to determine how we will respond in those seasons. How we choose to respond to the seasons He gives us will reflect the depth of our faith and trust in Him.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–15 (ESV) — 1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: **2** a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what 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 seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; **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.

- Let's pause and reflect on these fourteen "couplets" of opposites.
- Verse two: A time to be born and a time to die. These are the dates on our tombstone with a dash in the middle.
- **Psalms 90:12 (ESV) — 12** So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. **Ephesians 5:16 (ESV) — 16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
- God alone decides the time we're born and die. He allows us to choose what we will do with the "dash" between those dates on our tombstone.
- This reality should give us a sense of motivation to use our time wisely.
- "A time to plant and a time to harvest" – Don't attempt to fight the timing of this! Even if we are not farmers, how can we apply this to what we do with our time? What are some examples of planting and harvesting in our lives? How does it apply to our goals and our finances? How does this apply especially to parents and grandparents? Why is it time sensitive?
- "A time to kill and a time to heal" – Sadly things like war and capital punishment are realities for mankind. "A time to tear down and a time to build up." We think of decaying structures replaced with new buildings.
- "A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance."
- Mourning and celebrating are both normal seasons of life.

- Some deaths are so tragic all we can do is “weep with those who weep.”ⁱ
- Other funerals include both tears and laughter celebrating a long life well lived. Followers of Christ do not grieve as those “who have no hope.”ⁱⁱ
- If we live to please God He will sustain us in our weeping and give us lots of reason for laughter in between times of loss.
- Scattering and gathering stones is a bit of a mystery.
- In ancient times scattering stones in someone’s field was an act of warfare. Gathering stones would have been a time of building.
- “A time to embrace and a time to turn away.” Social distancing? 😊
- One commentator notes that sometimes we need to embrace and comfort those we love. Other times we need to confront them in love.
- Here’s another application for embracing and turning away.
- Susan counsels our kids to realize that most friendships come and go in seasons while a very few last a lifetime. Don’t be shocked or spend too much time questioning this. Be grateful for the season you had with those relationships.
- “A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away.” This one resonates for those of us who are either downsizing or decluttering in preparation for one day downsizing.
- Illustration: Shocker – Mother’s “silver” wasn’t worth anything!
- We become attached to possessions when we really need to understand that it’s all just “stuff” that God gave us for temporary enjoyment during seasons of life. Our walk with Him is the real treasure -- eternal treasure.
- “A time to be quiet and a time to speak.” We all need to hear that one!
- David Moore: *“God’s Word warns us about talking too much (Prov. 10:19) and speaking too quickly (Prov. 12:18). Sometimes silence is golden, but there are times when silence is yellow. These are times when we must speak. Not to speak against injustice is sin. Also, to remain quiet about one’s testimony is wrong (Acts 4:17–20; 2 Cor. 5:18–20; 1 Pet. 3:15).”ⁱⁱⁱ*

- A time “to love and to hate,” for “war and peace” – Quoting David Moore again, “...[I]t is not antithetical to the Christian virtue of love to show anger (see Eph. 4:26). When Jesus cleansed the temple (John 2), he did not stop being a loving God. Rather, the manifestation of his love took on a different look. In the same way, our willingness to hate at times is a manifestation of love. If we do not get angry at sin and its effects, do we really know the full truth about God's love?”^{iv}
- This list of “seasons” is simply a collection of examples to make that larger point we talked about earlier: Life is a collection of seasons. God determines the seasons and allows us to determine how we will respond in those seasons. How we choose to respond to the seasons He gives us will reflect the depth of our faith and trust in Him.
- Let’s talk about how we should respond to the seasons of life.

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.

- Where is the benefit from all the toil in these seasons of life?
- Solomon says God has made “everything beautiful in its time.”
- Some translations render it “appropriate” but the word means “beautiful.”
- In some seasons that statement is easy to embrace. In other seasons we might cynically ask, “*How can anything ‘beautiful’ come from this?*”
- Question: How can something in life be absolutely tragic and yet result in something “beautiful?” What attitude or outlook is needed to embrace Solomon’s claim that God makes “everything beautiful in its time?”
- We could go around the room and everyone would likely have a personal story of some situation in life that was absolutely tragic and yet God brought beauty from it in His perfect timing. The tragedy wasn’t erased but God used it to for something beautiful. (Illustration: My Granddaddy’s untimely death and my Grandmother’s influence on her family)

- God placed “eternity into man’s heart.” We are wired to desire something better than this imperfect parade of seasons in life. How does having eternity in our hearts help us to keep those seasons in perspective?
- Now Solomon takes a turn that may surprise us.

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.

- Is Solomon saying just “eat drink and be merry?” That would contradict his observation in 2:1: “[L]et’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.” *But I found that this, too, was meaningless.*”
- Why is this advice not just a hedonistic search for pleasure? Why is it especially relevant to followers of Christ? How does following it reflect a depth of faith in God? Illustration: Our friend Dick Ruiz – tragedy yet joy.
- Take note that the ability to enjoy life and do good regardless of the “ups and downs” of life’s seasons is “God’s gift to man.”
- Verses 14 and 15 remind us that God alone is in charge of the seasons of our life. For a clear understanding let’s read them in the NLT.

Ecclesiastes 3:14–15 (NLT) — 14 And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God’s purpose is that people should fear him. **15** What is happening now has happened before, and what will happen in the future has happened before, because God makes the same things happen over and over again.

- Our lesson writer states: *“There is a sense in which we have little say in the seasons of life we face, so how we face them is important.”*^{vi}
- Question: What are our choices in how we respond to the seasons God gives us in life? How could we respond to the seasons of life in a way that brings glory to God? How might Solomon’s observations in this passage change the way we choose to respond to the seasons in life?
- If we really embrace what Solomon is teaching us in this passage we will live out the truth of a familiar verse in Romans:

Romans 8:28–29 (NASB95) — 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- We can all quote verse 28, but don't miss the next verse:

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

- That verse reminds us that God uses the seasons in life to “conform us to the image” of His Son Jesus.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Life is a collection of seasons. Seasons that are happy or sad, easy or difficult, times of gain and of loss.
- God determines the seasons and He allows us to determine how we will respond in those seasons.
- When we confront the fact that God controls the seasons of life we can either feel like a victim fearing what is to come, or we can choose to trust Him believing that He will make everything “beautiful” in His perfect timing.
- How we choose to respond to the seasons He gives us will reflect the depth of our faith and trust in Him.
- A Christ-follower can respond with trust because we have His Holy Spirit living in us supernaturally empowering our response.
- If we really trust Him we can be assured that as the seasons change, He never does. That security allows us to “enjoy life and do good” because He is in control.

ⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 12:15). Wheaton, IL:

ⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Th 4:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moore, David. Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} *ibid*

^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ec 2:1). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{vi} Explore the Bible Leaders Guide – Lifeway 2020