

Time for Everything

August 9, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Session Outline

1. A Time for Every Activity (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)
2. What's the point? (Ecclesiastes 3:9-10)
3. Everything Appropriate in Its Time (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Theological Theme

There is a season for everything, and God is with us through them all.

Call to Action

What current season are you in? How are you seeking God's presence in this season?

Time for Everything

Introduction

We go through many seasons in life.

For many, childhood is a season of carefree fun, where joy abounds in the simplest things and the biggest worry is what game to play next, or whether to eat Brussel sprouts with dinner.

The teenage years can be rough ones, where emotions high fly. We may think we are invincible and we know everything (without the help of a fully developed frontal lobe). Thankfully, that's just a (blessedly short) season.

Maybe now you're in a season where you're young and married. You're beginning to figure out how to balance your budget and the many activities that demand your time.

For some, raising children at home is a season. This is an exhausting, rewarding, and woefully short season. It's a roller coaster of small joys and increasingly larger challenges. The days are long, but the years are short.

Maybe you're in a season where your nest is empty. Your challenges look different. Ailing parents need care, and maybe grandkids do, too.

In all the seasons life has to offer, God has planted joy for us there. We have the opportunity to turn to Him and praise Him for all the little joys that come our way, even when life is hard. This is the theme of our study today.



How would you describe the season you are in right now?



What blessings has God brought you in your current season? What challenges are you facing?

Session Summary

Last week, we began our study with a primary theme in Ecclesiastes: Everything is futile (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

What's the point of work, Solomon pondered, if we can't come up with anything truly innovative and anything we accomplish will be forgotten after we die? Solomon posed a similar question in chapter three: "What does the worker gain from his struggles?" (3:9)

This passage is also where we find one of the most recognized passages in Ecclesiastes: there is "a time for every activity under heaven" (v. 1). The human experience is made up of seasons. Some are seasons we anticipate with joy. Some are seasons we dread. But God "has made everything appropriate in its time" (v. 11), and we tackle every season knowing that He walks beside us, working things out in ways we won't understand this side of heaven.

1. A Time for Every Activity (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

-  What was Solomon's point in these verses?
-  How would you describe the list of activities Solomon named in these verses?

This is the most well-known section of the whole book of Ecclesiastes, and begins with probably the most widely recognized verse:

There is an occasion for everything,
and a time for every activity under heaven . . .
—Ecclesiastes 3:1

It's important that we read this portion of the book considering what we studied last week. Remember Solomon's main point? He stated it at the beginning of the book.

"Absolute futility," says the Teacher.
"Absolute futility. Everything is futile."
—Ecclesiastes 1:2

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon unpacked the question, what are we living for? In chapter 1, he wrote about the futility of work. If "there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9) and the world will keep right on spinning after we are gone, what's the point? He also said in a few generations "There is no remembrance of those who came before" (1:11). And then the same thing will happen to the generations that come after us.

Let's keep this central point in mind as we explore chapter 3 today.

Desiring More

Our existence in this world is a mixture of joy and sorrow, harmony and conflict, and life and death. Each has its own proper moment, and we, as creatures of time, must conform to the temporal limitations that are built into the cycle of life. No permanent state of affairs exists in this world. This is a great source of frustration for people since longing for eternity is planted within us.

There is a time for everything that makes up the human experience. To give birth. To die. To plant. To uproot. To weep. To laugh. To mourn. To be silent. To speak. To tear. To sew.

Solomon summed up many things that make up life in this list of opposites. Some of this list is objectively good. Some we would rather avoid (wouldn't we all rather laugh than weep?) and some we would directly label bad.

These aren't menu items we get to pick and choose from. Life isn't always going to feel good. Sometimes it hurts. We will have hard times. We will be faced with impossible decisions. We will hurt and be hurt. Jesus even warned His disciples of this eventuality (John 16:33).

 How have you experienced the truth that there is a time for everything in life?

2. What's the point? (Ecclesiastes 3:9-10)

 How do these verses connect to Solomon's point in chapter 1?

 Why is it worth regularly reflecting on the main point of our lives? How would you answer that question?

In chapter one, Solomon unpacked the idea that our work doesn't really amount to anything in the grand scheme of things. The world will go on without us, and a few generations down the line, for most of us, no one will remember we even existed (and that generation will continue in this never-ending cycle). Solomon posed the same question here: What do we gain from our toil?

Have you ever felt this way in your work? At some point, most of us stop and wonder if what we are doing is making a difference.

Here, Solomon referenced the "task" God has given us to keep us occupied. We often think of work as a consequence of the fall, and there are elements of work that are consequences of the fall, but work came before sin. We were created to work. God created humans and put them into meaningful work in partnership with Him before the fall happened.

So if God created us to work, and the New Testament reiterates that we should go about our work for the Lord, how should we understand the question Solomon posed here?



How can we distinguish between the effects of the fall on work and work as God's good creation for people?

3. Everything Appropriate in Its Time (Ecclesiastes 3:11)



What does it mean that God has "made everything appropriate in its time" (v. 11)?



How has God put eternity in our hearts? How is this true even for those who don't follow Christ?

The NIV renders this verse 11 this way: "He has made everything beautiful in its time." He has made everything beautiful. What meaningful truth there is in this.

Mourning is painful, but it can be therapeutic, too. We can look back on hard seasons with gratitude and see beauty in the way God showed up for us. Metaphorically tearing down something we spent time and energy to build can feel defeating, but many times, God has something better for us on the other side.

God makes everything appropriate in its time, and He is with us unfaithfully. This truth is echoed throughout the pages of Scripture:

If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
—Psalm 139:8

Even when I go through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
—Psalm 23:4

No matter where we find ourselves on this roller coaster of life, God is with us. He won't abandon us. And He wastes no moments to work things out for our good, even the hard ones (Romans 8:28).

We live in a set moment in time. But God planted the idea of eternity in our hearts. We all want something to live for. We want to work toward something, to have a reason to live (humans have clearly been looking for this since Solomon's days!).

As believers in Jesus, this verse has deep meaning for us. Eternity is in our hearts in a very meaningful way. We are living on earth in this temporary moment in time, but eternity is waiting for us as citizens of heaven. This is something to look forward to.

Solomon ends this verse with a very important truth: “No one can discover the work God has done from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Many a person has learned this truth the hard way, but a memorable example from Scripture is Job. God speaks to Job at the end of the book and demonstrates how much more He knows. Job simply didn’t have the context to understand what God was or wasn’t doing, and we don’t either. We won’t fully understand what God has done in the world and in our lives this side of heaven.

What Solomon processes in Ecclesiastes can feel heavy, but in this truth, we find comfort. We won’t fully understand what God is working, but we do know that He is in all things, working them out for our good.



Where do you feel the longing for eternity in daily life?

Conclusion

There is a season for everything.

Sometimes it’s a season we welcome and sometimes it’s a season we dread.

We were all born, and will all die. Sometimes, we’ll enter a season of flourishing, and sometimes we’ll walk through a season of tearing down and rebuilding. Some seasons will be full of laughter. Other times, we will weep so often that laughter feels impossible. Sometimes we mourn. Other times we celebrate (and sometimes we do both at the same time).

We live in a specific moment in time, and our lives will not be easy. Scripture makes this very clear, and Solomon reminded us of this in his list of opposites. Life is a roller coaster of ups and downs, but when nothing feels steadfast, one thing is constant: God “has made everything beautiful in its time” (v. 11, NIV). His hand is at work in the blessings of life:

It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts. —Ecclesiastes 3:13

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
—James 1:17

He is with us in the valleys. And He uses every single situation we encounter for good. We won't understand everything He is doing this side of heaven, but we can take comfort in knowing that He's with us, and our life and work isn't futile. We are a vital part of what God is doing in the world right now.

-  How do you hold together the tension of the toil of daily life and eternity that is on our hearts?
-  How can understanding that we won't discover the work God has done from beginning to end (v. 11) impact how we live each day?
-  What does this passage teach us about God and His character?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the good seasons in your life. Thank Him for walking with you through the hard ones. Ask for His help as you seek to trust Him and remember that “He has made everything appropriate in its time” (v. 11) and that we don’t have the perspective to understand everything He is doing.

Memory Verse

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but no one can discover the work God has done from beginning to end.
—Ecclesiastes 3:11

Additional Resources

- *Ecclesiastes* by Philip Graham Ryken
- *Be Satisfied* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes* by Daniel Akin and Jonathan Akin



Historical Context of Ecclesiastes

Purpose

Ecclesiastes shows us that since we and our works are futile—that is, destined to perish—we must not waste our lives trying to justify our existence with pursuits that ultimately mean nothing. Put simply, Ecclesiastes examines major endeavors of life in light of the reality of death.

Author

According to 1:1 and 1:12, the author was David's son and a king over Israel from Jerusalem. Also, 12:9 speaks of the author as a writer of proverbs, so Solomon appears to be the author. Many scholars believe that Ecclesiastes was written too late in Israel's history for this to be true, and they want to date the book at least five hundred years after Solomon's time (later than 450 BC). However, strong evidence attests that the book does come from the age of Solomon. For instance, it displays a great knowledge of literature from early Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Setting

Ecclesiastes is Wisdom literature, meaning that it is in the part of the Bible especially concerned with helping readers cope with the practical and philosophical issues of life. It has roots in the Wisdom literature of Egypt and Babylon. Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are the biblical answer to the search for truth. Proverbs is basic wisdom, giving the reader fundamental principles to live by. Ecclesiastes, by contrast, is for a more mature reader. It engages the question of whether death nullifies all purpose and meaning in life.

Special Features

The Bible is never shy about confronting painful truths or hard questions. The book of Ecclesiastes faces the issue of how we can find meaning in life in light of the seemingly futile nature of everything. It will not allow the reader to retreat into superficial answers. It does not answer this problem by comforting us with hollow slogans. To the contrary, its motto is "Everything Is Futile." But by forcing us to face the futility of human existence, it guides us to a life free of empty purpose and deceitful vindication.

Extended Commentary

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

3:1–11 These verses, the most famous text in Ecclesiastes, must be read from the context of the fundamental claim of the book: that we are mortals, doomed to perish, and that our work will perish with us. No human work is eternal, and our activities, whether building or tearing down, must change as the situation dictates. We naturally prefer to stay on the positive side of the list—to laugh rather than to weep, to love rather than to hate, and to have peace rather than war—but as long as we live in a world of change, conflict, and death, we must accept the fact that we cannot have unchanging bliss. Even so, as v. 11 says, everything is appropriate in its time. Mourning and separation are painful, but there is a time when it is right and even beautiful to mourn. We must accept the fundamental fact of mortality: we are creatures who live in time. We must respond appropriately to the seasons of life as they come.

3:5 The meaning of throwing or gathering stones is uncertain. It may refer to clearing a field for planting versus building a wall, or spoiling a field (2Kg 3:25) versus clearing it (Is 5:2). A rabbinical tradition takes it to be a euphemism for participating in or refraining from sexual relations.

3:11 The fact that God has also put eternity in their hearts tells us that although we are creatures of time, we are not like the animals, who are fully and exclusively creatures of time. God made us as hybrids, so to speak, in that we are temporal but we have an inner longing for eternity. We can never be fully at peace in this life because, although we are mortal, we yearn for immortality.¹

References

1. Duane A. Garrett, “Ecclesiastes,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).