

A Time for Everything

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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August 3-4, 2024

I've had some wedding bloopers over the years. One time, I called the groom by the wrong name. The bride's name was *Jennifer*, and during the most reverent part of the ceremony I called the husband-to-be *Bennifer*. Everyone busted up but me. I became very embarrassed, turned red, and lost my place. It's the only wedding I've done where the bride had to calm me down.

The biggest wedding blooper I experienced goes back to when I was pastoring in Rockford. The couple really liked boating, so instead of walking down an aisle, they decided to have the bride ride on a pontoon boat from one side of the lake to the other. As I waited on the pier with the groomsmen, the wind started blowing and the temperature dropped. When the boat finally came into view, the bride had a scowl on her face to match the summer squall that was causing the train of her dress to flap in the wind, and threatened to tear off her veil.

When they finally docked, the bride didn't look very happy. As the groomsmen tried to help her get off the boat, a big wave hit, and she fell into the water! A holy hush came over the crowd and then I started laughing and couldn't stop. Has that ever happened to you? It's really hard to stop laughing when you're at a serious service isn't it? I'll never forget the icy stare I received from the bride as she climbed out of the water. I don't remember much more about the service except that I think I raced through the ceremony and got out of there as soon as I could. For some reason I never saw them at church again either.

There's a time to laugh and a time to refrain from laughing, which I'm still trying to figure out. Our topic today is there is a time for everything. Let's read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 together: "***For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.***"

The sermon today will be shorter...no, really it will. I want to leave time for you to get to know Daniel Barrett, our Administrative Pastor candidate, and his wife Dee Dee. We'll also end our service by celebrating communion. Our approach will be to unpack the first verse, make some general observations about the next seven verses, and conclude with several applications. We'll circle back to this text next weekend.

Let's consider verse 1: ***"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."*** The word ***"for"*** links us back to the end of chapter 2 where we learned that the person who is not looking for ultimate meaning in their job is the one who will be given the capacity to find enjoyment in it. We summarized the passage this way: *We can't find our worth in our work, but we can worship God by how we work.*

The phrase ***"under heaven"*** speaks of God's control over creation and contrasts the repeated phrase, ***"under the sun"*** found 29 times throughout Ecclesiastes, which refers to life on the horizontal level. As Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, ***"...for God is in heaven and you are on earth..."*** The words ***"everything"*** and ***"every"*** refer to *"all, entire, the whole."*

This is God's world, and He rules and reigns over everything, including the function of time, order, cause, effect, and consequence. Everything in this time-bound universe is under the authority of our holy God in Heaven. This is stated clearly in Isaiah 45:7: ***"I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord who does all these things."***

This reminds me of what J. Vernon McGee once said, *"This is God's universe, and God does things His way. You may have a better way, but you don't have a universe."* The sooner we settle this, the sooner we'll be at peace in the midst of our problems and the quicker we'll accept adversity as part of His plan.

Don't miss the word ***"season,"*** which refers to a long duration and the word ***"time"*** which speaks of a point in time. Psalm 31:15 says, ***"My times are in your hand..."*** The word ***"matter"*** refers to our desires or willful acts. This is fleshed out in Ecclesiastes 3:17: ***"...for there is a time for every matter and for every work."***

Let's pull this together in one statement: *"Because God has a reason for each season in our life, we can trust His timing."* The solution to finding satisfaction in life is the sovereign providence of God. The only resolution to the

meaninglessness of life is to accept that our Almighty God is working His ways and His will for His good purposes, even when we don't understand, or don't agree with what He is doing.

The easiest way to remember what God's providence means is to focus on the root of the word, which is to *"provide."* Providence is the preserving and governing of all things under the intentional sovereign rule of God. Here's a helpful definition: *"Divine providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the universe."*

As we've said before, God is always at work...and sometimes we get to see it. The challenge is to trust His providence even when we don't see Him working or don't like the situation we're in.

One pastor says it well: *"God is in control, and in the mysterious administration of His wise providence – He permits certain things to happen at certain seasons or times. I understand that, believe that, and accept it. This acknowledgement of God's ownership of time and the way He set this up, helps me to live here with some sense of sanity, balance, and confidence in the One who is above time...in His time, everything happens without ever taking Him by surprise."*

We would be wise to agree with Job who declared in Job 42:2: ***"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."*** The New Living Translation reads, ***"I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you."*** To say it another way, because God is with you, He'll get you through, even if you fall in the lake.

Because God has a reason for each season in our life, we can trust His timing.

Now, let's make some observations.

Observations

- 1. This passage is a Hebrew poem.** While other parts of the Bible utilize poetry, this poem is unique in three ways.
 - **Repetition.** The word ***"time"*** is repeated 28 different times in verses 2-8.

- **Parallelism.** The structure of the poem utilizes antithetic, regular, and inverted parallelism, which translates easily from Hebrew into hundreds of other languages.
 - **Merisms.** A merism is a combination of two contrasting polarities to refer to the whole. In Ecclesiastes 3, the extremes of “*born*” and “*die*” in verse 2 speak of the whole of human nature, while “*weep*” and “*laugh*” in verse 4 represent the entirety of human emotions.
2. **There’s a definite orderliness to what God does.** One commentator writes, “*The universe has a flow and regularity to it that is beyond any human control...the wise person lives life in the light of this massive truth.*” His sovereignty has a chronology, fleshed out in our times and seasons. These events come into our lives and we’re often helpless to control their arrival or their departure. Right now, at this very moment, God reigns and is working out His ways and His will in and through the seasons in your life.
 3. **This list is comprehensive.** There are fourteen contrasting pairs of activities, which is twice the biblical number (seven) of perfection. The number four correlates to the seasons of the year and when used as a multiplier of seven, we see 28 specific times listed.
 4. **Life is made up of heavy and happy things.** There have been many times during our Growth Group over the years when I’ve asked the group to share a “bummer” and a “blessing” because they often happen within the same day. It’s usually not an either/or but both/and. Actually, many bummers turn into blessings. The commentator Matthew Henry offered this insight, “*To expect unchanging happiness in a changing world, is to set yourself up for disappointment.*”
 5. **This passage is descriptive, not prescriptive.** This is how life is in general. Life is made up of good times and bad times and for the most part, you can’t change the season you are in by skipping ahead to the next one or by going back to the good old days. You are where you are. You can find God’s purpose and bring Him glory in a season of struggling and suffering or in a time of harvest and happiness. We’re not told when to plant or pluck, break down or build up, keep or cast away. But we are told to submit to His sovereign providence no matter what season we’re in.

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Here are some ways we can put this into practice.

Applications

1. **Chose to trust God to work His good no matter what season you are in.** Even when we go through terrible times or sour seasons of life, Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us ***“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”*** Write this down: *Trusting in God’s will means trusting in God’s timing.* God always acts for your ultimate good, even when it doesn’t seem like it’s for your immediate good. You and I need to be OK with that.

As we’ve said many times, *He’s God and you’re not.* Ray Pritchard brings some clarity to this conviction: *“All spiritual reality begins with the recognition that there is a God who rules the affairs of men and nations, and that He is truly God, and we are truly not. Once you accept that truth, you can advance in the spiritual life, but until you recognize it, you will be stuck forever in spiritual kindergarten.”*

2. **Submit and surrender to His sovereignty right now.** We should abandon any false notions that we are in control of life and surrender to God’s sweet sovereignty. We can either receive what God has for us and grow in faith so we get better, or we can resist and end up fighting Him, which often leads to bitterness. Instead of seeing God’s sovereignty as a matter of theological debate, see it as the solution to the meaninglessness of life. Accept that there is a sovereign providential ordering of all things.

The real danger we face during times of trial and seasons of suffering is to blame God incessantly and complain repeatedly, leading to a sourness of spirit which saps our spiritual vitality. The seasons of life bring bummers and blessings, but our submission to God’s sovereignty must remain consistent because God’s providence is the ultimate comfort to the believer. I take great comfort in Psalm 139:16: ***“Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”***

3. **Wait for God’s timing.** The hard times we experience can stay for a short season or last much longer than we anticipate. The more important issue is how we will respond to the season of life we find ourselves in. Isaiah 55:8 says, ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my***

ways, declares the Lord.” Psalm 27:14: “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”

- 4. Make good use of the time you have.** *Psalm 90:12 says, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Ephesians 5:16 urges us to be all about “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”*
- 5. This is the right time to get saved.** *2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*
- 6. Accept changes when they come your way.** *Isaiah 43:19: “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”*

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I think of how our Edgewood family went through a big change several years ago during *Grow Time*, our facility expansion and renovation project. This hit me in a fresh way when I met a family who used to come to Edgewood over 20 years ago and they were back for the first time this past weekend. They couldn't stop talking about all the changes as they celebrated how functional our facility is.

Change is often not easy, however. This reminded me of some words of wisdom Pastor Tim shared as a way to help us process change before we launched our expansion initiative. With more changes on the horizon related to staffing, I thought it would be good to revisit these principles: *“Change can help us grow because it reveals what we have trusted in and what we value. Strive to hold loosely to your preferences but tightly to God’s biblical principles and practices. It’s important to display Christ-like reactions so when we look back, we can say, ‘I showed spiritual maturity through this change.’”*

Edgewood has certainly experienced various seasons of ministry and times of transition during the past 119 years. About six years ago, I preached through the Book of Haggai and one truth really stood out to me: *We will remember the past, while embracing the present, so we can be faithful in the future.*

Here are just some of the changes related to staffing which have helped us embrace the present so we can continue to be faithful in the future.

- Pastor Brown served as Senior Pastor of Edgewood for 44 years and I've been trying to figure out how to follow in his footsteps for 11 years.
- Sharon Rice served for 32 years as the Church Secretary, followed by Sheila Mills as the Office Manager for 15 years and now Marie Guyton is serving in that position as she partners with Lynn Johnson as our Office Assistant.
- Darlene Lee and Joy Greer serve as our custodians.
- Pastor Dan has been serving here for 14 years and is now focusing on shepherding our flock.
- Pastor Kyle served as Youth Pastor for 6 years and now Pastor Chris and Micah Kongkousonh are evangelizing and discipling students.
- Pastor Tim served for over 40 years in various roles, most recently as our Discipleship Pastor. Pastor Kyle is now providing leadership in this area.
- Pastor Tim also served as worship pastor for many years and now Pastor Chad leads has been leading our services for 9 years and has added Dave Bennett to the team as technical director.
- Sheila Kursicak has served as our Children's Director for 23 years and has passed the baton to Marcy Kongkousonh.
- Suzy Crosby served as Nursery Coordinator for 7 years and now Liesl Parks serves in this role and Becca Rollins is our Preschool Coordinator (with Brianne Newman jumping in during Becca's maternity leave).
- Pastor Ed has been serving here for 45 years. I'm tuning out any reference to his retirement.
- Pastor Andy served as our Administrative Pastor for 16 years and today we welcome a candidate for this open position.

Let's give a warm Edgewood welcome to Pastor Daniel Barrett and his wife Dee Dee!