

Gleanings of Grace

Ecclesiastes 3

Lesson 26

The key word in Ecclesiastes is *vanity*, which is the futile emptiness of trying to be happy apart from God. The author, King Solomon, was the wisest, richest, and most influential king in the history of Israel. Solomon discovered all of his earthly advantages and pursuits of pleasure to be *vanity*. He also discovered that the seasons of this life are inevitable; each of us experiences both good and difficult times. God has ordained them both.

OBSERVATION: Ecclesiastes 3

1. Read Ecclesiastes 3 using the Observation Worksheet (the last page of this homework). After reading through the chapter, what would you say to someone if they asked you what it is about?
2. Key words help us to better understand the verses. We have listed below key words. Mark each one in a distinctive way (either with a symbol, highlighting, or some form of boxing, circling, or underlining). Mark each of the key words each time they are used in the text. Remember to mark any personal pronouns/titles that refer to *God*.
Key Words: *God, time, and know*
3. King Solomon began this chapter proclaiming, *there is a time for every purpose under heaven*, by contrasting many different *seasons* of our lives. Reflect on those contrasts as you complete the chart below.

A time:	And a time:
<i>to be born</i>	
<i>to plant</i>	
<i>to kill</i>	
<i>to break down</i>	
<i>to weep</i>	
<i>to mourn</i>	
<i>to cast away stones</i>	
<i>to embrace</i>	

A time:	And a time:
<i>to gain</i>	
<i>to keep</i>	
<i>to tear</i>	
<i>to keep silence</i>	
<i>to love</i>	
<i>of war</i>	

Background:

1. As you consider King Solomon's lament in Ecclesiastes, keep in mind it was not meant to depress, but to challenge the reader to seek joy and fulfillment in the LORD rather than accomplishments, people, or pleasures. The word *vanity* is used thirty-three times in this book. Refer to the following verses, and in your own words, describe the *vanity* expressed.

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:8 (the beginning and end of the book)

Ecclesiastes 2:1

Ecclesiastes 4:4

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Ecclesiastes 7:15

2. Ecclesiastes was written at the end of Solomon's life. Read Ecclesiastes 2:9-11. This was Solomon's interpretation of his life, before his conclusion at the end of the book. (We will look at his conclusion later in this study). Most of us cannot say, as Solomon did, that we have not withheld pleasure or riches from our lives. For most of us, much of that has been withheld from us. Sometimes when something is withheld from us, that is the very thing or person we believe will bring us satisfaction. Solomon knew better. What are your thoughts as you consider the *vanity* of obtaining your desires?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1. As Solomon calls us to consider the seasons of our lives, his point in these verses might be summarized in Ecclesiastes 7:13,14. What does it say?
2. Write the words King Solomon used to begin Ecclesiastes chapter 3.
 - a. King Solomon wrote similar words in Ecclesiastes 3:17 and 8:6. What does Ecclesiastes 8:6 add?

- 1.) There are two thoughts regarding the phrase, *though the misery of man increases greatly*. One interpretation is the acknowledgement that going through rough times is difficult. Another is the lack of understanding that we are to expect both good and bad; that God has His *time* for the *matters* of our lives causes our *miseries* to *increase* or be worse than they need to be. Ponder this as it relates to your own life. What are your thoughts?
 - b. Scan through the *times* of verses 2-8. Choose three of them. How might a person's *misery* decrease by their understanding and accepting these truths?

3. What are some things we tend to believe when bad things happen?
 - a. Which ones are lies?

4. What are some examples of the following, as they might apply to your life?
 - a time to pluck what is planted (i.e. not just plants ☺)

 - a time to break down

 - a time to cast away stones

 - a time to gather stones

 - a time to refrain from embracing

 - a time to tear

 - a time to sew

 - a time to hate (see the first phrase of Proverbs 13:5)

5. Summarize the goal of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 as you understand it.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

1. Notice the question asked in verse 9. The same question was asked in Ecclesiastes 1:3. But this time, we have the added wisdom of verse 10. What is it?
 - a. What difference does it make to you to know you are spending your time in *God-given tasks*?

2. Thoughtfully write the first sentence of Ecclesiastes 3:11.
 - a. This is a difficult verse to try to explain to someone who is hurting. However, it is a great verse to self-apply. Using the truths of this verse, what would you say to yourself in times of feeling like your life is *vanity*?

3. Consider the next words of Ecclesiastes 3:11. In what ways did God put *eternity in your heart* before you knew Him as your Savior?
 - a. Romans 1:19 reminds us that God has made His existence clear to man; that man is without excuse. Note the two words used to describe what unbelieving man has done with the *truth* in Romans 1:18 and 25. What are they?
 - 1.) What does this teach you about man's responsibility to the truth that *eternity* has been placed in their *heart* by God?

 - b. In what ways has God put *eternity in your heart* now that you know Him as Savior?

4. The last phrase of Ecclesiastes 3:11 refers to how little we know about the *eternity* God has *placed in our hearts*. However, we know that it is important. What are some things you do know about *eternity*?

5. Verse 12 begins with the words *I know*. Using verses 12-15, list what King Solomon *knew*. HOWEVER, write the gracious words of Psalm 130:4a (and rejoice in them) next to the last phrase of verse 15.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

1. The phrase *under the sun* refers to life on this earth (verse 16). Solomon looked at the world – the here and now world, apart from considering eternity – and saw that there was great evil and injustice. Instead of fair *judgment*, he found *wickedness*; instead of *righteousness*, he found *iniquity*. Focusing on this reality can give us a skewed perspective. King Solomon refocused in verse 17. In what ways does having *eternity* in your heart help you refocus?
 - a. King Solomon also declared that *there is a time for every purpose and for every work*. What have you discovered about God’s timing?
2. In a casual reading of Ecclesiastes 3:18-21, one might think that King Solomon believed that there is no difference between a man and an animal. Remember, this is *under the sun* thinking by a man who has also stated that God *has put eternity in the heart* of man. Simply stated, men die and animals die. For both, their bodies decay and return to the dust. What do we know about the body of the believer according to:

Job 19:25-27

John 3:16,17

1 Corinthians 15:53,54

- a. How has understanding the eternity Christ has purchased for you caused you to see *purpose* in your life rather than *vanity*?
3. King Solomon closed the thoughts of chapter 3 with what he *perceived*. What was it?
 - a. The positive side of this thinking is the encouragement to take joy in what has been allotted to you. You will not be able to come back and do your life differently. Given this truth, how are you challenged?

King Solomon’s Conclusion: Read Ecclesiastes 12:13,14

1. What instruction was King Solomon’s *conclusion of the whole matter*?

- a. Although King Solomon had allowed his life to go astray, his final instructions were much like those he wrote in Proverbs, the reminder of *fearing God and keeping His commandments*. How would you conclude your thoughts if you were to write about what is important in life?
2. The words of verse 14 would strike fear in us if it were not for promises like the one found in Psalm 103:10. Rejoice as you write the promise.
 - a. As believers, we have the wonderful promise of God's grace and forgiveness. For a moment, contrast what your life would be like right now if Ecclesiastes 12:14 were still true for you.
 - 1.) For another moment, thank the Lord that it is not!

REVIEW: Ecclesiastes 3

1. *To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). How will you apply this truth in your life when you find yourself in a stormy *season*?
2. In what ways have you learned the disadvantages of *under the sun* thinking?
3. In what ways have you learned the advantages of an eternal perspective?

*He is the Rock, His work is perfect;
For all His ways are justice,
A God of truth and without injustice;
Righteous and upright is He.
- Deuteronomy 32:4*

Observation Worksheet

Ecclesiastes 3

¹ To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: ² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck 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; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw 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 of war, and a time of peace. ⁹ What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? ¹⁰ I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. ¹² I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, ¹³ and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. ¹⁵ That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past. ¹⁶ Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. ¹⁷ I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." ¹⁸ I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals." ¹⁹ For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. ²¹ Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? ²² So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?