

A Practical Study of ECCLESIASTES

“Where Your Heart and Treasure Meet”

Study Number Three – Whatever Will Be, Will Be! – Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Someone said you know you’ve reached middle age when:

A doctor not a traffic police man warns you to slow down.

You are thinking that when people say the war they always mean World War II.

Or you wonder why young people don’t ever get together at somebody’s house for a taffy pull.

Or you have two cars and two children and you’re walking to the drug store after aspirin.

Or you’re going to a class reunion and wondering how you possibly could have ever been associated with all those gray haired, bald headed people.

Or you are reading the obituaries and seeing how old the people are who died yesterday.

The mid-life crisis is what we’re looking at.

Thus far in our series we have seen Solomon facing real trauma in his own life.

In the first chapter, in our first study, there were two things that really came to the surface.

1. First of all, he was frustrated by the fact that there is no gain to what he's doing.
2. There's nothing new under the sun and nobody's going to remember me anyway when it's all over.

That was the foundation for a mid-life crisis.

Last week we saw him caught up in the success syndrome. How do you solve that problem? Well he tried pleasure. He tried projects. And he did all kinds of things. It just made that passage come alive.

And as a result of the project, he made a lot. But then the problem was this, he's going to have to leave anything he acquired to somebody who isn't going to appreciate it. And there's where we left him in the study.

As we come to this third chapter, we're coming to a section that really comes alive when you understand what a crisis is all about.

You know when it comes to recognizing this, I've often thought one of the great tragedies of a person who is victim to a mid-

life crisis and never comes out of it, he'll never be able to hear from the Lord:

Matthew 25:23

Well done thou good and faithful servant.

He will never be able to say with the apostle Paul:

2 Timothy 4:7

I fought a good fight, I finished the course, I kept the faith.

Some of you know that I enjoy running very much and do a lot of it. In fact, I have participated in four marathons and I have finished two and two I did not finish.

I want to tell you that the two I finished were far more enjoyable than the two I did not finish.

For the two I did not finish was because of a lack of intense training that was needed just prior to the race that I was unable to do because of other commitments and emergencies.

And I heard that verse in Galatians 5:7 as soon as I stopped:

Galatians 5:7

You were running well...

And I stood at the finish line and watched the rest of them finish the 26.2, going over in my mind that I would not be able to say that:

Hebrews 12:1

... I laid aside every weight and the sin which so easily beset me and ran with patience the race that was set before me.

I would not be able to say that:

2 Timothy 4:7

I fought a good fight, I finished the course, I kept the faith.

I would not be able to say that:

Philippians 3:14

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling.

So all of these verses came plunging into my mind.

Somebody gave me a shirt that said “Failure to prepare is preparation for failure.”

It really ministered to my need.

I've had a gnawing goal in my mind and anybody who gets hooked on running always wants to run the Boston Marathon.

I was going to write a book on running in the Christian life because there is so much of it in the Bible. But Ann Kiemel beat me to that and used all my verses and ran the Boston before I had a chance.

My goal is now to qualify after I'm 50 next may and run Boston in '84.

But I just feel like it's a great picture of oftentimes our lives. The trauma of not finishing and the thrill of being a finisher. You don't run those races to win them when you're our age. You just run them to finish.

Somebody said "A picture is worth a thousand words."

I've got a picture in my office that was given to me by a friend, which is a picture of the Peach Tree Marathon and the heat was 90 degrees at the finish, so they had fire hoses to spray everybody down. And there are guys laying on the ground and the water is just spraying all over everybody. And underneath it says "We drench ourselves with the grace of exhaustion and the ecstasy of knowing that we are worthy to receive it."

You know, there's another picture in my office that's far more meaningful than that. And I have learned now that running needs to be seen in its proper perspective anyway. And it's not

all that important. There's a race of life that's far more important.

Sometimes your kids give you a present that doesn't cost very much but it means everything in the world. My Aggie son, who is a senior in engineering this year, gave me such a Christmas present that cost him \$2. It's a poster of a guy hanging on the ropes, repelling on a glacier. And this is what the picture says:

“To dad, I chose this present in the first place because the man in the picture looks like you. And I know you love the mountains and the snow. But the more I thought about it, the more I felt the idea of the picture matches you. You're always striving higher, to run farther, to last longer, to teacher better, to live closer to God. You're an example to me and I admire your striving to reach your goals. Overcoming your obstacles in reaching your summits. Climb on dad. I'm right on the rope behind you. Love, Bob.”

Christmas presents like that, you don't put in dollars and cents. And that's where the real action is. It's not putting on a pair of Nikes and some running shorts and trying to see how far you can run physically. It's life that really counts because a lot of people are watching. And it's what you are more than what you do that really counts anyway.

The mid-life crisis has two factors in it:

1. The first is just plain STUBBORNNESS. “I am too proud to admit that I’m going the wrong way.”
2. SELFISHNESS—what about me? “When am I going to get something out of this life anyway? I have given and I’ve given and I’m giving, now what about me?”

You know, when it comes to the epitome of stubbornness, you can’t help but think of old Harry Truman. Not Harry Truman the president. Harry Truman had a lodge for 53 years at Spirit Lake on Mt. Saint Helens. If you’ve read anything about Mt. Saint Helens and its explosion on May 18th of a couple of years ago you realize that Harry became the epitome of stubbornness. He got on national television, [and] he said “these scientists don’t really mean this. This mountain don’t dare blow up on me. I know this mountain and it won’t dare hurt Harry.”

The last thing they saw of Harry was he was sprinkling his lawn on May the 17th expecting visitors to come to his lodge like they had for the last 53 years. At 8:32 a.m. the next morning Harry was gone, buried under 40 feet of mud and hot lava and steam.

Stubbornness brought the guy to an end but he was a national symbol wasn’t he? Everybody looked to the guy: “Man isn’t he courageous? Isn’t he great?” No, he’s just a stubborn bull-headed old man that wouldn’t leave the mountain and listen to the scientists tell him what he ought to do.

The biggest problem we've got with men in mid-life crisis is that men won't seek help. I can tell you, and I'm telling you men this just as straight as I can tell you, I can have women lining up at my door wanting counsel in their marriage but their husband wouldn't darken that door for neither love nor money because it's the woman's problem not the man's.

And they're too stubborn and too proud to admit they got a need and that somebody could actually tell them something to be of help to them. That's just plain stubbornness. And as long as we stay in that kind of thing, we're going to stay in a mid-life crisis.

Then the second one is selfishness.

Somebody gave me this little poem the other day. I got a kick out of it. It's called the "Tea Party":

I had a little tea party
one afternoon at three;

'Twas very small, three guests in all,
just I, myself and me.

Myself ate up all the sandwiches,
while I drank up the tea,

'Twas also I who ate the pie,
and passed the cake to me.
(source unknown)

The mid-life crisis. It's the epitome of "I, Myself and Me"! And what am I getting out of life? And I'm tired of giving.

My wife really brought me up short tonight. I called her on the phone before the study and I said "You know, I've poured myself into this week—it's the third week. I'm weary and I don't have a word to say at that funeral tomorrow."

And she said "Well you are so selfish. Why don't you start thinking about where they're coming from and what their needs are rather than what yours is. And then when it's all over, you can go get your rest."

Well for 29 years she's lived with the epitome of selfishness so she knows how to say it. And I better sit up and listen and take notice. It's so easy to get that way. Especially when we get weary in well-doing. When we feel we're doing it and we're being used. Nobody appreciates us. We get down.

It's the epitome of the crisis. John Denver said it, remember? "Some days are diamonds, some days are stones." He said this,

Now the face that I see in my mirror
More and more is a stranger to me
More and more I can see there's a danger
I'm becoming what I never thought I'd be.

Some days are diamonds some days are stones
Sometimes the hard times won't leave me alone

Sometimes the cold wind blows a chill in my bones
Some days are diamonds some days are stones.
(source unknown)

Tonight's study is called *Que será, será*. Whatever will be, will be.

Schulz did a great job. I guess you saw last year when he took this particular passage of scripture with Lucy and Charlie. It's at football season so I brought it tonight.

In the first square Lucy is saying to Charlie with the football: "To every thing, there is a season, Charlie Brown."

"A time to be born, and a time to die"—in frame 2 as she puts the football down and he backs off.

"A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted."

"A time to weep and a time to laugh...a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

And he's coming running toward the football: "A time to love, and a time to hate. A time of war, and a time of peace."

"AAUGH!" splat!

"And a time to pull away the football."
(*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 16, 1980)

Poor Charlie Brown.

I mused on that for quite some time.

I remember last year when I taught this particular study in Alexandria, Louisiana. The wife came to the door and she says “You won’t believe this. Both kids have got the flu, the dog is in heat, the dishwasher is overflowing and we’re expecting 40 for Bible study. I don’t have dinner ready.” She says “I’m ready for a mid-life crisis.”

Doris Day in “The Man Who Knew Too Much” sang that song to which we dedicate tonight’s study:

When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, “What will I be? Will I be pretty, will I be rich?” Here’s what she said to me:

Que será, será—Whatever will be, will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que será, será.

Since I am just a boy in school, I asked my teacher, “What should I try? Should I paint pictures, should I sing songs?” This is her wise reply:

Que será, será—Whatever will be, will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que será, será.

When I grew up and fell in love, I asked my sweetheart what lies ahead. Will we have rainbows day after day? Guess what my sweetheart said:

Que será, será—Whatever will be, will be. The future's not ours to see. Que será, será.

Now I have children of my own. They ask their mother, “What will I be? Will I be pretty? Will I be rich? I tell them wait and see.

Que será, será—Whatever will be, will be. The future's not ours to see...

(source unknown)

Alright, why did I call that “Whatever will be, will be”?

First of all, because of selfishness and stubbornness the mid-life crisis is a place where you find yourself fighting against the system.

God has a sovereign purpose for each of our lives. And when you're in a crisis it's because you're fighting against what is there. Whether it's your marriage, whether it's your job, whether it's your kids, whether it's your lot in life, you're bucking something that God has permitted. And I am telling you, it's awful lonely and number two, you're fighting a losing battle. And the sooner you surrender and submit, the better off you're going to be.

God is going to accomplish His purpose and that is the truth of this. Que será, será—Whatever will be, will be.

You will be happy and fulfilled when you learn to live life according to God's designs and patterns. And as long as you

fight it, you're going to be a lone wolf. You're going to be unhappy. And I can tell you, as you sit before me, your unhappiness is equivalent to your rebellion against what God has designed for your life.

It is that quiet sense of gnawing unhappiness that's inside as your resistance against God's program for your life.

And to Solomon that's exactly where he is today. He's come to the point and he's saying "There's no gain. There's nothing new under the sun. Nobody's going to remember me anyway. And I've tried all these projects and I've tried all this pleasure and I'm going to tell you I'm going to leave it everybody else. And every time I turn around I'm bumping up against something! And I'm not finding happiness."

He is just flat in a Mexican stand-off with God.

Isaiah 55:8 and 9 says:

Isaiah 55:8, 9

My thoughts are not your thoughts, sayeth the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Judges 21:25

Everyone did that which was right in their own eyes.

No wonder the book of Judges is one of the tragic pictures of unhappiness in human history.

Saul found himself doing that. Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus to wipe out Christians and he thought he was helping God until God says “Isn’t it awful lonely Paul, kicking against the goads”—that is the goads of authority. God’s restraining hand struck him blind there on the road and brought him to a conversion of brokenness of heart, of submission to divine authority.

You know, just maybe the reason you men are having such a problem with your kids and with your wife—that is your wife submitting to your authority and your kids submitting to you—is because you haven’t learned to submit to God’s authority.

For once a man learns to live comfortably with divine authority, it’s amazing how the wife recognizes that and submits to the authority of the husband as the head of the house. And also the children recognize that power and that leadership and that submission as well.

A man in mid-life crisis is fighting against a sovereign system. And God is more powerful and I’ll tell you, you’re going to lose in the end of it.

Now, we learned last week that a guy in mid-life crisis lives life apart from God. He’s living as though “eat, drink and be

merry for tomorrow we die.”

He’s living it as though the grave is the end. And the crisis would not be a crisis if we were content with things the way they are. So if you can just get the feel of Solomon today you’ll understand this passage for the first time. I’ve got to confess that now that I see it in a mid-life crisis context, this passage is just going to leap out at you.

You can say “Hey! You know, I have some of those feelings. I’m thinking that guy’s experiencing what I’ve experienced. He knows all about it. It’s amazing!”

If you could just see Solomon right now as a weary guy having fought a losing battle. He has struggled. He’s fought. His marriage is in trouble. His marriages are in trouble. His work’s in trouble. He can find no meaning and no purpose in life and everything he keeps trying fails. He’s bumped up against a wall at every turn.

Ok, verse 1. There’s where he is. He’s tried all this stuff or wanted to.

Look at verse 1.

v. 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

Isn’t that a moment of surrender?

He's saying, you know there's just "a time for everything and a season for every activity."

God's just has this whole thing planned out. And if I just learn that He has the recipe for happiness, and He knows how to make me happy, and see every activity under heaven as part of it, I could be a happy individual.

You know Satan just does the opposite. You see a picture of Satan's activity in Matthew 4 when he tempts Christ.

He tempts Christ to turn stones into bread so that He can feed Himself. That's the right thing at the wrong time because the Father's going to take care of the Son in His time.

He says: "Cast yourself off the pinnacle of this temple and the angels will bear you up on their wings and you won't even have to go to the cross!"

And he says "Here, you can have all these kingdoms and the glory of them. And you don't even have to go to the cross!"

You see, he's talking about right things at the wrong time.

Many times in our lives, even good things can rob us because we're picking the flower green or before it's had a chance to bloom.

Some of you sit here and you've got vain regrets over your days of courtship because you did things that messed up your

marriage. And today you suffer the grief of that.

We do that in so many areas of our lives where a little discipline, a little proper timing, putting it in its right context and activity would have made it a joy instead of made it turn sour and make us feel guilty and makes us feel defiled.

He's saying "There is a time...and a season for every activity under [the sun]."

I put Proverbs 3:5 and 6 here:

Proverbs 3:5, 6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path.

You know it's that "leaning not unto your own understanding" that's the real problem.

It's our understanding of how life ought to be lived and we want to call the shots that oftentimes creates the greatest problem.

Solomon's just saying God's got His big red appointment calendar on the desk and it's got every day of my life mapped out. All the hours of it and if I'll just check-in with God, and follow His instructions it'll be amazing what God will do.

You know the Prodigal Son had that experience. He went off into the far country, he spent his bucks, lived the high life. In his stubbornness, he continued to work for a farmer. And then a little phrase “he came to his senses” and he went home to his father.

You know, I have prayed today, there’s some of you sitting in this class I really feel like you’re in the far country in your marriage, in your work, in living life. And life is bondage to you. Life is not fun and you’re here really desirous to find out what went wrong. Just realize that you bucked against authority. Maybe you took off on some mission that you shouldn’t have gone on and God is really speaking to you.

God says to Elijah the prophet, as he comes off of Mt. Carmel, he’s won this fantastic battle and he runs out in the middle of Beersheba because Jezebel sends him a telegram and tells him she’s going to kill him.

And out there under a juniper tree he says “I’m not any better than anybody else. Here’s my prophet’s badge. I’m turning it in and I’m dying.” He wants to die.

And the Lord gives him food, gives him rest, and he goes running off to some cave. And then the Lord asks that question: “Why are you here?”

I remember one night I was teaching that passage of scripture and there was a guy that came all the way from California to Texas thinking it was God’s will. And when I got to that

question, “Why are you here?” he went outside, packed his things and went back to California because he realized he was out of the will of God. I couldn’t believe that.

Maybe God’s saying that to you. Why are you here? I mean, you’re sitting here in a royal snit and you’re all upset and life is bondage and you’re unhappy. “Well why are you here? I never intended for you to be here in all of this traumatic set of circumstances! I mean for you to be happy! I meant for you to be blessed!”

God is love and every expression of His hand is a part of love. And yet there is that feeling inside that there’s nothing ever in our lives that’s free from the pressure of God just pushing in on us and making us change, making us feel unhappy and frustrated.

Joni Eareckson in *A Step Further* says it so well:

(Joni Eareckson Tada by *A Step Further*)

Wow! Sometimes as Christians we don’t even get a choice in the matter. If we care at all, we’ll just let God handle it His way.

(source unknown)

And boy, she has a lot to let God handle as a quadriplegic for the rest of her life. We can’t control the events of our lives. Every tear, every moment of laughter, every sorrow, every tornado, every problem comes as some purpose in mind.

You can resist it like JACOB and say:

“all these things are against me. “

Or with JOSEPH you can say you:

“thought it for evil against me but God meant it for good.”

With JOB you can say:

“though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.

With JEREMIAH:

“why did you let me see this trouble?”

We cannot make ourselves happy. God limits us. God has a gigantic computer and He feeds your program into it. And as it comes out and you walk in obedience to His word and His way, you're going to find the happiness.

Swindoll's written a great little book if you're having some trouble along this line called *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*. Boy now that relates doesn't it? This is what he says:

(Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back by Chuck Swindoll)

You can't carry yourself through the storms. It is too much for you. When will you come to the realization that the blizzards

in your live are allowed by God. Threatening storms are designed to slow us down, to make us climb up into His arms, to force us to depend on Him. Maybe it's time to say "Lord, I love You. Thank You. Through Your strength I will not be moved. I will stop running, I'll stop striving, I will not fear, I will hold on to You. I will count on You to build the tent around me and protect me from the blast. Thank You for giving me in love this blizzard of stress. Thank You that I can't even see the distance or the goal. I admit my weakness. I need Your strength."

(source unknown)

So he starts the study with the fact that there's "a time...and a season for every activity." It's just like he's exhausted.

Verses 2-8 now are going to be 14 CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES of life and I think these 14 contrasting couplets—which is 28 in total—are really meant to encompass all of life, everything that you would ever hit in life. I think it's designed for that.

In all of life:

"There is a time...and a season" for this and he's going to mention each of them.

And I'm just going to whip through them here so we can get on with the passage.

Verse 1.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:”

Ok, what is it? Our times are in His hands then.

Verse 2.

v. 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

Alright, let's look at that first one.

1. “a time to be born and a time to die...”

How does that relate to the mid-life crisis? Well at the mid-life crisis you're sitting down at half-time and you're reflecting on how you've lived and you realize that your death-day is closer than your birthday.

And every day you now you live you're getting closer to your death-day than you are to your birthday.

And it gets kind of shaky inside because you realize your time's in somebody else's hands.

Interesting how Jesus came to the end of His life and He says “My hour has come.”

All through His life He marks it by saying “My hour is not yet

come,” “My hour is not yet come.”

And in John 13 He says “My hour has come.”

Galatians 4:4, 5

But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the curse of the law.

You’re never really prepared for this.

Death does come.

There is “a time to be born”—you’ve got a birthday but you’ve also got “a time to die.”

And it might not be very long from now. You don’t know that. You’re times are really in His hands. That’s what he’s trying to say.

He says “my life is like a vapor. It appears for a little time and then it vanishes away.”

2. “a time to plant and a time to uproot,”

Well we plant our gardens in the spring and then we tear them up in the fall unless you’re like me. I plant them in the spring and they burn up in June so why not pull them up?

Number 3, verse 3.

**v. 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down
and a time to build,**

3. “a time to kill and a time to heal,”
4. “a time to tear down and a time to build,”

Well, there’s “a time to kill.”

I was driving the backroads to Camden, Arkansas Monday and these two beautiful deer just stepped right out on the road. I realize hunting season’s here! The adrenaline is starting to flow. You won’t find them when hunting season gets here but at least they were trying to cross the road.

There’s “a time to kill.”

There’s “a time to heal.” We go to the hospital.

There’s “a time to tear down and a time to build.”

A building gets out usage and we tear it down. And there’s “a time to build”—we scrape the ground and up go the buildings.

**v. 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn
and a time to dance,**

5. There’s “a time to weep and a time to laugh,”

6. “a time to mourn and a time to dance,”

When is there “a time to weep?” The Bible tells you there are three times that it is right to cry:

1. when a loved one’s died,
2. over our own sin and selfishness, and
3. over the loss condition of those around us who don’t know Jesus Christ as Savior.

Those are the times to weep.

They that sow in tears will reap in joy. God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

But there’s also “a time to laugh.” Why do we laugh? In the moment of spiritual victory.

Joy is the evidence of the King in residence. When the Spirit of God is flowing in our lives there is an inextinguishable joy that is ours.

“a time to weep...a time to laugh,”

“a time to mourn and a time to dance,”

Verse 5.

v. 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

7. “a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,”

8. “a time to embrace and a time to refrain,”

What’s the “scatter stones and a time to gather them?”

You scatter the stones to make the road. You gather them when you’re getting ready to plant a garden. Get them all out of there.

There’s “a time to embrace and a time to refrain.”

Paul gives us some instruction on that in our relationships with each other.

In 1 Corinthians 7:5 he says:

1 Corinthians 7:5

Stop depriving one another except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer and come together again, lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Verse 6.

v. 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

9. “a time to search and a time to give up,”

10. “a time to keep and a time to throw away,”

“a time to search and a time to give up,”—King Saul went looking for his daddy’s donkeys and finally he heard from Samuel, the man of God, that the donkeys had been found so he gave up the search.

There’s “a time to search and a time to give up,”—there were 90 and 9 safe in the fold but the Lord went out to look for that one lost sheep. When he found him he gave up the search. He was never content until he had all 100 in the fold.

There’s “a time to keep and a time to throw away”—Garage sales, Good Will, Salvation Army.

You know guys, I’ve really taken the banner for you and the women have really nailed me to the wall on this.

I mean, I’ve told them you know that we’re the guys that want to get rid of all this stuff and they say they put it out to the curb and you go out and get it and bring it back in again.

Some of your priceless little treasure that they have thrown away! And you nearly go up in smoke over it. Is that right? I mean, that’s what the women say.

There's "a time to keep and a time to throw away."

v. 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

11. There's "a time to tear and a time to mend,"—you know what that is. It's an old pair of clothes that's no longer good. You tear it up and use it to wash the car with.

"[And] a time to mend"—when a knee is out, we patch it up and keep using it.

12. There's "a time to be silent and a time to speak"—boy there's a lot of wisdom in that.

James 1:19

This you know, my beloved brethren, let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to answer.

Watchman Nee said:

Speaking inadvertently is largely responsible for the breaking up of the unit of the church and the losing of its power.
(source unknown)

Tongues out of control.

There's "a time to speak" and "a time to be silent."

Verse 8.

v. 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

13. “a time to love and a time to hate,”

What is meant by that? Well you love the sinner but you hate the sin.

There’s “a time to love and a time to hate.”

14. “a time for war and a time for peace.”

Hal Lindsey in his *The Late Great Planet Earth* said:

Inside man there is a selfish, self-centered nature. This is the source of what God calls sin. Sin is basically self-centered, seeking and striving, going our own way with our backs turned on God. It is because of this selfish nature with which we were born that we cannot have consistent peace with ourselves, our family, our neighbor, or on a broader scale, with other nations. As one man has said, “What’s wrong with the world?” And he answered himself truthfully, “I am wrong with the world.”

(source unknown)

Matthew 24:6

Are you not hearing of wars and of rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened. For these things must take place. But that is not yet the end.

There will be no peace until the Prince of peace comes. Of course we know that.

Alright, there's 28 things that he's bumped up against and he sees God's sovereign purpose in it. There's a right time for it.

Verse 9.

v. 9 What does the worker gain from his toil?

Does that sound familiar?

We had that back in chapter 1 and verse 3 at the foundation of the crisis. He comes right back to the very foundation of it:

“What did I gain from all of this?”

It's a disturbing thought.

Do you know what he's saying? He's saying if everything's mapped out and it's all planned, and there's a right time for it all, then what am I gaining from all of the sweat and blood? All of the struggle? Why am I fighting it? What is the real gain of just pouring myself into all of this stuff if I'm not going to get anything anyway?

Verse 10.

v. 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men.

“I have seen the burden God has laid on men.”

That takes you back to [Ecclesiastes] 1:13 when he said:

Ecclesiastes 1:13

I devoted myself to study and to explore my wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

Here's a brand new insight. I realize now why Solomon said “this was a problem to me.”

Why is life a burden?

Here's the insight the Lord just gave me. The burden comes a blessing when you submit to the plan of God for your life. And if life to you is a burden—it is a hassle, it is a losing cause, you're unhappy, you're out of sorts—I'm telling you that burden will become a blessing when you submit to the divine authority in your life and you let God really do it His way.

That's why he says this. That's why he's constantly spelling it out, that it's such a burden.

Proverbs 16:9

The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps.

Psalm 37:23

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delights in His way.

That is, when the Lord is ordering your steps, you will delight in His way.

Psalm 37:5

When you commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him to bring it to pass.

Psalm 37:4

...he'll give you the desires of your heart.

And that's verse 11.

I love verse 11 more than any verse in all of Ecclesiastes. I'm so glad you came because this is my very favorite verse.

v. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”—that’s HIS time—“He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

Isn’t that neat?

He makes it beautiful in HIS time, not YOUR time.

And the frustration of a mid-life crisis is you want it NOW. And you want it YESTERDAY. And you’re upset with the hand you’ve been dealt. And you’re going to let the world know it.

And until you submit, life will be a burden and not a blessing. And it won’t be very beautiful.

HE has made it beautiful in HIS time.

Bob Foster, who is a layman who writes a lot of things for Christian laymen has a letter called *The Challenge*. He wrote a little poem in it called “A Miracle for Sale.” I thought it was so great.

I paid a dime for a package of seeds

And the clerk tossed them out with a flip.

“We’ve got ‘em assorted for every man’s needs,”

He said with a smile on his lip,

“Pansies and poppies and asters and peas!

Ten cents a package! And pick as you please!”

[That's before inflation.]

Now seeds are just dimes to the man in the store,
And the dimes are the things that he needs,
And I've been to buy them in seasons before,
But have [always] thought of them merely as seeds;
But it flashed through my mind as I took them this time,
"You have purchased a miracle here for a dime."

"You've a dime's worth of power which no man can create,
You've a dime's worth of life in your hand!
You've a dime's worth of mystery, destiny, fate,
Which the wisest cannot understand.
In this bright little package, now isn't it odd?
You've a dime's worth of something known only to God."

There are seeds, but he plants and the blossoms are here
With their petals of various hues;
In these little pellets, so dry and so queer,
There is power which no chemist can fuse;
Here is one of God's miracles soon to unfold,
Thus for ten cents an ounce is Divinity sold!
(source unknown)

He makes it beautiful in His time.

And it might seem awfully ugly and awfully wrinkled and
awful crusty right now, but I'm telling you when you let Him
have it it's going to turn out beautiful.

And what Solomon is saying is “I better get in step with the Creator so I can see the big picture! And I can understand what He’s doing in my life.”

You know we’re doing a lot of singing now—folk singing—in Christian circles where we’re singing the Psalms and we’re singing a lot of little choruses that....

“Seek Ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”

“And let’s just praise the Lord....”

And a lot of these.

There’s a new little song that has come out not too long ago that has really spoken to me and it’s on this verse.

It’s called “In His Time”:

He makes all things beautiful, in His time.

And then the answer is this:

*Lord my life to You I bring,
May each song I have to sing,
Be to You a lovely thing,
In Your time.*

My life to You I bring.

(source unknown)

Maybe you're here without Jesus Christ and you've been in church all of your life and you have never really brought your life to the foot of the Cross. And saying: "God I've been fighting the system. I'm lonely. I'm tired. I'm hassled. I've come to my senses and I recognize there is no way but Your way."

That's salvation. But as a believer you can be a Prodigal Son in the far country today, feeding on the husks in the pigpen when God wants to put a ring on your finger and a fresh clean robe, and sandals on your feet. And let's kill the fatted calf and let's rejoice! This, my son that was dead is alive again! He's come home."

Get in step with the Lord. Let His time be your time. And watch fulfillment.

Life is not like an orange that you squeeze for all you can get out of it. Life to the fullest is surrendering to God's sovereign and eternal purpose and finding the blessing of it.

You know, I think Solomon realized this in love with Shulamith.

In the Song of Solomon you see the little phrase occurring over and over again: "Let us not awaken love until it is pleased to be awakened of itself."

Keeping themselves for that day when love will be awakened of itself. Let's keep ourselves for that time.

Solomon is beginning to realize that everything in his life ends up at zero UNLESS he is surrendering to God's sovereign purpose.

Now notice the rest of the verses. They just fall right out of the text. You won't believe they're here.

Verse 12.

v. 12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.

And he's found out where that is!

John 10:10

I have come that they might have life and they might have it more abundantly.

1 Corinthians 13:12

I know I see through a glass darkly, but then face to face,
I know in part, but I'm going to know even as I am known.

Verse 13.

v. 13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

You're going to find satisfaction. You're going to find fulfillment. It is a gift from God's hand as you surrender to Him.

Verse 14—this just keeps building up! Isn't it something! You didn't even know this was here.

v. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

Oswald J. Smith wrote this poem called "The Savior Can Solve Every Problem":

The Savior can lift every burden,
the heavy as well as the light.
His strength is made perfect in weakness,
in him there is power and might.

The Savior can strengthen the weary,
his grace is sufficient for all.
He knows every step of the pathway
and listens to hear when we call.

The Savior can break sin's dominion
the victory he won long ago.

In him there is freedom from bondage,
He is able to conquer every foe.

The Savior can satisfy fully
the hear the world cannot fill.
His presence will sanctify wholly
the soul that is yielded and still.

The Savior can solve every problem
the tangles of life can undo.
There is nothing too hard for Jesus,
there is nothing he cannot do.

(source unknown)

But you know, you're just like the guy on the sailing trip this summer. I love to salmon fish. And I take these three salmon rods and I give them instruction on how to handle those rods but these turkey Texans that have never had one of these Star Drag reels in their hands will do it every time.

BZZZZ! Goes the line and man there is a gigantic mess! And I just told them about it!

And they bring it and say "Here! Fix it!"

We're like that. Man, we mess around with our lives. We get it into granny knots and backlashes and we finally say "God here! Take it!" We're frustrated!

And why don't you give it to Him at the first sense of a

problem? And avoid all of that?

I've got a buddy, I'm telling you, he is the biggest character. He is a frustrated mechanic. I mean, if some little...if he takes the car into get it fixed and it's just a tad bit out, he'll be messing with the carburetor and the points. And the car's sitting there and won't go and he blames the mechanic for it. He's been messing with it! Man, he's got four cars in his driveway, a lawnmower and a tractor and none of them work!

We do that. Our watch breaks and we mess around with it. The jeweler says "Good grief! What happened to this watch!"

"I was trying to fix it!"

And we do that with life.

He says "Just give it to me!"

1 Peter 5:7

Cast all your care upon Him for He cares for you.

One guy described it this way:

The lady brought her big sack full of burdens in and she spread them all out before the Lord.

"Lord, I'm praying about this one and I'm praying about this one, and praying about this one, and praying about this one."

Then she gathers them all up and puts them in the sack and carries them away.
(source unknown)

And we do that. We never really learn how to turn over and so we become unhappy.

Verse 15.

v. 15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

“Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and”—uh oh—“God will call the past to account.”

Now he’s getting shook. I mean, he’s been bucking the power structure and he hasn’t been getting away with it because “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Gal. 6:7)

He’s going to be held accountable at the Judgment Seat of Christ as a Christian for all these years that he’s been living for himself.

God’s going to deal with him. It’s going to be brought into account. And the Bible says that.

2 Corinthians 5:10

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things good or bad.

Romans 14:12

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Verse 16.

v. 16 And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there.

He's saying "under the sun" you can have guys in the court that finagle the law to the accomplishment of the purpose.

I got a dear buddy that handled my class in Lubbock when I was traveling out there and teaching a year or so ago. And he nearly got killed. He was one of these salesmen that travels, you know, with these surgical instruments and goes to hospitals all over west Texas. And he was driving home one night in his little Chevrolet and all of a sudden he hit broad-side a pick-up. The guy had been over playing dominoes and drinking the booze and he was heading to the house and he just ran a stop sign and my good buddy just ran into him broad-side.

It was a small community and there was nothing said on the citation that this guy had imbibed or that he was intoxicated.

It really frustrated him because he was nearly killed in the process and the guy didn't even get a ticket to the fact that he ran a stop sign.

We know those injustices. It makes us awful mad when we see people declaring insanity and get off with shooting our president and a lot of other things that take place under the name of the legal profession today.

A lot of times we see wickedness in the place of justice and we're frustrated like Solomon because we don't see the righteous being vindicated in a situation like that.

And so verse 17 has the KEY PHRASE in it and I want you to catch it because it ties it all together.

v. 17 I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.”

The righteous are going to be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The wicked are going to stand at the Great White Throne Judgment and be judged, of course, eternally.

“for there will be a time for every activity, and a time for every deed.”

See, there it is. Now he brings the passage to a conclusion. He started with this in verse 1 and he says even in the face of

judgment, God is so sovereign and He controls the events of the life that He's going to hold us accountable for it at the end. He also says:

“there will be a time for every activity, and a time for every deed.”

You need to underscore that because that's back in chapter 3 verse 11: “He makes everything beautiful in HIS time.”

Chapter 3 verses 2-8—there's a time to mourn, a time to laugh and the 28 things we saw.

What he is saying is, “I am locked into the sovereign purpose of God and I will never be free from it. And I will one day have to give account of my relationship to that sovereign purpose of God.”

Verse 18.

v. 18 I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals.

Now that bothers you, doesn't it?

Here he is coming down to the end and he says God sometimes tests us to show us we're like the animals.

Well, what does a test do to you? When you have stress in your life it immediately shows you how selfish you are, doesn't

it?

I mean, if you have a real problem and you're really feeling down, who do you think of first?

We're "like the animals."

Have you ever seen a kitten going up to mother to nurse, to be concerned about a little kitten that's not getting in and getting her part? I mean, the animal world is selfishness supreme. I mean, they don't care a thought.

Those little beaks are wide open and boy you just drop it in ma! And I don't worry about that poor sick bird that's sitting next to me. I'm taking care of number one!

And he's saying as he thinks about all of this, God tests us so we can see we're like the animals. We are selfish. When things start to happen and fall apart around us, who do we think about? Number one! Forget the rest of them. I don't have any responsibility for them.

That's exactly what John Denver said in that "Seasons of Life" last week. I came here for love in the first place and now love is the reason I must go.

Hit a little stress in the marriage and love is why I came here in the first place and NOW love is the reason that I must go!

Selfishness supreme!

Back of the mid-life crisis is the struggle and that has to be selfishness.

Verse 19.

v. 19 Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.

Remember we said the mid-life crisis, the grave is the end? Now, when a guy gets crowded and he's beginning to see himself, he gets down and so he makes some brash statements. I'm taking it, now that he sees he's fighting a losing battle against God, he's going to spit out a few wild statements here at the end that really don't mean anything other than the fact that he's just totally depressed.

You've said that sometimes. You know you say "Oh my, I can't go on. I'm through. I'm finished. I'm done. I've had it! I'm quitting! I don't care if they fire me! I'm finished!" And you don't really mean that.

I mean, you don't REALLY but you've said it, haven't you? I think what he's saying here is "I'm locked into the sovereign purpose of God and I don't like it and I'm unhappy! And I want to tell you that it's not any different than the animals! They die and we do too!"

That's what started this whole crisis in the first place. He says

“there’s no remembrance in the grave.”

And you know what the guy in the mid-life crisis is saying? He’s saying “Look, just maybe there might not be any life after death so I better grab for all the gusto I can because this is all I’ve got! So I’ve really got to go for it! I mean, who knows whether there’s anything really out there or not! I mean, there’s a 50/50 chance so I better get after it.”

And so he finds an excuse for really living high on the hog.

Verse 20.

v. 20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

Isn’t that edifying?

v. 21 Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”

What is that? That is an excuse for his stubborn resistance and selfishness. It’s spoken out of deep depression. He’s tried everything and it’s all meaningless and he is just really upset.

How different that is from the Bible.

The Bible says “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:8)

Paul says “I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ,

which is far better.” (Phil. 1:23)

Verse 22.

v. 22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

“So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot.”—See? The sovereign purpose of God!—“For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”

I put one statement at verse 22 because he’s finally getting his act together.

Submissive surrender to the sovereign purpose of God solves the crisis and you leave the future in His hands.

Submissive surrender to the sovereign purpose of God solves the crisis and you leave the future in His hands! And it’s a great place to leave it.

Now the hardest time for us to lock ourselves into the sovereign purpose of God is when we’re suffering. That’s the biggest challenge.

Can we surrender in suffering to see something of God’s sovereign purpose in this traumatic circumstance of a little

child being called home at 3 ½? That's the challenge of the believer. Can we do that?

Joni Eareckson says:

My focus changed from demanding an explanation from God to humbly learning to depend upon Him.

(source unknown)

Most of what comes into our lives we have to face that.

McDaniel in a book called *Stewardship of Sorrow* says:

(*Stewardship of Sorrow* by Douglass S. McDaniel)

Submission is the other way. It is the triumph which comes when we lay our sorrowing soul at the Father's feet and accept what he sends.

(source unknown)

Fénelon in his little book *Let God*, which is worth it all and you ought to read it. It goes well with this study. It's learning to turn it over to the Lord. He says:

(*Let God* by François Fénelon)

I am saying this because I have noticed a tendency in you to talk about your problems rather than abandoning yourself to God and leaving them with Him. And you will be better off both physically and spiritually when you quietly place

everything in God's hands.
(source unknown)

Watchman Nee says it this way:

God's hand is upon you to break you, not according to your will but His. Not according to your thoughts but His. Not according to your decision but His. Our difficulty is that as God withstands us, we blame others...
(source unknown)

We have this treasure in earthen vessel and the vessel must be broken before the light shines.

Fénelon says:

When it comes to accomplishing things for God, you will find that high aspirations, enthusiastic feelings, careful planning and being able to express yourself well are not worth very much. The important thing is absolute surrender to God. You can do anything He wants you to do if you are walking in the light of full surrender.
(source unknown)

Out of this study I got six lessons so let me give them to you in conclusion.

Lesson #1: There is a time for everything. "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity." (verse 1)

“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity.”

Satan will always tempt you with a right thing for the wrong time. That’s when you get frustrated.

“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity.”

Lesson #2: A man in mid-life crisis is often found rebelling against God’s eternal purpose.

A man in mid-life crisis finds himself rebelling against God’s eternal purpose.

Lesson #3: God sees the total picture and He’s working it all together for good whether you believe it or not.

God sees the total picture and He is working it all together for good whether you believe it or not.

Lesson #4: Cooperating with God’s plan brings joy and fulfillment.

Cooperating with God’s plan brings joy and fulfillment.

And then I added #5.

Lesson #5: God will bring judgment both to the righteous and the wicked.

God will bring judgment both to the righteous and the wicked

We're going to be held responsible for what we sow we shall also reap.

And then I wrote another one down.

Lesson #6: Suffering reveals the stubborn or the submissive heart.

Suffering will reveal the stubborn or the submissive heart.

If it's stubborn you'll get bitter and resentful. If it's submissive you're going to learn from what the Lord has given you and you're going to make it a climbing block onto something better in the future.

Suffering will always reveal the stubborn or the submissive heart.

One writer put it this way:

The purposes of God often develop slowly because His grand designs are never hurried. Learn to accept His timing without murmuring.

(source unknown)

Men would pluck their mercies green, when the Lord would have them ripe.

(source unknown)

Phillips Brooks said:

The trouble is that I am in a hurry but God isn't.
(source unknown)

Dear heart, let perfect patience be thy goal,
It is the way earth's noblest souls have trod;
Tis just a calm adjustment of the soul
In all things to the perfect will of God.
—Hayward
(source unknown)

I was running one night in Houston with a guy after I'd taught this particular study. And he says "You know, the mid-life crisis brought me to Jesus Christ."

I thought to myself, it's worth it to go through that if it brings you to the foot of the Cross.

And you can put this all behind you today if you're here and you're not a believer, by surrendering to Him. And perhaps the crisis is there because you've been resisting God's authority in your life.

As a believer your joy, your fulfillment is to be sensitive to that still small voice that is saying "This is the way, walk ye in it. When you turn to the right-hand and when you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21)—letting God order your steps.

This statement is the conclusion of my study.

Solution comes when you surrender to His sovereignty.

Whether you're here not a believer or you're here as a Christian, that is true.

The solution comes when you surrender to His sovereignty.

Father, we thank You for today. Thank You for this tremendous passage of scripture tucked with your sovereign purpose and yet realizing that you make it beautiful in Your time. Knowing we're going to be held accountable for our resistance, we pray that we'd be sweetly submissive to Your Spirit speaking to us now saying "Hey, this is the way you need to go. This is how the steps need to be ordered. This is where you need to walk." We love You and thank You for how good You are and for Your faithfulness to us, and Your patience with us. Thank You, too, that You can break the most stubborn heart and bring real blessing in the midst of brokenness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Study Number Three – Whatever Will Be, Will Be!

– Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

NOTES

v. 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

v. 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

v. 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

v. 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

v. 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

v. 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

v. 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

v. 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

v. 9 What does the worker gain from his toil?

v.10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men.

v.11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

v.12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.

v.13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

v.14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

v.15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

v.16 And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there.

v.17 I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.”

NOTES

v.18 I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals.

v.19 Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.

v.20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

v.21 Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”

v.22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. Outline the fourteen contrasts in verses 2-8.

3. What has God done, according to verse 11, and what is the significance of it?

4. What does Solomon know, according to verses 12-14?

5. What is God going to do, according to verse 15?

6. What else did Solomon see, according to verse 16?

7. Summarize the thoughts of Solomon's heart in verses 17-21.

8. What did Solomon see in verse 22?

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: There is a time for everything and a season for every activity.

LESSON #2: A man in mid-life is often found rebelling against the decrees of God's eternal purpose.

LESSON #3: God sees the total picture and is working everything in accordance with His eternal purpose.

LESSON #4: Cooperating with God's plan brings joy and fulfillment.

LESSON #5: God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked.

LESSON #6: Suffering reveals the selfish, stubborn, or submissive heart.