



What Time is It?

Open it

When I'm not feeding my dopamine addiction with memes or watching Linus Tech Tips on YouTube, I use my phone for more productive things. Phones are wonderful, mysterious creatures that are underutilized in practical aspects of life. On my phone, I keep a detailed and labeled calendar with all events, work and class schedules, movie releases, and appointments. All types of events are color-coded and easily accessible from my home page. When I want to add an event to my calendar, I just push the plus button and fill out the brief form with the date, time, where the event will be, and (most importantly) the color. However, just because I have this neat calendar, doesn't mean that I'll be on time for everything. In fact, it doesn't even mean I'll *make* it to *anything*. It's simply a guideline and an organizational tool for me to follow if I want to succeed in my life. The keyword for that sentence, unfortunately, is *IF*. I don't always remember to look at it or my car breaks down or I write the wrong time or day. It's not a 100% safety net that I'll be at everything I hope to be at. Probably not even an 80% chance. But there is one calendar that *guarantees* that what's written in it will happen. God must have a really good phone with the enterprise version of Google Calendar or something because everything that happens in ALL our lives is all according to His plan. No matter what happens in my life, I know God's got a plan through it all and He is always in control. While you study chapter three of Ecclesiastes this week, I pray that you'll increase your confidence in God's calendar for your life.

1. **What's a moment in your life you wish you could go back and change?**

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Everything, Everywhere, All at Once

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

I remember the first time I learned about antonyms. Way back in fourth grade at James R. Wood Elementary in Somonauk with Mrs. Pevonka. To explain what an antonym was, she reminded us of a song that came out just a couple of years earlier called “Hot N Cold” by Katy Perry... It’s occurred to me that this song is as old as many of you guys reading this. Also, it’s not a very appropriate song even for fourth graders... Anyway, Mrs. Pevonka explained that the use of antonyms in a repetitive way could cause the listener to have a sort of mental whiplash, in essence. The contrasting nature of the opposite phrases helps to emphasize that in a case where the actions would have contradictions, both extremes subvert expectation and are both true. Applying similar logic to verses 1–8 allows us to see that in every situation given, God has given us a time and place for each one. I know I certainly experienced this mental whiplash while reading this. “Woah, God’s given us time for this too? Surely not for that as well!” Well, it’s not so much that God’s given us the *time* for it. Rather it’s more that God has *designated* the time in our lives for these actions to occur. As we’ll learn later in the passage, the Lord does everything just right and on time and we cannot add or take away from what He’s done. Sometimes we forget just how much of an influence God has on our everyday lives. Everything we do comes from God, and in everything we do God has declared when it should be done.

6. Think about some of the more “questionable” actions in these verses (such as the killing ones). When has God given His people an appropriate time for some of these in the Bible?

7. Now, what are some examples of these things that you can apply to your own life?

8. With those examples in your mind, how does knowing that God has formed your life with a balance of good and, we’ll say, less desirable events help prepare you for what is to come?

¹ And no. Solomon’s not saying there’s a time to go around and murder people in verse 3. Some scholars believe that because war and peace also make an appearance at the end of the list and already deal with life and death, verse 3 could be talking more about killing emotions or healing relationships. Similarly, to 3, verse 5 may be talking about something a bit more... We’ll say Song of “Solomonesque” as all the other lines connect to each other. Lastly, the “tear apart” one refers to the tearing of clothes when in mourning.

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Hard Work

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–11.

Jumping back to Ecclesiastes 1, we were introduced to the viewpoint of a man who was unaware that all the answers to life are found in God.² Chapter 2 discussed the ideas of hard work and wisdom and asked the question if it's even possible to find happiness in it from the view of the natural man. Chapter 3 finally switches to the more spiritual man mindset of it. Solomon again brings up a topic from Ecclesiastes 1:3 by repeating the verse. Comparing the two verses, however, we'll notice that there's a change. He no longer talks about the hard work *on earth*, but now focuses on how God has given us our lives. The natural man in chapter 2 views hard work as pointless while the spiritual man in chapter 3 views life with purpose to please God. Chapter 2 describes the riches and fame that sprouted from the hard work the author did, and he found it all in vain. He had pleasure in it, sure, but had nothing to gain from anything he did on earth; nothing would go with him when he died. He views his time differently from before he acknowledged God's involvement.

9. How does viewing your life through a God-centered lens encourage you?

10. Verse 11 says that everything God does is both just and on time, but people can never completely understand what He is doing. When were some times in your life when you were confused at what was happening but God proved them to be useful later?

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Ecclesiastes 1 footnotes.

Day 4 — Today's Theme: The Master Timeline

Read Ecclesiastes 3:12–15.

Back to the Future is one of my favorite movie series ever. I love the concept of going on a time-traveling journey and somehow ending up messing up the space-time continuum to coincidentally make your life leagues better. For example, in the first movie, Marty accidentally goes back to the year 1955, helps his dad be more confident, and helps his mom be a more respectable role model for her kids. When Marty returned to 1985, his present wasn't the same 1985 he left. His dad was publishing books and his mom was sober! Even the class bully was washing Marty's truck! Sometimes we wish we could be like Marty. We'd like to alter the circumstances we're in or change those around us. Sometimes we wish we were the ones being changed. We'd like to go back and redo our own moments. I know I've wished to go back to some embarrassing times in my life... *cough* middle school *cough* However, unlike the fiction in *Back to the Future*, things aren't coincidences in our lives. Nothing is ever luck. We read here in verse 14 that everything that happens in our lives is because God created it. It's all part of HIS space-time continuum timeline thingy. We cannot add to it, nor take away. That's what I love about it. We can't take away from God's great plan for our lives.

11. **With this in mind, to what extent could we take verse 13? Surely, God doesn't want us to party ALL day? Which part of verse 13 tells us that it's not all partying?**

12. **We cannot add to or subtract from God's plan. How do we know what to do at all then?**

Day 5 — Today's Theme: Who Cares? God Cares. Should I Care?

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24–26.

So what then? If success, pleasure, accumulating wealth and possessions, and wisdom all fail to deliver, what then? What's the conclusion?

Throughout the rest of this book, we're going to unpack all of these things much more as Solomon wrestles with all of this with pen to paper. But for now, he leaves us with this...

Not everything is all morbid and sad about this. Just because none of these things deliver lasting meaning and value and will all leave us coming back for more, he does include this tidbit of good news in here, like a glimmer of shining light in the darkness: *"There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"*

"Solomon is not advocating 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!' That is the philosophy of fatalism, not faith. Rather, he is saying, 'Thank God for what you do have, and enjoy it to the glory of God.'" Paul gave his approval to this attitude when he exhorted us to trust *"in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Tim. 6:17 NKJV)... It is not enough to possess "things"; we must also possess the kind of character that enables us to use "things" wisely and enjoy them properly."³

13. How might living in a culture that promotes all these fleeting things create challenges for you to "keep the main thing the main thing"? What are some ways that your small group members could support each other in this?

14. What kind of character do you think "enables us to use 'things' wisely and enjoy them properly"?

³ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Satisfied (Ecclesiastes): Looking for the Answer to the Meaning of Life (p. 46). Kindle Edition.
Note: This study was written by Micah Hett. www.villagebible.church/students.