

**Oasis: “Words of Wisdom” – 1.1.2012**  
**DONE IN SYNC WITH “THE LIVING GOD’S STORY JOURNEY”**  
**THE PASSAGE – ECCLESIASTES 3:1-14**



**Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 - A Time for Everything**

**1** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: **2** a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, **3** a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, **4** a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, **5** a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, **6** a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, **7** a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, **8** a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. **9** What do workers gain from their toil? **10** I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. **11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. **12** I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. **13** That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. **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 people will fear him.

*Preface: Welcome to our LC Bible study in our sermon series “Living God’s Story.” As you know by now, this year we will be working our way through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. This week we focus on the idea that there is a season for everything according to Ecclesiastes. These LC studies will complement the sermons, and will focus on specific biblical text and to help us go deeper in personal understanding and application.*

Possible Opening - Most people tend to avoid the philosophical questions of life and death for numerous reasons, some obvious, some not. However, it is a good thing to devote appropriate attention to it and as believers, we celebrate the hope that Christ offers.

There are numerous moments of life when we feel its sacredness, its triviality and everything in between that reminds us of our mortality.

### **Possible Starter Questions**

What is your first memory of when you realized that you weren’t going to live forever in this world?

Describe a time when you sensed the futility of life (leader should be prepared to offer a few personal examples to allow for others to feel comfortable to share theirs).

Describe a time of when you felt a moment of transcendence (the profound sense that there is something more beyond this world).

*(If your group is large, either just have several do this; or better yet, subdivide into small clusters of 4 or 5 so that everyone can get an opportunity.)*

Transitional Comment: **This study is focused on what the writer of Ecclesiastes was teaching in his famous passage of “there is a time for everything.”** As we will see in this account, everyone can be overwhelmed by the seeming futility of life. Every heart asks, “Is life worth living?” “Is there something more?” “Who am I?” and “What am I here for?”

The point of this study is **to celebrate the meaning of life that God offers those who seek and love Him from the perspective of Ecclesiastes.**

### Context & Word Studies

**O** – “Ecclesiastes” means “Teacher” (The “Kohelet” in Hebrew) as one would “gather his class for instruction.” The authorship and the “Teacher” is generally attributed to King Solomon and it’s in the context of his life that we read these words.

**Q** – What mental pictures and thoughts come to mind when you think of King Solomon gathering a class of students to listen to his wisdom gained over his lifetime?

**O** – The phrases “all is vanity” and “everything is meaningless” occur 38 times throughout the book. The seeming emptiness and futility of life is the problem that Solomon aims to address.

**Q** – We tend to come against these words in a variety of places from college philosophy classes to funeral homes to even pop-music. Though it is a saddening sentiment, what good can be found in exploring its truth?

(Possible answers include – it forces us to think of the story of our lives in the big picture sense and take inventory of our life’s trivialities, values and purpose).

**O** – “The Teacher” mentions “God” 42 times and only uses “Elohim” never “Jehovah.” “Elohim” means “God, the Mighty One over all creation” and “Jehovah” means “Lord”.

**Q** – What do you think can be induced from his usage here?

(Possibilities include – perhaps it’s a sign of the distance in Solomon’s heart that he is unable to refer to God as his “Lord.” Or perhaps Solomon wishes to speak of God’s grandeur; perhaps also it’s a gesture of respect as he, one of the most powerful men in the world, also realizes that his life is “but a vapor”).

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is perhaps the best-known passage in the book. There are numerous features to this verses but **the central idea focuses on life and death.**

**O** – Note that only verse 2a (“A time to be born, and a time to die”) is a moment uncontrolled by human hands. The remaining verses depend on personal/social responsibility.

**O** – Verse 3 “a time to kill and a time to heal” seem to give society two ways to respond to individual transgression.

**O** – Verses 4-7 can be seen as a grouping on the life & death theme of mourning and celebrating.

**O** – Verse 5a - “a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them” can be understood in an agricultural context but can also be understood as gathering stones to create a memorial.

**O** – Verse 5b “time to embrace, and to refrain from embrace...” are metaphors for physical intimacy (according to medieval midrash which is among several Jewish interpretations and commentaries of the OT).

**O** – Verse 7 “a time to tear and a time to mend” refers to the ancient Israelite mourning custom of rending garments (see Gen. 37:29; 2 Sam. 13:31). Again the theme of mourning is part of this set as verse 7cd, “a time to keep silence and a time to speak” is a reference to Job 2:13 which suggests silence was appropriate in the presence of

bereavement.

**O** – Verse 8 culminates the human experience with the extremes of love and hate and ultimately their fruits seen in times of war and peace.

**Questions** – Verses 3-8 can be understood in a number of ways. What comes to your mind when you hear them? (Leader should read one verse at a time and ask for spontaneous thoughts from the group. Avoid commentary on each one until the end and follow up on discussion as appropriate. The goal of this exercise is to see this passage as a whole as opposed to individual clauses).

**O** – Verse 9 “Labor” and “Toil” are used 23 times in the book and its meaning is “to toil to the point of exhaustion.”

**Q** – In a time not known for typical 40-50 hour workweeks void of the technologies and comfort that we enjoy today, what do you imagine to be the toiling aspects to ancient life?

**O** – Verses 10-14 point directly to a benevolent and loving God who desires to see His creation find beauty and satisfaction in life. This again is a unique feature of Judaism that proclaims a monotheistic loving God who is directly involved in the lives of His creation.

**Q** – This is the “game-changer,” a God who desires that we enjoy the beauty found in life. To fully enjoy life, what answers do all people need to find? (Note that this points back to the introduction).

**Q** – What does the usage of “fear” mean in verse 14? (Reverence)

**Q** – As people of the New Testament, how does God answer these questions for all of humanity? (Numerous ways to answer this question; at some point, land on the person and saving work of Jesus).

**Q** – How does living in the way of Jesus affect how we address the seasons of life and death of Ecclesiastes 3?

### **Application**

Indeed there is a season for all things in life. But praise God that He infuses Christ-followers’ lives with the meaning and hope of the Resurrection which informs every season of life. The best application we can live is to offer this meaning and hope to those around us who are struggling with the futility of life, plagued by hurt and searching for answers. The truth being sought is found in Christ and may we live in the calling we have received and share the good news with everyone.

#### Advice to study leaders:

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night. Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group.
- b. Complement OQ questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.