



Summer Lovin' Devotions

Week Twelve

Aug 27—Sept 2, 2017



A Season for Everything

As you begin each day: Take some deep breaths and acknowledge that you are in God's presence. As you read, pay attention not just with your mind, but also with your heart. Are there words or phrases that stick out to you? If yes, take time to consider them. Carry the words with you throughout the day and let God continue to work with you on what has been brought to your attention. If you get distracted as you read, that is okay. Use the distractions as a reminder to thank God for those happy distractions and as a reminder to give to God those troubling distractions.

All scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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 throw 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 throw 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.*

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Day 1—What time is it?

Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 from your Bible or page 2 of this guide.

What time is it? Is it time to get up? Is it time for lunch? Meeting time? Time to leave for work? Time to go home? Time for Wheel of Fortune? Game time? Time for bed? So much of life revolves around clocks and calendars. There is nothing wrong with considering the date or time. In fact, we need to pay attention to how we steward the time we have been given. We are given varieties of experiences, and varieties of tasks, not all of them pleasant. They're part of the human experience, we are born, we die, we laugh, we weep, we love, we hate. This week we will look at some verses in Ecclesiastes 3 more specifically, but today let's consider that God *"made everything suitable for its time"*. We experience it all, and God is present with us in it all and can use it all, even when it's wrong. The author of Hebrews quotes from Deuteronomy saying, *"I will never leave you or forsake you,"* then goes on to say, *"So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'"* (Hebrews 13:6). God is with you.

How would you describe this time in your life? How do you perceive (or not) God with you? Ecclesiastes 3 says God, *"has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."* In your personal life, do you tend to look toward the past or future? *When you think about God's work*, do you tend to look toward the beginning or the end? In your day-to-day schedule, where do you have space to recognize God?

As you consider your current time in life, offer yourself to God, as you are, where you are, in this time of life. If God calls you to repentance, repent; if God calls you to thanksgiving, be thankful. Listen to God's leading and be faithful in obedience with God's help.

Prayer: God of all, you existed in the beginning and will be present through all time and beyond. We thank you for being with us in this particular time of life. We give our day to you this day, in this time. Use us in ways that bring you honor, even when we don't understand. Give us wisdom to discern how to be happy and take pleasure in our toil. Guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.

Day 2—A time to be born, and a time to die

Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 from your Bible or page 2 of this guide.

Today we consider our birth and death. In middle school our English teacher had us write our own obituaries. It was a good exercise in thinking about how we wanted to live our lives. I'm not sure I thought about my own mortality too much, though, because it was easier to think about how I wanted to live than to think of dying. But, we all will die. The repetition in Genesis 5, right at the beginning of our scriptures gives clarity of this fact of life: we all die, generation after generation.

*⁵ Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; **and he died...** ⁸ Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years; **and he died....** ¹¹ Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; **and he died....** ¹⁴ Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; **and he died....** ¹⁷ Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years; **and he died....** ²⁰ Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; **and he died....** ²⁷ Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; **and he died....** ³¹ Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years; **and he died.***

Your life and work will end. Everything that you possess and do will be left to others. Money, house, clothes, intellectual work, thoughts you have spoken or written, and more will all be left behind. How do you feel about your own mortality? What things do you want to do before you die? What things do you need to do before you die?

Birth and death come to everyone, that is given. A Christian discussion of death must also include resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 says, *"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."* Certainly death doesn't have the final word, but it does still have a word.

Prayer: Eternal God, thank you that our days on earth are numbered. Teach us to see the blessing of being perishable in this sinful world. May our prayer be like the Psalmist: *So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.* Use our days to fulfill your kingdom here. Amen.

Day 3—A time to kill, and a time to heal

Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 from your Bible or page 2 of this guide.

It is common to think of all these couplets in Ecclesiastes 3 as giving permission to do all things, including taking the life of another. We may interpret it as “there is an appropriate time for everything”. Maybe this argument works when living under human law, including modern laws like stand your ground laws. But when living in heavenly law, under grace and peace, Jesus taught a different way.

Jesus suffered a cruel death and said his followers would also suffer, *“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?’”* (Matthew 15:24-26)

Jesus also responded to the law in Matthew 5:21-28 by confronting the standard practices around murder, adultery, divorce, lying, retribution, love, and hate. Ultimately he says that God’s kingdom is about reconciliation, *“Be reconciled to your brother or sister”* (v24).

What should we make of Ecclesiastes in light of the entire Bible? First, it’s realistic. In the world, humans kill other humans for many reasons. How does God call us to respond? Like Jesus, and through Jesus’ power, we heal. Our call to heal includes first, and continually, being healed ourselves through Jesus Christ. There isn’t a “one size fits all” approach. The work of healing involves many vocations with wide variety of gifts and personalities. Each one must consider how God calls you to be part of God’s healing.

What violence have you experienced? How are you being healed by God? Where do you see suffering? How does God call you to work in healing today?

Prayer: Great Healer, the world is a mess of suffering and violence. It’s also a place of grace and new beginnings. When we see hatred and violence and feel its piercing sting, remind us to look to you for instruction on what we’re called to do in response. Bring your peace to our world. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Day 4—A time to weep, and a time to laugh

Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 from your Bible or page 2 of this guide.

From our very earliest days we cry and laugh. We are born crying, but it takes a few weeks to learn to laugh. Parents often remember the first time they saw their baby laugh. Laughing with other people is one way we form deeper relationships. Laughter is a medicine, and depending on our ailment, sometimes it is the best medicine. God is with us when we laugh.

Tears are also healing, weeping is exhausting and cleansing, and life gives us opportunities to cry. To be fully human is to include space for grief and mourning. We can't make everything better, we can't get everything we want, we can't always make a difference, we fall short. Whatever the reason for our sadness, God is with us when we weep.

Have you ever held back tears or laughter? Sometimes, we aren't comfortable expressing emotion. Why do we hold our emotions in check? Certainly there are some worthy reasons. Other reasons are not as worthy. We were created as full people who feel and express emotion. Ecclesiastes 3 observes that emotional times are part of life, and it teaches expression. Indeed, the words used are not emotions but expressions of emotion. Verse 4 says weep, laugh, mourn, dance, rather than feel happy or feel sad. God created us to express emotion through weeping and mourning, laughter and dancing, and more.

The Apostle Paul is an example of one who is open to a range of emotions. Scholar Stephen Voorwinde writes about Paul's emotions expressed in 2 Corinthians: *Specific references to Paul's emotions are found no less than thirty-five times, and twenty different Greek words are used. No less impressive is the range of emotions expressed. He despairs, experiences sorrow, is glad, rejoices, feels anguish of heart, sheds tears, loves, is perplexed, groans, has regrets, is afraid and jealous, mourns and burns with distress.*¹

What emotions do you express easily? Which are more difficult? Do you consider others when you express your emotion? What emotions might you express to God today?

Prayer: God, thank you for your presence with us at all times, even when we feel joy and sadness. Thank you for creating us with expression. Help us express ourselves in a way that brings honor and glory to you, and strengthens our relationship with you, our neighbors, and all creation. Amen.

¹ Voorwinde, Stephen. "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians: Part 1". Retrieved from rtc.edu.au

Day 5—A time to keep silent, and a time to speak

Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 from your Bible or page 2 of this guide.

“Be quiet, it’s not your turn!” “Speak up, I can’t hear you!” “What do you have to say?” “I don’t want to hear your opinion.” Chances are, we’ve all heard these things. Chances are, we’ve all said them too. Life gives us time to speak and time to listen. Sometimes we are heard when we wish we wouldn’t have said anything and other times we have something to say but our voice is silenced. It’s part of the way humans experience life.

The old adage, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak,” is good to consider. We need to take a lot of time to listen because listening is hard. When we listen, the words another says, and the things left unsaid, are competing for space in our mind with all of the other thoughts we have swirling around. Much can be learned when we truly listen with love to another.

In Luke 4:18-21, Jesus announced the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* Jesus came to bring good news and freedom to the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. He came to give voice to the voiceless. Do we hear them? Poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression come in many forms. Is it time to speak? When given a voice, a “a time to speak”, God’s people cannot be silent, whether for themselves or for another. We have good news!

Are you generally quiet or talkative? What topic can you talk about for a long time? When have you experienced times of silence? When have you experienced times of speaking? Where do you see a person or people who don’t have much voice? Where do you see a person or people with a loud voice? Are you called to speak or silence?

Prayer: God, you hear us all, know us all, and love us all: how incredible! Give us your heart to love our sister and brother, and lead us to use our times of speaking and times of silence in ways that you bring your full salvation to the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. Amen.

Day 6—A time to keep, and a time to throw away

Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 from your Bible or page 2 of this guide.

We live in a physical world, full of physical goods. We seek things, loose things, keep things, throw things away. We earn, take, save, and give. The teacher in Ecclesiastes asks what workers gain from toil, and then answers, *“I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.”* We can take comfort in knowing that God’s work endures forever. God generously provides for our needs, often through us! In Matthew 5 Jesus teaches how to live in relationship with others in a way that is Godly, with grace, love, forgiveness and generosity. The chapter ends with Jesus saying, *“Be perfect, therefore, as you heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matthew 5:28). Not an unattainable perfection, but essentially, live toward others in the way that God lives toward us: be generous with your goods, time, forgiveness, energy, and love. God’s work of generosity is done through you and me.

What is your work? How does your work meet your own needs? How does your work meet the needs of others? What do you need to keep? What do you need to let go of? Do you see the needs of others? What can you give generously today? To whom could you offer generous love? Generous forgiveness? Generous time? Generous emotional energy? Generous physical energy? Generous prayers? Generous goods? Generous money? We aren’t each called to give every *thing* every *day*, so if you feel empty, know that God is with you and God’s Spirit can fill your emptiness. You too are loved and are part of God’s generous gift to the world.

Prayer: You have given us much, Lord, sometimes more than enough. Holy Spirit, fill us when we have nothing to give. Push us toward your style of compassion and generosity as we consider when to keep and when to discard. Change our thoughts from me and mine to you and yours. May we welcome your perfect spirit within us. Amen.