1-7 January 2023 Ecclesiastes 3: 1-13

Opening doors

Read the passage from Ecclesiastes. It is written below.

### A Time for Everything

**3**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[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+3%3A1-13&version=NIV#fen-NIV-17371a)] 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.

**Bible notes**

The book of Ecclesiastes is from a group of Old Testament books known as wisdom literature. We are unsure when it was written, but probably somewhere between 450-200 BC. The book takes its name from the word for a person speaking before an assembly. It is a teaching text designed to provoke discussion, a kind of fictionalised autobiography common in the ancient literature of the Middle East. The book as a whole certainly confronts us with the challenges life brings, and the difficulty of holding onto the meaning of lifewhen we each have only a brief span that leads to death. This particular passage puts before us a number of contrasting courses of action and implies that wisdom lies in knowing the appropriate action to take at a particular time. The text does not give us guidance on how we should learn to do this, but it provokes thought by listing actions that might be seen as very negative (to uproot, to scatter stones, to hate, etc.) and giving them a place alongside positive actions such as healing and building up. Often binary choices seem to limit the way we see things, but the author’s intention here seems to be to broaden our vision – to help us to see more of the tasks that wisdom might require of us ‘under heaven’.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

One of the crucial questions for interpreting Scripture is to ask: What time is it? What time is it in my life, and how does that tie in with what I’m reading? Ecclesiastes encourages us to see that there are many different times ‘under heaven’, some of them very dark indeed. What time are we in right now? How might we identify or name it? Ecclesiastes is also about actions. Can we identify a wise action for this moment? How can we look beyond the endlessly positive and optimistic, or at least the desire for it to be so, and to notice that the wise action is sometimes to throw something away or to let it go?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.*

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* **Questions**
* Why is it important to do the right thing at the right time?
* What do you need to be doing – in faith – right now?
* And what should you stop?

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| Prayer Adapt to your local context. **A prayer of adoration** O Lord our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth, you have set your glory above the heavens; Lord of all eternity, mighty Saviour, you have given us a time for everything. We thank you for every season and time under heaven. You created everything. You have breathed life into all things. We worship and adore you.  **Amen.**   **A prayer to end the Bible study** When life is hard, **it’s time to trust God.** When life is full of joy and fun, **it’s time to thank God.** When God seems far away, **it’s time to look for God.** When God is close, **it’s time to sing to God.** In all our lives **it’s time to praise God.**  **Amen.** |  |

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