

Introduction: It is all too easy to get frustrated by the ‘brush fires’ of life, those everyday crises that hinder us from doing meaningful projects that will benefit people for years to come. *** In my former vocation my bosses gave me the benefit of their experience to help me make an estimate of the time I would need to complete a major project. This is how they accounted for the effect of ‘brush fires’ we always need to put out, whether we like to – or not! First, make my best guess in terms of weeks or months I thought I needed to finish the project. Then, build in a ten to twenty percent margin. Finally, double or triple that number. And, they told me I will always scramble to complete the project by this projected date. This is life in the ‘real world’: There is always too much of the ‘same old, same old’ that will always drag us down to prevent us doing what we think is the best we are called to do. *** I believe God wants us to consider two things about this reality of life. First, we must ask ourselves and God, does He agree with our definition of a worthy project; and, if so, is He calling us to do this project now? Second, when we know His ‘big picture’ will for us, and when we are ready to do it, we must remember that life is more than just big projects. *** But, how do we know what little annoying things are a waste of time to God, and which are part of His overall plan for us? We should pray to be set free from the first, and for grace, love and strength to do the second. *** A book in the Bible that speaks to all this is the college level book of wisdom: Ecclesiastes. The two passages we heard this morning address these issues. *** The first passage poetically describes the futility of repeated cycles in nature that seem to go nowhere. *** But, the second passage declares that God has appointed a time for everything; and, we can have delight in this if we receive everything from Him in recognition of His awesome strength and our need to be guided by Him, and to seek Him so He enables and empowers us to find joy in the simple gifts of life. *** Let’s look closer while praying for wisdom in our lives.

I. The futility of life focused ONLY on creation. (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)

A. The son of David says life ‘under the sun’ constantly goes through the same cycles – over and over. (Verses 1-7)

1. The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem: ‘Vanity of vanities’ has said the preacher, ‘vanity of vanities, all is vanity’. (Verses 1-2)

Preacher: Preacher can mean public speaker and even collector of sentences.

Vanity: Vanity is literally the vapor of breath and can mean: empty, futile, or subject to frustration.

2. What profit to a man in all his toil which he will toil under the sun; generation going and generation coming, and the earth is forever standing; and the sun has risen and has gone down the sun, and to its place hastening, rising there. (Verses 3-5)

Profit: Solomon is questioning the advantage or excellence a man might gain from all his toil.

Under sun: ‘Under the sun’ means life without any thought of God in heaven and His instructions for life.

Over and over: People labor generation after generation and gain nothing for their toil ‘under the sun’, which keeps on rising and going down.

Earth: The earth keeps standing forever, and those with only an earthbound perspective, see no advantage or benefit from their daily toil.

3. Going to south and turning about to the north, turning about and turning about, going the wind on its circuits returning, the wind; all the rivers are going to the sea and the sea (is) never full, to the place where the rivers are going, there they are returning again. (Verses 6-7)

Unending cycles: Solomon speaks of the wind constantly turning about from south to north. Three times he refers to the action of the wind turning about. He concludes by using the noun from this verb, translated ‘circuit’, and the wind keeps returning. Next, he says the rivers are always going to the sea and it is never full. To the place the rivers are going, they are returning again. This is a poetic description of the water cycle. For both wind and rivers Solomon uses ‘going’ three times and ‘returning’ twice. With much word repetition, Solomon describes never-ending cycles.

B. All is exhausting, nothing is new, and those coming after will not remember this. (Verses 8-11)

1. All things are wearisome (and) man is not able to speak it. (Verses 8a-b)

Drudgery: Solomon says all has become drudgery to the point people can’t speak of their weariness.

2. The eye will not be satisfied in seeing and the ear will not be filled from hearing. (Verses 8c-d)

Eye and ear: Solomon predicts eyes will not have satisfaction in what they see and ears will not become full from what they hear. This is not what God created. All God created was good. He intended eyes to find satisfaction in viewing His very good creation; and, as people listened to each other while talking about His creation their hearts would be filled by all they heard about Him.

3. Is there what has been that will be, or is there what has been done which will be done, and nothing at all is new ‘under the sun’; is there being a thing of which it is said, ‘See this is new?’ It has already been in the eternity which was before us. (Verses 9-10)

Nothing new: Solomon asks rhetorical questions about things being and doing. Will they be different in the future?

He answers nothing is new ‘under the sun’ when people do not consider God. He says that whatever is being done now is just an extension of what has been from eternity. Let us escape the exhaustion of life lived without acknowledging God The Creator by only seeing what He created. (Romans 1:18-32)

4. There is no remembrance of the first things and also of the things coming after which will happen; there will not be for them remembrance among what will come after. (Verse 11)

NOT remembered: Solomon hints people don’t remember anything because nothing that happens ‘under the sun’, without any awareness of God and what He desires and does, is ever memorable. This can be summed up in the words of a disappointed child, ‘Ain’t nothin’ never any good happens here!’

Bottom line: After hearing this, we might all be saying: There has to be something better. There is.

II. God has appointed a time for everything; He has made it beautiful in His time so people should fear Him because He will judge. (*Ecclesiastes 3:1-17*)

A. There is a time for every delight, even in the drudgery of toil without profit. (*Verses 1-10*)

1. For everything (there is a time) season and a time to every pleasure under the heavens. (*Verse 1*)

Delight: The word translated 'purpose' in the King James Bible usually means pleasure or delight. In fact, it is translated this way thirty three (of thirty nine) times by the King James Bible.

Under heaven: Solomon now changes his perspective. He considers the dual heavens: Both the earth's atmosphere and the highest heaven where God's throne is. With God, everything is a delight!

2. A time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that having been planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn (lament), and a time to dance; a time to cast out stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace (clasp), and a time to be distant (to embrace); a time to seek, and a time to destroy; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear away, and a time to sew together; a time to be silent, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (*Verses 2-8*)

Contrasts: There are fourteen contrasting pairs here. Looking from 'under the sun' sometimes the first item seems good and sometimes bad. But, God is saying, that all twenty eight things listed are not only appropriate in the right circumstance; but, are a pleasure to Him, and by extension a delight to us.

3. What profit (is to he) working in which he toils? I have seen the travail which God has given to the 'sons of adam' to be humbled in it. (*Verses 9-10*)

Profit from toil: The question from the first chapter about the advantage from toil is repeated. This time there is an ambiguous answer. If the travail produces humility in people, they will be brought closer to God (Psalm 34:17-19; 51:14-19). May we find delight in the drudgery of toil without profit because it can bring us closer to God.

B. God has made everything beautiful so people can rejoice in food, drink and toil as a gift of God; therefore have faith in the awesome one who will judge. (*Verses 11-17*)

1. He has made everything beautiful in its time, also He has given eternity into their heart so that no 'adam' will find out the work which God has done from the beginning until the end. (*Verse 11*)

Beautiful: God is the One who makes things beautiful to those who acknowledge Him.

Eternity: And, God has given a sense to each human heart of eternity, Himself and His works; but, no one can find this out by his own resources.

2. I have known there (is) nothing better for them than to rejoice and do good in their lives; and, also every 'adam' will eat and drink and see good in all his toil: it is God's gift. (*Verses 12-13*)

Rejoice and do good: What is wisdom for people created in God's image? To rejoice in Him and do what is good according to His Word. We must rise above what we see and always look to God. **Wisdom is found in God – not creation.**

Pleasures are gift of God: The simple pleasures of eating, drinking and seeing God's hand in all of life are gracious gifts from God. May we be given wisdom to find beauty in these, God's simple gifts. **Wisdom is found in God – not creation.**

3. I have known that whatever God does, it will endure forever: nothing to add to it and from it, nothing to diminish; God has made it so men will fear from before Him; that which has already been and that which (is) to be has already been; and God will seek what is being put behind. (*Verses 14-15*)

God's works eternal: Whatever God makes is meant to be eternal, and God will always seek so that what He directs in the future will be consistent with what He directed in the past.

Faith in fearful One: Fear before God is faith in His awesomeness: Who He IS, all He does. Two thousand years after Jesus completed His mission to earth which was one thousand years after Solomon wrote this, we know by grace through faith we are saved in The Messiah to do good works prepared for us (Ephesians 2:8-10); and, all the treasures of wisdom are hidden in Him (Colossians 2:1-3). **Wisdom is found in God – not creation.**

4. Still, I have seen in the place of justice there (is) wickedness and in the place of righteousness there (is) wickedness. (*Verse 16*)

Wickedness: Wherever God is not acknowledged ('under the sun') wickedness taints God's justice and righteousness. This is one dark cloud on all the wisdom given in this chapter up to now.

5. I have said in my heart that God will judge the righteous and the wicked, because there is a time for every matter (delight) and for every work (deed). (*Verse 17*)

God judge: This will happen when THE Savior King, Jesus Christ, comes again. All who are righteous by grace through faith in Him will experience eternal delight in His presence (Revelation 22:1-7); but, all who rejected Him and lived their lives only 'under the sun' will be thrown into the 'lake of fire', the second death (Revelation 20:11-15).

We must all rightly fear God because He will judge.

Know that God will judge all

Conclusion: Life lived without God is futile, with endless meaningless cycles that are exhausting, repetitive and not memorable. But, those who take delight that God has an appointed time for everything, even what seems to be toil without profit, can see the beauty God has made, and enjoy food, drink and toil as God's gift. And they have faith in the awesome One who will judge all people.

Wisdom is found in God – not creation