

For everything, a time

Ecclesiastes 3.1-13

The writer poetically pairs together 14 sets of contrasting actions (birth and death, planting and pulling up, and so on...), proclaiming that God has set the right time for everything. Their conclusion is that while we can never fully understand what God has done, we can enjoy the gifts of God for as long as we live.

Now read Ecclesiastes 3.1-13 see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

By indicating that there is a right time or season for everything, we are prompted to think about our lives now. What is it time to do now? By encompassing the full spectrum of joy and sadness, we are reminded to consider other people's experiences and challenges.

REFLECT

Find something in your house which can be built into a tower (blocks, marshmallows, coins... anything will do!). Look back over the past year and towards the year ahead. Build a tower. As you add each object, name something you would like God to help you build up, grow or develop. Tear it down again. As you remove each object, name something you would like God to help you tear down or let go of.



Why is it important to do the right thing at the right time?



Listen to this passage set to music by Lynsey Martin Kimmitt (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLBybveXCfE>). Think of what lies ahead for 2023 – what uncertainties, excitements or changes lie ahead? Reflect on the repeated line 'God will be with us all' and think about how that makes you feel. If you have a 2023 calendar or diary, select a few pages at random, and write or draw on them a reminder that God is with us in all times.



Follow a recipe (e.g. https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/scones_1285) to bake some scones. As you complete each stage, think about the importance of taking the right time over it. From weighing the ingredients, to rubbing in the butter and kneading the dough, to baking in the oven, scones only work if the right time is taken. Discuss ways we can ask God to help judge the right time for everything in our lives.



Set an alarm or reminder on a phone or alarm clock to go off at the same time each day this week. When the alarm goes off, stop, and consider whatever you are doing in that moment. What is this the right time for? Where is God in this moment?



Look again at the passage on page 2. There are 28 statements beginning "a time to..." Which ones might help someone in your community? Choose one of these helpful things and carry out the action this week. For example, perhaps you could weed someone's garden, share your skills in sewing, dancing or speaking, or think of someone who would appreciate a hug.

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

For everything there is a season, and a time for everything under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to weed 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 hug, and a time not to hug;
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 benefit have the workers from their efforts? I have seen the task that God has given to everyone to be busy with.

He has made everything suitable for its time; also, 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. It is God's gift that all should eat and drink and feel good about their work.



Ecclesiastes 3.1-13

Did you know?

- These words were written by someone known as 'The Teacher' or 'The Philosopher'. They reflect that, although life can be complicated, we can trust that God is in control.

Ecclesiastes 3.1-13 (NRSV)

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.