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Wired for Eternity

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 10

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

People around the world throughout history held the belief that we have the possibility of living for eternity. God has given us this innate sense of eternity because He is the one who sees from eternity past through eternity future and is sovereign over today. He is the one who holds the plans and directs the future, but through it all desires us to find joy in the simple activities and remember it all in light of eternity.

Discussion Points:

Don't lose heart as God composes your life-story.

- What are you getting out of life for all of your hard work and toil?
- Where do God's plans fit into your life?
- How does knowing God's plan for you, even through suffering and hardship, will continue into eternity give you hope and encouragement?

Don't lose touch with that sense of eternity.

- What does eternity mean and how should that affect your daily life?
- Why is humanity so inquisitive about eternity and immortality?
- In what ways is it comforting to know that God is sovereign and that whatever He does endures forever?

Don't lose out on the joy of simple things.

- Why does it surprise most believers that the following verse is included in the Bible: *I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God's gift to man* (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)?
- How can you and why should you consider doing things, even the mundane, with enjoyment a gift from God?
- How does God's sovereignty impact the way you make decisions and plans and how you enjoy even the small things in life?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Gospel Connection:

God has given us an innate sense of eternity which drives humanity in search of meaning and purpose. God has also given us the means of living with Him in heaven for all eternity through belief in Jesus Christ and his saving sacrifice.

Practical Implications:

Think: Do I enjoy the simple God-given activities in my life?

Pray: Praise God for His sovereign plans and the gift of salvation which allows us life eternal in heaven with Him.

Do: Live life enjoying the simple things that God has gifted you to do.



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One author made the statement that no matter how far you go back in time, every civilization in human history was shaped by the sense that we will live forever somewhere. The more we excavate, the more evidence is unearthed that people throughout human history believed in life beyond earth.ⁱ

The Australian aborigines pictured heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed they departed to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that in their afterlife their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. The oldest secular story to exist, was written in Babylon some 2,500 years ago before the birth of Christ and it referred to their heroes, upon death, going to a place of rest beneath a tree of life (that sounds somewhat familiar). The pyramids of Egypt entombed wealthy citizens and royalty with maps placed beside their embalmed bodies so they wouldn't get lost in the afterlife. Seneca, the Roman philosopher said, "The day thou fearest – referring to the day of your death – is the birthday of [your] eternity." Although the depictions of the afterlife widely vary, the global unifying testimony of the vast majority of the human race throughout history involves the concept life after death.ⁱⁱ

Somebody might say to me, "Stephen, not everybody believes it."

I would say, "No, not everybody is willing to admit it." And they come up with ways to debunk it.

Atheist Stephen Hawking was asked what his view was of Christianity and life after death, which he doesn't believe in. He said that the brain is a computer which will stop working when its components fail, and there is no afterlife for broken down computers. He went on to say, "Christianity is a fairytale – it is an illusion embraced by people who are afraid of the dark."

A few days later, John Lennox, a professor of mathematics at Oxford University and a Christian apologist was asked what he thought about Hawking's comment that Christianity is an illusion embraced by people who are afraid of the dark. Lennox just smiled and replied, "Atheism is an illusion embraced by people who are afraid of the Light!"

The truth is the believer is the only one neither afraid of the darkness nor the light. We are not afraid of the darkness of death because we know beyond that dark curtain of death is the kingdom of everlasting light and life. Death is simply the hand that opens the doorway into Heaven.

Not everyone will admit to life after death, but the compelling truth is that the human intuitively anticipates something beyond. You see, God placed us in time, but wired us for eternity.ⁱⁱⁱ

So the question remains - what kind of perspective should we have while traveling through time on our way to eternity?

As Francis Schaeffer famously asked in the last century, how shall we then live?

The Bible gives us hundreds of encouragements, challenges, perspectives, and commands, but I want to answer that from what Solomon provides in his inspired journal. Turn back to *Ecclesiastes chapter 3* and let us limit ourselves to the four observations he makes beginning in *verse 9*.

I want to put Solomon's observations into four encouragements for the believer, as you travel through time on your way to eternity.

1. Don't lose heart as God composes your life-story.

What gain has the worker form his toil?
(Ecclesiastes 3:9).

The word *toil* refers to a person's burden, his workload in life. What are you really getting out of life for all your hard work? Now, notice Solomon's observation in *verse 10*:

I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. (You may be expecting Solomon to say something really negative next, but he says:) *He has made everything beautiful in its time* (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11a).

The reference to time here takes you back to his poem he just concluded – there's a time for birth and death, sorrow and joy, laughter and tears, reaping and sewing.

It might not fit our plans, but it is all fitting into His plans. The word *beautiful*, which we studied in our last session, can be translated 'fitting or suitable'. So the question is not, "What am I getting out of life?" but "What is God fitting into my life?" Or "what is God doing as He unveils His plans for my life?" This keeps you from losing heart as God composes the next chapter in your life-story.

This is how you keep from wasting the chapters on suffering. Because this is what God is doing, this is what God is planning, allowing, and using in your life.

Joseph told his brothers who had sold him into years of slavery with unbridled suffering and agony that *you meant it for evil but God meant it for good* (Genesis 50:20).

This is how you don't misuse those chapters of success by turning it all into self-praising, self-congratulating idolatry. That also happens to be something God is writing into the journal of your life.

I had several people contact me this past week after studying the fact that God has determined the length of our lives – our birth and death – and everything in between. So why pray? If the novel of your life is already written, why pray about anything? The Bible informs us that prayer makes a difference, like praying for rain or healing, but in that context, James writes, *the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much* (James 5:16).

We do not know how God weaves those prayers into His eternal plan or when or why because we are stuck down here in time. We know we had breakfast, but we are not sure we are going to get out of church in time for lunch. I am not sure either! What we do know is that we are encouraged to pray about everything – for the sick, for our daily needs, for the advancement of the gospel, for protection from the devil and for unity in the church. We are also told that God knows what we are going to pray before we pray it.

The work of our prayer and the unfolding of God's providence is a mystery. We don't entirely know how our prayer matters, we are just told that prayer matters!

God is fitting everything into what He calls beautiful, suitable and fitting, from His eternal perspective. Even from our perspective it doesn't seem beautiful and it doesn't seem to fit.

2. Don't lose touch with that sense of eternity.

Notice *verse 11*, again:

Also, He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end (Ecclesiastes 3:11b).

The word for *eternity* here has been variously translated by some to mean 'the world; ignorance; darkness and eternity.' The translation that fits within this context is eternity, since the entire passage has been all about God's planning and orchestrating over time.^{iv} Furthermore, the same word appears in *verse 14* where we are told that whatever God does it *endures forever* – for all eternity. In other words, God has put forever in our hearts; He has placed the concept and idea and reality of eternal-forever in our hearts.

And with that, God made us inquisitive about eternity.^v

Even though Solomon writes here, unless it is provided in scripture, we can't figure out very much of what God has been doing from eternity past and what He will do in eternity future, but the fact remains, we are all wired for eternity. Why? Because you were made in the image of an eternal God, you were made to live eternally, and you reflect that immortality by having eternity in your heart and on your mind.

God has planted us in time but with an implanted sense of eternity.^{vi}

C.S. Lewis wrote it this way:

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.^{vii}

Solomon makes a third observation on how to live through time as we head toward eternity.

3. Don't lose out on the joy of simple activity.

Solomon writes in *verse 12*:

I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good

as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God's gift to man (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

I am convinced that if these verses were not in the Bible, the average Christian wouldn't think they should be. Enjoy your meal? Take pleasure in your job? Really? There is enjoyment in doing good things, but enjoy building that house, fixing that computer, writing that contract, cooking that meal, teaching that class, cutting that lawn? Yes, take pleasure in them. Consider them gifts from God to you.

And notice how Solomon puts it – enjoying the simple things of life isn't second best. Look again, he writes, ***I perceived that there is nothing better*** than to be joyful in these simple pleasures as gifts from your Creator God.^{viii}

Look, it is as if Solomon says you might be bound in time, but it is not a waste of time. In fact, guess what? Those simple pleasures of joy are actually gifts from God which He created you to enjoy. Which means, if you are allowed to talk like this in church, "God enjoys your enjoyment!"^{ix}

As long as it is not violating His word, God enjoys the fact that you enjoy the simplest things in life.

I was reading in one of my commentaries on this very text where the author applied this verse practically and wrote this simply means take a vacation, spend time outdoors, pursue an enjoyable hobby, plant some flowers, or watch a football game.^x

I was working on my sermon yesterday when I came across this, and I had been wondering who was winning the game between LSU and Alabama. This was a big game; the President and his wife were in the stands. This was being called the game of the century. I had a sermon to do, but then I read this in my commentary - watch a football game. It was obviously the voice of God. So I went upstairs and watched some football. My sermon is going to be

shorter, but you'll enjoy that, amen? Not so loud.

Paul picks up this same idea when he writes to the New Testament Christian that *whether you're eating or drinking or whatever you're doing, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Paul and Solomon agree that enjoying a meal can be done with thanksgiving, glorifying God who gave you the ability to enjoy it. So today, not only can you enjoy your Sunday dinner, but get this, God will enjoy the fact that you enjoy it because He created you with the capacity to enjoy it. So enjoy it as one of the gifts God has given you.

Just a simple meal!

Teach your children and your grandchildren that even the simplest things are gifts from God to be enjoyed.



Especially round things that get sold by the dozen. I took my grandson Micah to Krispy Kreme a few weeks ago; I had to take a picture of this special moment in his education. He is four years old and it was time to teach him that some letters in the alphabet are more important than others, like the letter K. I asked him to point out the K, and he did it. He is such a gifted student. This is training up a *grandchild* in the way he should go.

Look, would it be a surprise to get to Heaven one day and the Lord look at some of us and say, “You know, I wanted you to enjoy your life so much more. I gave you so many little gifts to enjoy but you were usually looking for something else. You missed the gifts along the way.”

If God is writing into the chapter of your life those little gifts, as you travel through time on your way to eternity, Solomon would say,

“Identify them, look for them, enjoy them as much as you can.” They are from the hand of your eternal, joyful God.

4. Don't lose sight of God's sovereignty.

Notice *verse 14*:

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever, nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before Him (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

In other words, having the proper vision of God's sovereignty leads us to fear Him, which is the Hebrew expression tantamount to trusting Him, standing in awe of Him, and worshipping Him. Why? Because His plans for you are perfect. The journal of your life is not a mistake.

Notice, again, ***whatever God does endures forever – nothing can be added or taken away from it.*** In other words, there are no additions to His plans and no subtractions.^{xi} Which is another way of saying God will never need to use an eraser in your life.

He has never said, “I need to add that in. I didn't see that coming. I need to take that out.” No, God never has to rewrite anything.

Even when it doesn't look like God's ruling from Heaven, God is ruling. Even when the world is filled with chaos – and maybe your world too right now – you trust in the promise that God is ordering the chaos to fulfill His sovereign plans. Even when things seem to be falling apart, God is orchestrating the falling apart of those things to fall into the plan of His eternal purposes.

Solomon essentially writes that what God does is not only forever, it is flawless.^{xii} And that is because God alone has the eternal view. He can see everything fitting together from eternity past to eternity future.

One author wrote that He alone has an eternal view and all we have is a point of view.^{xiii} And our point of view isn't any bigger than a little point.

This truth gave reassurance and hope to Job, the great sufferer, who, at the end of his suffering wrote, *I know that You (God) can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be stopped* (Job 42:2).

Solomon will write in his *Proverbs*, *The Lord has made everything for its own purpose* (16:4a).

Listen, we cannot know all that God's hand is doing in the mysterious ebb and flow of our circumstances and our lives.^{xiv} In fact, maybe you struggle with the fact that God is this sovereign over your life, and trust me, we are still responsible to submit our lives to Him and get out of bed in the morning and obey Him. We submit to Him which is tantamount to what Solomon writes here – we fear Him – that is, we worship Him we choose to walk with Him and we trust Him. And we recognize that life happens to us while we are busy making other plans.^{xv}

Let me expand that a little - life which God has planned for us happens to us while we are busy making other plans. And we trust Him for He sees from eternity past to eternity future. You see, with God as sovereign over everything there are no accidents, there are only appointments.

Oh, if only we could live each day with this in mind and to not lose sight of God's gracious, flawless, eternal sovereignty.

Sometimes we see it. Sometimes we get it. Sometimes we say, "Oh I see why God did that here or said 'no' there or made me wait here. I see why that problem I was having turned into an opportunity."

Here's an example of what it would look like. One of the venerable saints in our church was rear-ended a few months ago in traffic. It wasn't his fault, it just peeled up several panels of his new car. He got out and walked back to the driver of the car behind him, a college-aged girl, who was standing there upset and crying. He put his arm around her shoulder and said, "It's okay. God wanted me to meet you today, that's why this happened. God wanted me to meet you today."

When we don't lose sight of God's sovereignty, we make our plans with diligence, we're told to in God's word; but we understand that we're the ones writing in pencil; the life we plan may not be the life God has planned for us to live that day . . . life happens while we're busy making other plans . . . and we trust His.

Solomon ends this paragraph with *verse 15*:

That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been
(Ecclesiastes 3:15a).

In other words, from God's perspective, the past and the future are in His purview; He doesn't forget anything in the past and He isn't taken by surprise by anything in the future; notice

. . . and God seeks what has been driven away (Ecclesiastes 3:15b).

What Solomon means here is that God will call the past into account – which is another way of saying that in the end of time and at the beginning of eternity, God will redeem everything that was driven away; in other words, God will make everything right.^{xvi}

So without God, what are you left with?

One man writes of the despairing prospects of forging through life and then facing an eternal future without the assurance of a sovereign, gracious, joyful, Creator God.

His name was Clarence Darrow, and he was the attorney who argued for evolution in the famous Scopes Trial in 1925 that tragically changed the educational course of generations in our country – this was his hope for life and the future – he wrote, that life is like a ship, tossed by every wave and by every wind; a ship headed to no port and no harbor, with no rudder, no compass, no pilot, simply floating for a time, then lost forever in the waves.^{xvii}

Solomon would beg to differ as he encourages the believer as you travel through life on your way to eternity:

Don't lose sight of God's sovereignty –

And you won't lose out on the joy of simple, God-gifted activity;
And because you recognize that God-created sense of eternity –
You won't lose heart as God writes your life-story.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/10/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Randy Alcorn, Heaven (Tyndale House, 2004), p. xix

ii Ibid

iii William D. Barrick, Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament (Christian Focus, 2015), p. 66

iv Michael A. Eaton, Ecclesiastes (IVP Academic, 2009), p. 94

v Douglas Sean O'Donnell, Ecclesiastes (P&R Publishing, 2014), p. 74

vi Benjamin Shaw, Ecclesiastes: Life in a Fallen World (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), p. 42

vii Quoted in Philip Ryken, Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters (Crossway, 2010), p. 93

viii Adapted from Ryken, p. 94

ix David Jeremiah, Searching for Heaven on Earth (Integrity, 2004), p. 67

x Adapted from Jeremiah, p. 67

xi Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, General Editors: The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 6 (Zondervan, 2008), p. 292

xii Jeremiah, p. 70

xiii Ryken, p. 92

xiv David A. Hubbard, The Preacher's Commentary: Volume 16 (Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 108

xv Adapted from Thomas La Mance, quoted in Don Givens, The Storms of Life (Xulon Press, 2008), p. 59

xvi Adapted from O'Donnell, p. 78; Adapted from Ryken, p. 97

xvii Quoted in John D. Currid, Ecclesiastes: A Quest for Meaning? (EP Books, 2016), p. 37