



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Days of Our Lives

### THE GOOD LIFE

#### Ecclesiastes 3:1–14

Tim Badal | October 2, 2022



We're in week three of a 12-week series we've titled "The Good Life." We're looking at a very heavy, sometimes pessimistic, book about regrets and remorse, in which aged King Solomon is looking back at his life, asking the question: where is the good life to be found?

Last week we saw him go through a whole laundry list of places where he had thought the good life could be found. Was it in parties? No. Was it in punch lines? No. Was it in possessions, pleasure or prestige? The answer again was no. No matter how much the world advertises these things will bring contentment and fulfillment, nothing in this world can bring the satisfaction we're looking for.

This morning we're going to pivot to a great passage of Scripture. After bursting our bubble last week—or if you prefer, popping the balloon of our thinking—Solomon now encourages us to look at the totality of human existence. He does this in a poetic way, a way that is so connected to our lives that these words are captured in a song. For those of us who are older, when we read these words, we start thinking, "Turn, turn, turn. There is a season, turn, turn, turn." Those of you under the age of 40 probably have no idea what I'm talking about.

What we have in this text is Solomon's version of the microcosm of human existence. Let's look at our verses today and glean four characteristics about life from them. Then I also want to give you three takeaways as we move into our time of communion.

<sup>1</sup> For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant,  
and a time to pluck up what is planted;

<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;

<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

<sup>5</sup> a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

<sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

<sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

<sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup> What gain has the worker from his toil?

As Solomon looks back on his life and all the places he looked for fulfillment, he is asking, "Where is satisfaction to be found?" I'm going to give this part of his answer the title, "Days of Our Lives." If a TV program lasts for five years, it's said to be a hit. If it makes it for eight seasons, it's a classic. For some shows that are few and far between, they might get 10, 12 or maybe even 15 seasons.

The Simpsons ran over 30 seasons. But that pales in comparison to the daytime soap opera, “Days of Our Lives.” For 57 seasons, “Days of Our Lives” has been on daytime television. The only time I’ve ever seen it was when I was sick and in a doctor’s waiting room where someone else turned it on. To watch all 57 seasons of the one-hour program would take 14,000 hours. Rather than “days” of your life, it would take two and a half years of your life to watch all of it.

For everyone who says, “I don’t watch soap operas,” I did a little research and learned that “Days of Our Lives” has ten times the daytime audience than any of its competition during those time slots. It tells the story of two families that live in the fictitious town of Salem, Illinois. Illinois! I had no idea that “Days of Our Lives” took place in Illinois. One of the things I found in a Smithsonian article that was recently published to celebrate the 57 seasons is that the show looks at all the elements of life. While following the two families, the show is designed to have times of laughter, times of languish, times of love—and of course, because it’s a soap opera, times of lust. In other words, it contains the totality of the human existence.

You’re probably asking, “Why all of this about a soap opera? Shouldn’t Tim be preaching out of the Bible?” The answer is found in the opening line of the show: “Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.” Ecclesiastes 3 is a verbal depiction of the days of our lives. All life has to offer is contained in these eight opening verses. All the joys, sorrows, victories, defeats, gains, losses, pleasures, pains are neatly constrained and concisely packaged in these opening verses. We could go through every one of these and talk about what each phrase means, but I don’t think that’s why he wrote what he did. Rather, he’s giving us one overall truth. We all live life. The question is, will we live the good life? Remember that the theme of Ecclesiastes is simple: life apart from God is meaningless.

Therefore, the good life is what your teaching team hopes will result in a lightbulb moment. As you look at Solomon’s life, you might realize, “I don’t want to live like he did.” We hope you’ll have an “aha” moment and say, “I’m going to pursue the good life that is found in communion with Jesus Christ.”

When we give ourselves to Christ and we live side by side in partnership with Him, then all those temporal things that in and of themselves cannot bring meaning to life will all of a sudden have meaning, because we’re able to put them in the proper perspective, with the proper priority. As Solomon considers all the things he brings up in these opening chapters, he wants us to understand four characteristics about life.

## **Our lives are cyclical.**

Solomon writes down 14 specific events which are book-ended with you’re born and you die. You plant, you harvest. You kill, you heal. You break down, you build up. You weep, you laugh. You mourn, you dance. And so on. In short order, Solomon is giving us a commentary on life. As one author put it, “It is the catalog of life.” Life is contained in these short verses. As you see the back-and-forth of this list, it looks like a swinging pendulum.

When I was growing up, my mom’s parents, my grandparents, loved clocks. Their favorite was a seven-and-a-half-foot grandfather clock that stood in their living room. It was a massive piece of furniture. I remember sitting in front of it and watching the pendulum swing back and forth. The rhythm was constant, from one side to the other, back and forth. Solomon is telling us that life is like that pendulum. It swings back and forth between the two extremes. At some points in life you’re on one side, at some you’re on the other side.

It’s easy to see life as one big pendulum. We can see the swing in hair styles. I don’t know if you’re aware of this, but the mullet is back. A few years back, my younger children would say to me, “What kind of haircut is that? It’s all good on the front, then there’s all kinds of craziness going on the back.” Now what do I see on a lot of young men? The mullet is back.

Think about when we used to make fun of our parents for wearing bell-bottoms. They’re back. Have you ever ripped out shag carpeting? Now we call it mid-century modern. You see, in this world there are cycles. We see it in politics. We see it in art. We see it even in the church. That which we think is new and novel, Solomon says, “Been there, done that.”

Life is on a perpetual loop: the longer you live, the more you realize that life is cyclical. It’s like a swinging pendulum. That’s why old people are sometimes in a bad mood. They’ve been there, they’ve done that, they know it’s just more of the same.

Alistair Begg preached a message out of the book of Ecclesiastes, saying this about the cyclical nature of life:

The poem reveals the great absurdity of life because each activity cancels the other out. There are 14 pluses and 14 minuses, and that adds up to zero! Every birth ends in death, every planted crop is pulled up, every building is eventually condemned, every celebration gives way to a funeral, and every peace gives way to another war. Nothing is gained.

Within the span of life there is great futility. It seems as if we're just in for the ride, swinging from one side of the clock to the other.

## **Our lives are full of changes.**

Notice something else, especially in these opening verses: life is also full of changes. Nothing is stagnant. We're always in motion, from one thing to another. Good times come to an end and bad times ensue. Storms pass, then the sun begins to shine. Summer days wane, as we're seeing now, and winter sets in. Early in life you're invited to birthday parties and showers. Later in life, you are invited to hospital visits and funerals.

More specifically, in those pendulum swings of life, there are times of change. Whether you're in the good part of the swing or the bad part of the swing, nothing stays the same. One moment you're healthy, the next moment you're sick. One moment you have that special someone with you, the next moment they're gone. One day you're married, the next day you're divorced. One day everything is going the way you want it to financially, the next day you have no money left. One day you've got a job, the next day you're unemployed. Life has a way of changing very, very quickly. In the blink of an eye, that which was good has now moved to the bad.

Now, let's pause for a moment. This swing from the good of life to the bad in life should produce certain results.

### **This should encourage the hurting.**

Maybe right now you're in a bad chapter of your life. Perhaps nothing is going right for you. Maybe everything in your life is an absolute mess. Maybe all the news you're getting right now is bad news. Take heart; good times are coming. Life is cyclical. You can't sit in the bad part of the pendulum swing forever. Inevitably the pendulum will swing back to good times. We see that in the life of a nation. We even see that in the life of a civilization. We see it in our own personal lives. If you wait long enough, the bad times will leave and the good times will come.

### **It should exhort the haughty.**

What about those for whom life is good? You're winning championships. You're getting promotions. You have all the money you need. Your family life is good. Married life is good. Everything is good. But when we're on top of the mountain, we tend to think we've done something to get there. We can even look down on people whose lives aren't as good, thinking, "If they were just as smart or savvy as I've been, then their life would be better." The haughty part of each of us need to realize that bad times are on the horizon. Just give it enough time and you'll see economic downturns. You'll see trouble in your marriage. You'll see trouble with the children.

I recently had a young man come to me who was a new dad. His kids are five, three and a newborn. He said, "I don't know why people make such a big deal about parenting. It's a cinch." Wait 'til they hit 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. Wait 'til you hand them the keys to your car. They can make bigger messes out of diapers than they ever made in diapers.

We can have this haughty nature, thinking we've got it all figured out. Then the circumstances of life come knocking on our door. Once you think you have it all figured out and think it's always going to be this way, just give it time. Inevitably the good times do end. Consider this example from history. The "Roaring 20s" covered about six years of great prosperity in the United States., but it was followed by 13 years of the worst depression our nation has ever seen. Good times always come to an end; usually bad times last longer than the good times. So this reality should exhort the haughty, even while it encourages the hurting.

## **Our lives allow for choices.**

We've seen this life is cyclical and it's full of changes. But notice that with each of these signposts, life allows choices. There's a time to be born and a time to die, but within those limits, there are a lot of choices to be made. For the farmer, there are lots of

decisions to be made between the time when he plants and harvesttime. So it is with life. You and I have a lot of choices to make between the bookends of life.

There's very little in this life that we don't have some say in. We don't have a say in when we're born and when we die., but we do have a say in many of the decisions and choices we make between those two events. Whether we're in the good side of the pendulum swing or the bad, we can choose. Will we find joy or sorrow? Will we find peace or turmoil? Will we find ourselves in isolation or in community with others? Will we look at each moment of our lives with pessimism or positivity? We're somewhere on the spectrum of the cyclical nature of life, so will we be better or bitter about where we are? You're the only one who can decide.

More than how we respond to situations, we also need to realize that sometimes our responses aren't due to the circumstances around us, it's because of the choices we ourselves have made. Solomon wrote what he did, not because he found himself in bad circumstances; he was where he was because of the choices he had made. His regrets were the result of his own decisions. This can be true for us as well. We may well be living with the consequences of decisions we've made. As a result, the pendulum in our lives may linger longer than we might like. Perhaps instead of building, we've been destroying. Instead of loving, we're hating. Instead of being peaceful, we're at war. We aren't experiencing the good life, because our choices have resulted in a negative harvest.

This however isn't true for everyone in every case. Circumstances come that have nothing to do with our decisions. In my life, some of the bad seasons have come as a direct result of foolish or selfish decisions I've made. So life is cyclical and full of changes. Our lives allow for choices.

## **Our lives are to be celebrated and commemorated.**

ow, isn't just throwing life away. He isn't just saying bide your time, then die. I think he's really being positive about things. He's saying life has a lot to offer. We can glean a lot from this life. In verse nine he says, *"What gain has the worker from his toil?"* In other words, what can we gain from life? Verse 10 says, *"I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with."* Then look at what he says in verse 11. *"He has made everything beautiful in its time."*

God has put His stamp of approval on us living life. This is what God has created and it's beautiful. Beauty can be found in life. There's a sacredness to life. That's why each moment should be celebrated and commemorated. Let me give you a few reasons why this is true.

### **Each moment in life is not guaranteed.**

You're not guaranteed another birthday. You're not guaranteed another anniversary. You're not guaranteed another day at work, nor a promotion. You're not guaranteed the good, nor are you guaranteed the bad. That's because death meets us all.

I learned this truth at 14 years of age. My older brother at age 16 had all his life ahead of him. He was looking forward to graduating high school, going off to college, meeting the love of his life, having some children. He expected to have a job and all the other things life can offer. But when he was 16, he died in a tragic car accident. He wasn't guaranteed tomorrow.

So in every moment we have, every opportunity we have, we should celebrate and commemorate life. We should be grateful that God has given us life and breath because we're not guaranteed another day.

### **Each moment in life is a gift from God.**

We also need to realize that each and every moment, whether good, bad or ugly, is a gift from God. Let me say that again. Every moment of your life, good, bad and ugly, is a gift from God. Remember what Job 2:10 says? "Can we not receive the good things from God, and not the bad?" Job recognized that God is the giver of good and difficult things. We must realize that God has reasons for giving us these things. We need to celebrate them and consider how God wants us to take them.

### **Life continues on.**

We take time to celebrate and commemorate because we also realize life continues on. Amanda and I are about to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this December. If we didn't have an anniversary for me to forget, I wouldn't remember how long we've

been married. If you were to ask me how long I'd been married, without anniversaries I would probably say, "A really, really long time." "How long?" "Long. Longer for her than for me." But by having these moments when we stop and say, "We've been married 25 years," it gives us an opportunity to pause and realize this milestone is something special.

Each birthday gives us an opportunity to stop and embrace what has been given to us in that person. When graduation rolls around, it's our opportunity, not just to celebrate that Junior or Sally has fulfilled what the school has asked of them, but it also raises the question of whether or not we have done what we needed to help our children graduate from home life into adult life. Let me explain.

In the corporate world, we just finished the third quarter. With me running my own business, I pay attention to this. In church we follow a different calendar, but in the 5 B's world I live in every day, the quarter is an opportunity for me to look back. Please understand why I'm telling you this—I don't mean to be boastful in any way. I simply want to walk through what I did a couple days ago as the quarter came to an end.

In the third quarter, 5 B's served tens of thousands of meals—just in the third quarter alone. We cooked more than 100,000 pieces of meat. We made tons upon tons of side dishes. We washed 7.35 million dishes. Okay, I'm kidding, but it feels that way. Hundreds of hours, if not thousands, were worked by my staff. Lots of activity. Vans coming and going. Deliveries. People eating and coming back for seconds—again and again and again. Do you notice the cycle? Back and forth, back and forth.

Now, at the end of this quarter that just finished a couple days ago, what if I told you, "The main purpose of 5 B's is to make money, but we made nothing? No-thing." [I didn't, by the way. Some of you are looking at me like, "Really?"] Here's the thing. Do you know what you would say if that was true? "What a foolish venture. You mean you did all that work and have nothing to show for it? What a waste of time."

Now you're probably thinking, "Where are you going with this?" Notice what our text says. *"What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with."* That's life. Life is our business that God has given to keep us busy.

Now, the milestones and moments of life—the quarterly breaks of life—should stop us and cause us to ask, "In all of the busyness of life, did I accomplish anything? Did I profit anything?" Some of us are so busy going through the motions of life. Back and forth, back and forth. Carpool the kids, take them here, take them there, go to work, come home from work, go on vacation, come home from vacation, mow the grass, plow the driveway—repeated cycles season after season. And at the end of all of it, we're right back to where we were before.

Some of us are living that life. We are busy doing life, but we're not experiencing the life God intended us to live. Here's why. Your purpose, your meaning in life, is to live life in partnership and concert with God and His Word. You and I are so busy doing all the other things, that we have nothing to show for it. You ran your kids around to every activity. Let me tell you something. With all those drama and concert rehearsals your kid did, she will probably never be in the Boston Pops Orchestra. With all the practices you sent your kids to, there's a good probability they'll never make the pro's, right? But here's the 100% reality: they will all stand before God on the day of judgment. If all you did was carpool your kids around, if all you did was sit in the bleachers and watch them play kids' games, if all you did was listen to them toot their horn without anything to show for it, you will die, they will die, and all will be forgotten, Solomon says. What does a man have? If he does not give his life to the God Who has gifted him with life, he has nothing. Some of us right now are busying ourselves, but we are forgetting to keep God in the equation.

Notice one more thing, then I'll pivot to my last point: God is nowhere to be found in the first eight verses. Notice the turn that happens. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 describes life without God is so the question is, what does a person gain in his life apart from God? The answer is nothing. Nothing. It's just this perpetual back and forth. Verse ten says, *"I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with."*

Then he goes on, *"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart."* Verse 12, *"I perceived 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."*

There's the good life. The good life is to live life with eternity in mind. The good life, as Dave Gibson says in his book, is to "live life backwards," with eternity a part of every decision we make. It isn't that God doesn't want us to go through the cycles of life; He wants us to invite Him into them.

Just this last week the church served as the site for an adoption party. Eric and Rebecca Smith, dear people within our church, recently got the final adoption of little Jordan. What an awesome story. They threw the greatest. People came to me and said, "Pastor, why don't we see this stuff on Sunday? This is awesome."

Here's the thing. As little Jordan grows up and sees pictures of that party, I hope he doesn't say that party was all about him. Instead it was about the significance of someone loving him, choosing him and purposing a better life for him than he could have had on his own. That party was a celebration of the love of a mom and dad, pouring out all they have on a kid. God bless them for it.

Life is a party that God has given, but here's what we begin to think: "I must be something special. I deserve this." Life is God's gift to us, the good and yes, the bad. This should result in us not saying, "What a great person I am," but, "What a great God I have."

When we have good times, we should ask, "God, why do I deserve that? Maybe it's not about me, but it's about You and the testimony You want me to have in this world." Or, "Why did You give me another birthday? Why did You give me another anniversary? God, You've gifted me with this, You must have a plan. You must have a purpose."

Then on the back side of that pendulum swing, we ask "God, why cancer? God, why did You take my spouse? God, why did You give me this financial hardship?" We don't ask this as complainers, but we ask as students. We are basically asking God to put eternity into our hearts. "Why, God—You Who are timeless, You Who are eternal—would You allow this into my life? Teach me, so I can bring eternity to bear on this."

In order to do this, we need to realize a few things.

### **In a world of chaos there is One Who is constant.**

Life is chaotic apart from God. If you do not have an all-sovereign, all-powerful God, then life is a chaotic mess. We who believe in God in this world of chaos know that God is the one constant. As life ebbs and flows, as the pendulum swings back and forth, recognize that God is there.

Probably the most precious thing is what we sang today: "I am not alone. You go before me. You will never leave me. You're with me." When you're on the mountaintop, God is there—so acknowledge Him. When you're in the valley of the shadow of death, God is with you. He will never leave or forsake you. He is the constant one. We are faithless; He is faithful. We are temporary; He is eternal. We are changing; He is changeless. He is the constant. He is the Sun around which we orbit. That means life must be lived holding fast to the one constant: God, our Heavenly Father.

### **Allow the circumstances of life to push you to contemplate eternity.**

Consider God and contemplate eternity. Why did this good thing happen? What do You want me to learn about my life, God? What do You want me to learn about my Savior? What do You want me to learn about others? Whatever this victory is, God, it's not about me; it's about what You want to teach me."

What about in the bad things of life? "God, what do You want to teach me about myself? What do You want to teach me about my Savior?" This is messy, by the way. This isn't easy.

I'm watching this first-hand with my father, who just a year ago buried the love of his life. He's living life apart from her and is wrestling with that. I watch him asking the questions, "Why, God? What do You want to teach me about myself? What do You want to teach me about You, my Savior?" Those difficult times are not easy.

This is what the book of Job is all about. We recognize what Job says to his wife: "Should we receive the good and not the bad?" Although God gives and takes away, we will say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). That's allowing your circumstances to push you to consider God.

## Choosing the good life demands communion with God.

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."* God has given us life so that we can be filled with joy as long as we live, verse 12 says. We can eat and drink and take pleasure in all our toil. This is God's gift to us. Never think that God's gift was given to you and me to be lived apart from Him. God has given us purpose. He's given us meaning. Since the Garden of Eden, we haven't had it. Adam and Eve rebelled. They sought the good life on their own, then meaninglessness followed.

Galatians 4:4–5 says that when the time was right, God sent His Son to redeem us. God sent His Son to give us purpose. God sent His Son to give us meaning. God sent His Son to give us satisfaction. God sent His Son to give us the good life. The question today is not whether you're living life, but whether you're living the good life, which demands communion with God. So as we close this service and prepare to take the communion elements, would you pause and evaluate your life? Are you simply going through the motions, busying yourself, going here and there? Or, as God has placed eternity before you, are you living life backwards, with eternity in mind?

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