

AN OCCASION FOR EVERYTHING

MAIN POINT.

We must invest in what lasts rather than in what's temporary.



CHRIST CONNECTION

People spend their lives trying to become rich, powerful, and famous, but none of it lasts. Only a life spent trusting in Jesus as Savior and following Him will matter in the end. Jesus lived, died, and rose again so we could find purpose in Him and be with God forever.



MEANINGFUL LIFE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Ecclesiastes 1—Ecclesiastes 3

LIFE IS SEASONAL

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

1 There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven: 2 a time to give birth 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 throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to avoid embracing; 6 a time to search and a time to count as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away; 7 a time to tear and a time to sew; 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.

GOD'S PURPOSES ARE ETERNAL

ECCLESIASTES 3:9-15

9 What does the worker gain from his struggles? 10 I have seen the task that God has given the children of Adam to keep them occupied. 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but no one can discover the work God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and enjoy the good life. 13 It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts. 14 I know that everything God does will last forever; there is no adding to it or taking from it. God works so that people will be in awe of him. 15 Whatever is, has already been, and whatever will be, already is. However, God seeks justice for the persecuted.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We must invest in what lasts rather than in what's temporary.

Leaders: Life is fleeting, but when you use your days to love Jesus, it's meaningful. It has lasting impact. May your life reflect the truth that your heart is bent toward eternity (Eccl. 3:11).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

LIFE IS SEASONAL

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

“The Teacher tells his readers how to live in the world as it really is instead of living in a world of false hope. In short, Ecclesiastes urges its readers to recognize that they are mortal. They must abandon all illusions of self-importance, face death and life squarely, and accept with fear and trembling their dependence on God. . . . Second, life should be enjoyed for what it is—a gift of God. The book counsels that while avoiding the temptation to consider pleasure to the point of being the goal of life, one should not miss the fleeting joys life affords. This too is an act of humility, for it is an admission that one's work is not as important as one might wish and that it has no eternal validity.”⁹

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

“Solomon's purpose is to expose the foolishness of a life lived without God in order to push us to enjoy God and His gifts. Satisfaction in God and His gifts is the meaningful life. The Spirit's ultimate point in inspiring Ecclesiastes is to teach us that everything is meaningless unless you have Jesus. The time poem in Ecclesiastes 3 is another example to prove Solomon's thesis that life ‘under heaven’ is futile and fleeting.”¹⁰

GOD'S PURPOSES ARE ETERNAL

ECCLESIASTES 3:9-15

“The wisest man in the ancient world became a greedy, lustful, power-hungry, idolatrous fool. He violated the kingly commands of Deuteronomy 17 and accumulated possessions as well as women for himself. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). The foreign women he married pulled his heart away from Yahweh to false gods (1 Kings 11:1–8). He did not deny himself anything he wanted. As a result he ruined his kingdom, and God told Solomon that following his death his kingdom would be divided during his son's reign (1 Kings 11:9–13).”¹¹



CONTEXT

Background: The book of Ecclesiastes is classified as wisdom literature, and its purpose is to instruct believers on how to live meaningful lives. Authorship is attributed to Solomon—David’s son, the temple builder, and the wisest man to ever live. The book is interestingly structured from differing points of view. At times, Solomon used a name, “the Teacher”; at other times, Wisdom spoke; and at other points, Solomon wrote in first-person point of view. Ecclesiastes sheds light on the wasted efforts humans put into finding worth here on earth and offers wisdom on how to approach life with eternity in mind (Eccl. 3:11). Solomon knew this struggle well and likely wrote from old age as a reflective look on his life—a life of great accomplishment, marriages outside of God’s will, and folly. Ultimately, Solomon found that meaningful life can’t be found in earthly success or pleasure.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

The Problem of Evil

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing, then evil would not exist in the world. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful and impressive language, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world suggests a “good” moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a time. Given what we know about God’s character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even amid evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, IT IS OFTEN TEMPTING TO SEEK HAPPINESS IN EARTHLY THINGS. WE LOOK FOR WORTH IN OUR WEALTH, SUCCESS, AND MATERIAL POSSESSIONS. THANK YOU FOR THE REMINDER THAT LIFE IS ONLY MEANINGFUL HERE IF IT IS SPENT LOVING YOU AND POINTING OTHERS TO YOU.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

According to a poll which surveyed adults about their favorite season, nearly 45% answered that fall is their favorite, with summer ranking at only 24%. What's yours?¹²

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

TIME IS PRECIOUS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT DO YOU DO TO WASTE TIME?**
- **DO YOU THINK WE HAVE MORE TIME THAN WE CLAIM TO HAVE? WHAT DO WE SPEND OUR TIME DOING?**
- **HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN SOMEONE OR SOMETHING WASTES YOUR TIME?**

Time is precious, right? We usually claim that we don't have a lot of time, and we hate it when others waste our time. Yet, we often squander our own time on meaningless activities. Time certainly is precious, and it's best used with eternity in mind.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do you like to be in control? Many of us struggle with a control issue. This issue usually stems from a feeling of uncertainty. It can even be the result of trauma we've experienced in which we had no control at all over experiences that happened to us—things like death, abuse, abandonment, or sickness. We grasp for control in an effort to feel secure or less anxious. Want to know a better way? The better way is to give control to the Lord. In reality, He already has it. In reality, we have none. We fabricate the idea that we can control our lives, and yes, we do have free will to make good and bad decisions. But we have zero control over so much—over life and death, over others' actions. Instead of clenching our fingers around the control we think we have, we can open our hands and surrender to the Lord. We can choose to remain in His good and perfect will for our lives and trust that surrendering to it is so much better than attempting to control our own lives or the lives of others.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We must invest in what lasts rather than in what's temporary.

LIFE IS SEASONAL

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

WHAT ABOUT THIS PASSAGE IS COMFORTING TO YOU? WHAT PARTS CAUSE TENSION?

Each example from Solomon is a strong contrast, or an opposite. He began by explaining that there is a time for life and death—the bookends of our lives. In between those moments, we experience these extreme contrasts because life is seasonal. **Knowing that parts of life will be really good is comforting, but the other seasons cause tension.** These verses may even cause some of us feel a little anxious about the unknown. **We must lean on the truth that God is perfectly aware of it all.**



FROM THESE VERSES, WHAT SHOULD WE REALIZE ABOUT LIFE?

This passage serves as a reminder that life is composed of both good and bad seasons. **Earthly life won't ever reach the perfection our hearts long for because it's temporary.** We tend to want to cling to those seasons in which the good takes place—the planting, the healing, the building, the laughing, and the dancing. We run from the other seasons if we can. Sometimes being reminded of life's frailty is good for us; it reminds us that what we experience here—the good and the bad—is temporary and that perfect peace and joy will only be found in eternity with God.



WHY DO YOU THINK GOD ALLOWS THE PAINFUL PARTS OF LIFE SOLOMON MENTIONED? HOW CAN WE HAVE HOPE DURING THOSE TIMES?

We often struggle to accept the reality that pain, suffering, and evil exist because of sin. God's perfect design wasn't for us to experience these things. In fact, God designed Eden so that humans would know Him and live in unbroken relationship with Him. The choice Adam and Eve made to sin changed the course of human history. The fact that pain exists isn't proof of an unloving God or no God at all; this couldn't be further from the truth. **The problem of pain and evil only points to the reality that perfect goodness also exists. As believers, we know this complete goodness is God Himself.** Still, we do walk some painful roads, but we can have hope. **God kindly weaves all the painful seasons together with the peaceful seasons to make life meaningful.** We like to be in control; we plan out our lives without leaving room for the pain, but as we read here, pain will come. We don't have to walk through those seasons without hope though. **We know any pain we experience is temporary, while the peace we'll experience in eternity will last forever.**

GOD'S PURPOSES ARE ETERNAL

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:9-15



WHY IS IT SO TEMPTING TO INVEST IN THINGS THAT WON'T LAST? WHAT IS THE KEY TO MEANINGFUL LIFE?

If we're honest, it is tempting to throw ourselves into things that are temporary. These things are flashy and shiny. They attract us because of our sinful nature. We're drawn to earthly fame, material possessions, and success. We like the idea of our own name being great. **The key to meaningful life is in giving it away. The only way to find meaning is in surrendering ourselves to Christ and in committing to follow Him. He is the "way, the truth, and the life"—no other way leads to these things (John 14:6). We'll never find meaning in the things of this world.**

READ VERSE 11 AND BREAK DOWN EACH PHRASE. WHAT IS SOLOMON SAYING?

People often quote this verse without looking at every phrase. First, God has made everything appropriate in time; in other words, God really is in control of all life's seasons. He works even the worst of times for our good (Rom. 8:28). Next, God has placed a desire for eternity with Him in our hearts. It's why we struggle here; it's why we long for more than what earth can give us; and it's often why we attempt to fulfill this longing with earthly pleasures, which always fail us. Why do we do this? Look at the final phrase: we can't fully grasp the goodness of God's plans. His plans **are too grand, and we're finite. If we understood them fully, we'd never waste a moment on what's meaningless.**



HOW DOES KNOWING CHRIST EXPERIENCED ALL PARTS OF EARTHLY LIFE AFFECT YOU?

Jesus experienced the effects of sin without having sinned Himself. He walked among humanity in a fallen world. Christ was described as a man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3). He knew loss and grief; He knew toil; He knew physical exhaustion; He knew hunger and thirst. And the reason He was acquainted with all of this was to save us from our sin. **Jesus willingly came to earth to experience life in the same way we do so that we could experience salvation.** Knowing Christ left a throne in heaven for us should fill us with grateful worship.

WRAP-UP



HOW SHOULD THE REALITY THAT TIME IS PASSING AFFECT THE WAY YOU LIVE THIS WEEK?

A lot of us wish time could move slower. We do our best to soak up the present, but it passes so quickly and becomes the past. This reality should stir us to live more intentionally each day. **Living intentionally means we focus on what matters: knowing Christ and sharing Him with others. Oddly enough, when we do this, we actually get more out of every season of life—even the hard ones.**

Why? We find meaning in them because God is present in them all.

We love others well. We have a clear purpose instead of feeling like we're wandering aimlessly. Living intentionally produces actual joy, too, because we're investing in what is lasting instead of what is fleeting. Take steps this week to live intentionally by spending time in God's Word and in prayer, by looking for His work in your life and in the lives of those around you, by sharing the gospel with people, by helping those in need. When you invest in what lasts, you'll still experience the passing of time, but you'll do so with meaning and purpose.