

Life Above the Sun Devotional: Week 3

Week 3 Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. *1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Devotional. It's not very often that you take a portion of Scripture (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8), set it to music, and the song becomes a major hit in the secular world. But that's exactly what happened with the song "Turn! Turn! Turn!," written by Pete Seeger and later performed by The Byrds. The song reached number one on the *Billboard Hot 100* in 1965.

The song resonated with the tumultuous times of 1965. President Kennedy had been assassinated, the conflict in Vietnam had escalated, and the civil rights movement had taken a hit with the killing of Malcom X. It was a song reminding people to accept that change was inevitable, history is a cycle, strife is temporary, and to everything there is a season.

This side of heaven, there will be ups and downs. Sometimes life is going well, and then all of a sudden, it isn't. This is why we don't put our hope in this world. The God who created the world--the one over all things—is the one we put our hope in. He's the constant. His character never changes. We can't control *what* happens in life, but we can choose *who* we'll trust.

Prayer. "Lord, help me trust in you even when I don't understand what's going on all around me. Help me rest in your sovereignty and not in my situations."

Week 3 Tuesday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-13. *9 What gain has the worker from his toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. 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. 12 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.*

Devotional. Happiness vs. joy. Happiness is based on feelings; joy is based on faith. Happiness is the result of our "happenings," while joy is the result of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Happiness comes and goes; joy is constant. Happiness is like a thermometer, which registers the conditions; joy is like a thermostat, that regulates the conditions. Happiness evaporates in suffering, and joy can intensify during

suffering. Happiness depends on everything going right, while joy is available despite things going wrong.

There's nothing wrong with feeling happy, but life has too many ups and downs to always be happy. But joy is the inward peace that we have when we are walking close to Jesus. It can face any challenge. That's the idea in today's passage. We won't be able to understand what God is doing from "beginning to end." But we can trust He will make everything "beautiful in its time." And since we have eternity planted in our hearts, we have a sense that God will restore all things and that our temporary pain won't last.

And so we can "chill" when life hits hard at us. We can choose to "eat and drink and take pleasure" in things, because a day is coming when there will be nothing but perfection. You can't always change the circumstances, but you can choose to respond by not keeping too tight of a grip on things. Choose to laugh. Choose to enjoy a meal.

Prayer. "Heavenly Father, I know that you are on the throne. And you will make everything beautiful in its time. Thank you that my future is secure and it's a beautiful and glorious future. Help me choose joy today."

Week 3 Wednesday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:14-15. *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. 15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.*

Devotional. When Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe*, was a university student, he lived in a boarding house. Downstairs was an elderly, retired music teacher, who was unable to leave the apartment. Douglas said that every morning they had a ritual they would go through together. He would come down the steps, open the old man's door, and ask, "Well, what's the good news?" The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair and say, "That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, THAT is middle C!" The old man had discovered one thing upon which he could depend, one constant reality in his life, one "still point in a turning world." For Christians, the one "still point in a turning world," the one absolute of which there is no shadow of turning, is God.

That is the heart of today's passage. God is immutable, which means He is unchanging. He will always be consistent in His character. We never have to worry about which God is showing up today. It's the same God who showed up yesterday. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

Have you failed Him? Repent, and believe He will forgive. He always has and always will. Scared about a situation? Stop being afraid. He's the same God who calmed the seas. There is nothing we will face in life this week that God hasn't already proven faithful over.

Prayer. "Lord, I thank you for your faithfulness and consistency. When Satan tempts me with worry and fear, help me lean into your character, and trust you with my life."

Week 3 Thursday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-19. *16 Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. 17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. 18 I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. 19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity.*

Devotional. An umpire named Babe Pinelli once called Babe Ruth out on strikes. When the crowd booed with sharp disapproval at the call,

the legendary Ruth turned to the umpire with disdain and said, "There's 40,000 people here who know that the last pitch was a ball." Suspecting that the umpire would erupt with anger, the coaches and players braced themselves for Ruth's ejection. However, the cool headed Pinelli replied, "Maybe so, Babe, but mine is the only opinion that counts."

God is the one we will stand before at the Judgment Seat. His opinion is the only one that matters. Verse 17 says, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked." When we live "under the sun", we may be tempted to think that our fate is no different than the animals--we live and we die and that's it (vs. 19-20). Yet, death is only the beginning. Death ushers in a life of eternal joy, if we know Christ. But we will give an account of our life on earth.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 says: "....each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

We are saved by faith, not by works. But we were saved for good works. What will the Day reveal about our work? Let us live with that day in mind.

Prayer. "Dear God, thank you for saving me from my sins. Thank you that my eternity is secure. But help me remember that I will still give an account for how I live and what I do with my time on earth. Help me live with eternity in mind today."

Week 3 Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 1:20-22. *20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. 21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? 22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?*

Devotional. One lovely moonlit night a grandfather and his small granddaughter went for a walk. The stars were magnificent. As the grandfather named individual stars and constellations, the granddaughter exclaimed, "Grandpa, if the bottom side of Heaven is this beautiful, just think how wonderful the top side must be." Oh, from the mouth of babes.

Solomon asked the question, "Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?" Well, we actually do know. The Bible tells us. It may not give us a lot of detail of what heaven will be like but it's clear heaven is a

real place, and it's the home for followers of Jesus.

Revelation 21:1-4 describes heaven this way: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

We may not know many of the details of heaven, but we know enough to know that it's going to be glorious, and there will be no more pain or heartache there. In those moments when your life is touched by the curse of sin, take heart, one day the curse will be removed.

Prayer. "Lord, thank you for the hope of heaven. Thank you for choosing me to be your child. Help me always remember that my destiny is heaven and my hope is in you."