

Explore the Bible: What time is it?

July 12, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Aug. 1 focuses on Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.*

There is so much in our world that is totally out of any individual's control. At the top of the list must be time. In our society we try to stop time, rush time, cheat time, keep detailed accounts of time ... and often all simultaneously! I have been told I have poor time management skills, because a relationship is typically more important to me than being on time to another appointment. But the truth is, there are only so many hours in a day to accomplish what needs to be done. This is true for everyone.

In our lesson this week, we experience the first formal poetry in Ecclesiastes. In 3:1-8 we find seven short, paired lines; the number of lines indicating sacred completion. These are the most famous verses in the entire book (partially because of the famous song in the 1960s by Pete Seeger, "[Turn! Turn! Turn!](#)"). The topics for the writer seem random. However, almost every person will go through each one at some point in his or her lifetime. And as to what time it is? It's almost never in your control to decide.

Most of human time is spent in the in-between times—perhaps it is not a time to weep, but not a time to laugh either. All the extremes and the in-betweens are part of human existence as we experience it, and we must find out how to live in them both. As John Goldingay writes, "...they are all part of human life as God has created it, part of life 'under the sun,' as we experience it" (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 188).

Goldingay also notes the seeming randomness of the list is often a picture of how life can seem—there is positive and negative, good and bad. He continues: “Ecclesiastes itself isn’t evaluating them. ... They are just realities” (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 188). Ultimately, we are reminded God is sovereign. His lordship reigns over all human activities.

Seize the day

The popular movie *The Dead Poet’s Society* elaborates on a similar theme as Mr. Keaton (played by Robin Williams) challenges his students’ notion of their pursuit of life. As he takes them into the hallway at the boarding school, he guides them through a lesson to remember that time is ongoing, and encourages them to live by the motto *carpe diem*—“seize the day.”

Qohelet (our teacher) has in mind a similar instruction. Even when we think there is more to do than we ever get could done, we still can “seize the day” and make the most of what time we have. When we think all is lost and we cannot move forward because of tragedy or trial, we can “seize the day” and know there is a time for everything in life. And when we don’t see what God is doing or don’t even feel his presence, we can know “he makes everything beautiful in its time” (v.11).

But we also must note Mr. Keaton was not a theologian in the movie. As we “seize the day,” we need to remember this is our spiritual act of worship, as Paul would describe it in Romans 12:1-2. Paul writes of the sold-out life of a disciple as a “living sacrifice” and a life lived totally in God’s “good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Find contentment

So, perhaps instead of *carpe diem*, we should recognize Qohelet is speaking of living a life of contentment. Paul understood, as he followed the way of Jesus, there would be hardship and joy, there would be good and bad, and most times it would be entirely out of his control. So, he controlled what he could—his attitude. He determined that whatever the circumstances, he could be content and grateful before God.

“For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11b-13 NIV).

In the second half of our text, we find the prose that expounds upon the realities set forth in the poem. We understand by faith God is the one who numbers our days (Psalm 139:16). While our time on earth is limited, God does not intend for us to sulk or become saddened; no, he has placed a desire for eternity or “permanence” (as Goldingay translates v. 11) into our minds and heart.

While we desire such lofty understanding, it is not possible for us to see God’s grand design in all things. Goldingay concludes: “Fortunately, we can know that God knows what the big picture is and that we can trust him for it. ... enjoy your life, do what is good, eat and drink, enjoy the fruit of our labor, and accept the gifts God has given us but also the limitations God has placed on us” (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 189).

Let the words of Qohelet be a reminder to “seize the day,” not for self-fulfillment, but rather, as an expression of faith in the God who is for us and not against us (Romans 8:31).

You can watch the clip from *Dead Poet's Society* [here](#).

Davey Gibson is associate pastor of education and discipleship at Sugar Land Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Texas.