

"The Search for Meaning"

by Rev. John C. Tittle

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15 NRSV

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 throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; 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 throw 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. ⁹ What gain have the workers from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; ¹³ moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. ¹⁴ I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. ¹⁵ That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Discussion Questions:

1. This passage is one of the most captivating pieces of poetry in Scripture. What grabs you about it?
2. Why is this particular passage so often read in funeral services--both for believers and non-believers?
3. Do you find this passage encouraging or a bit grim? Why?
4. What are the different kinds of life experiences described in this passage?
5. The book of Ecclesiastes talks about four paths to happiness--philosophy, pleasure, possessions, and production and that all of them are dead ends to find ultimate meaning. Do you agree? Why don't they work? Why do we keep trying them for meaning?
6. Does this passage tell us how to get to the good parts of life or does it just describe reality? Why do you think that?
7. How do you know when you are in a new season?
8. This passage seems to be about embracing, not fighting against, the various seasons of our lives. Does this mean that we're to lead fatalistic lives? Or something else?
9. What is the fallout if we resist or deny the season that we find ourselves in? How can acceptance of the season we're in help us?

10. The sermon mentioned various psychological studies on happiness that breakdown the causes of happiness--does this percentage breakdown surprise you?
 - a. 10% external circumstances: health, money, status, etc.
 - b. 50% to our genetic disposition
 - c. 40% to our behavior and practices
1. What has helped give you meaning in life?