

Man's Stewardship of Life

Lesson Scope: [Ecclesiastes chapters 3 to 8](#)

Lesson Focus

We live in a world of constant change, yet the changes around us are subject to God's sovereign restraint. He superintends a mosaic of circumstances and opportunities for our continued growth. God ordains the seasons, the movements of stars and galaxies, and interactions of protons and neutrons. Everything that exists is specifically placed by God in His time and His way. He controls creation and orders our lives.

Although He is omniscient and omnipotent, God has granted men the gift of free will. We can learn, consider, and choose our actions and paths. Each of the circumstances and opportunities gives us a new choice to make that affects our relationship with God and with each other. Each choice also affects what circumstances and opportunities will be available in the future. We are accountable to God for how we choose and how we relate to the events of life. Each choice becomes either the pursuit of self-indulgence or the pursuit of a more perfect relationship with God.

God intends for men to find meaning in life. We discover meaning by embracing God-given opportunities as precious gifts from Him. He will bless us as we draw closer to Him.

All men are stewards of what God has given, and all are accountable for the proper use of the Lord's goods. Indeed, life itself is a gift from God, and we are accountable as to how we expend it. Three types of gifts that we receive are used to divide the lesson. Gifts of increase are those things that produce wealth, whether material or spiritual. Gifts of adversity do not sound like gifts, but when viewed from a spiritual perspective, adversity brings growth and strength. The gift of wisdom can be applied to our daily experience to make proper choices for the Lord and His kingdom. The Giver of gifts gives so that the recipient can be made better through the use of the gifts. How do we use the gifts given to us?

Life is a gift from God. He gives opportunities and possessions to

every man "severally as he will." In turn, man is accountable to God for those things entrusted to him.

Lesson Aim: To present principles that govern man's pursuits in life.

Theme Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:7. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dolt thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Lesson Text

The Gift of Increase

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it *is* the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better *is* an handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 ¹ Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. ² Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

Ecclesiastes 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-10 ⁸ If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is* higher than the highest regardeth; and *there be* higher than they. ⁹ Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field. ¹⁰ He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this *is* also vanity.

Ecclesiastes 5:12-13 ¹² The sleep of a labouring man *is* sweet, whether

he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. ¹³ There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.

The Gift of Adversity

Ecclesiastes 7:1-2 ¹ A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. ² *It is* better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that *is* the end of all men; and the living will lay *it* to his heart.

Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

The Gift of Wisdom

Ecclesiastes 8:1-2 ¹ Who *is* as the wise *man*? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. ² I *counsel thee* to keep the king's commandment, and *that* in regard of the oath of God.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 *There is* no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither *hath he* power in the day of death: and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 ¹² Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: ¹³ But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

Questions for Study

The Gift of Increase

1. How can the regular flow of creation provide increase?
2. List ways to maintain a proper balance in our pursuits of life.
3. Discuss how we deal with our fellow men with fairness and equity.
4. What is the teaching of Eccl.5:10? How do we avoid this snare?

The Gift of Adversity

5. How is exposure to death and mourning better than experiences of birth and feasting?
6. What should we consider in days of adversity?

The Gift of Wisdom

7. Describe the qualities of wisdom as discussed in these verses.
8. In light of our coming death, what are some things we should be doing today?
9. Describe characteristics of one who has a proper fear of God.

Analyzing the Passage

World (Eccl.3:11) comes from a Hebrew word that carries the concept of eternity. Man has been given a limited capacity to ponder the more weighty things of life. We are aware of the passage of time, but we cannot see the beginning or the end. Our considerations are limited by our experiences and by our human capacity. God, in His omnipotence, made creation to be well organized with each thing appropriate for its time. This is expressed through the use of the word beautiful in the same verse.

We need to be ready to act on what we learn (Eccl.5:1). Likewise, we are to be prompt in fulfilling our commitments (Eccl.5:4). The Lord gave specific direction to the Israelites regarding the making and keeping of vows (see Deuteronomy 23 and Numbers 30).

We are all dependent on the systems of creation that God set in place (Eccl.5:8-9). Regardless of our position, we all depend on the fruits of the field. We should not be surprised, therefore, when those of higher authority use their authority to oppress the poor and needy, perverting judgment for their own ends.

The verses from chapter 7 should cause us to reflect on how our lives measure up to our professed goal of eternal life. A good name and lessons learned from the hard experiences of life will carry into eternity.

Principles and Applications

The Gift of Increase

1. God gives man the opportunity to work in His creation and enjoy the fruits of his labor (Eccl.3:1, 11-13). Passing times and seasons give varying opportunities to engage in work for the betterment of ourselves

and others. We are blessed to enjoy work and the satisfaction of a job well done. Because we are aware of passing events and how things fit in their places, we are able to plan ahead and set goals by thinking through opportunities that will likely present themselves. We are, therefore, able to experience new circumstances or to perform a task better than we did it previously.

2. Man should be temperate in all his pursuits (Eccl.4:6). We need to be aware of our situation in life and adjust our workloads accordingly even if it means a setback in our plans or financial state. We should work to our level of competence, neither slacking nor trying to overachieve, but finishing what we started.

3. Man should appreciate the contribution of others (Eccl.4:9). Whatever our success in life, we need to remain humble and recognize the providence of God. He provides others for our benefit in family life, business life, and spiritual life. We should be willing to accept the help and counsel of faithful brethren. Likewise, employees can make meaningful suggestions to improve the work situation based on their abilities and their insights into specific tasks.

4. Man needs to pursue his worship of God with a conscientious obedience (Eccl.5:1-2). Diligent obedience is a normal response of true worship. We are entering into God's presence, and He is aware of us and sees what we are doing. We, therefore, need to be careful in our worship activities—not hasty, rash, or casual with our thoughts and emotions. As with any relationship, when we give, we will also receive.

5. Fairness and equity need to characterize all of man's dealings with others (Eccl.5:8-9; 7:7). God calls us to a wholly impartial treatment of others. Our actions must always be aboveboard and transparent so that we can always provide an honest report with a clear conscience. We appreciate such dealings being directed our way; we must return them in kind.

6. Honest physical labor helps to bring contentment to life (Eccl.5:12-13).

Work brings more than a monetary benefit. We also value the exercise associated with working and the knowledge that the gain was well earned. Labor has a dignity that cannot be denied, despite the attitude of the elite in today's society. Completed labor brings rest both to the laborer and to his family.

The Gift of Adversity

7. Integrity of heart needs to govern all of man's activities (Eccl.7:1). Integrity requires us to stand firm against wrong thoughts and actions. Some activities must be avoided altogether to safeguard integrity. Others, such as driving, can test our integrity depending on situations that arise during the activity. By keeping ourselves soundly grounded in the teachings of God, we can withstand temptations that come our way and maintain a clean conscience and a transparent, honest life in the sight of God and men.

8. Man should live in light of his death and the life hereafter (Eccl.7:2). The material things acquired while on earth are temporal and cannot accompany us into eternity. The wise realize that living with the reminder of reverses, sicknesses, and death has an intrinsic value in keeping us focused on the hereafter. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

9. Man is called to make the best of the circumstances in his life (Eccl.7:14).

Both good and evil will come to all men; it is up to each one to make the best of his circumstances. We must face life with humility, without bitterness, and without blaming others for our experiences. God allows only what we are able to handle and what will be best for us in light of eternity.

The Gift of Wisdom

10. It is wisdom to be undemanding of one's own way (Eccl.8:1-2). Wisdom gives up self and yields to the counsel and concerns of others. It recognizes that one's own way usually leads to destruction. It is obedient to the requirements of the "powers that be," recognizing that they are ordained by God to provide order in earthly affairs. The wise make submission and surrender their daily choice.

A fear of God needs to govern all of life's activities (8:12-13).

God will guide us through life if we are attentive and surrendered to Him. Proverbs 1:7 shows the wisdom of a proper fear of God. The blessing that results cannot be measured in this life; the dividends are eternal.

Answers to Questions

1. How can the regular flow of creation provide increase?

The orderliness God has provided in creation produces a regularity on which we are able to base plans and goals to provide an increase. God has created sufficient to provide for all men throughout all time. We need to do our part, but when we stay within the boundaries God has set for creation, we experience increase according to His providence.

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2. List ways to maintain a proper balance in our pursuits of life.

We keep our pursuits in proper balance by being temperate in what we do. Over-ambition in one area, particularly in business affairs, will cause family or church life to suffer. Do not allow small things to crowd out the more important things. Approach large tasks by breaking them into smaller segments.

3. Discuss how we deal with our fellow men with fairness and equity.

First, we apply the Golden Rule. We also need to keep the relationship clear, which includes setting aside past grievances. We should take into account the other's situation and needs and should respond accordingly. We dare not accuse or speak negatively of another person.

4. What is the teaching of Eccl.5:10? How do we avoid this snare? The love and pursuit of riches is unsatisfying and even addictive. Riches are both elusive and illusive.

Our pursuing the things of the world for their own sake is futile, since they will pass away. We must maintain the view that the primary purpose of material possessions is to meet our needs and to provide an increase to assist others. What we produce and the work we do should bring glory to God. Regular time with Him on a daily basis will provide a proper perspective.

5. How is exposure to death and mourning better than experiences of birth and feasting?

The primary benefit is the reminder of our mortality and our reliance on God for all we have. It will strengthen us spiritually and help us keep a proper perspective of life.

6. What should we consider in days of adversity?

Adversity should incline us toward God. Reverses in life, particularly when it seems we are doing everything right, remind us that we are dependent on Him. Adversity strengthens us and provides opportunity to

reach out to others. Adversity also allows us to consider the grace and providence of God in a special way.

7. Describe the qualities of wisdom as discussed in these verses.

Wisdom brings confidence in decisions along with the humble thought that our knowledge is extremely limited. Wisdom originates from God. Wisdom recognizes that life is a prelude to eternity and that death is the gateway between the two. Wisdom excludes the unnecessary
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and wicked things in life in order to make sure of eternal life.

8. In light of our coming death, what are some things we should be doing today?

Live for God. All we do should bring honor and glory to Him. We make our calling and election sure by searching ourselves for anything that would separate us from God. We engage in God-honoring activity that furthers His kingdom and our witness for Him. We pass on the faith to the coming generations.

9. Describe characteristics of one who has a proper fear of God.

He seeks to conform to the Scriptural standard. He seeks and actively supports a church that upholds God's Word. He confesses sin and makes restitution. He shuns activities that would draw him away from God. He places God at the center of his activities and is conscious of His presence wherever he goes.

Important Teachings

1. God gives man the opportunity to work in His creation and enjoy the fruits of his labor (Eccl.3:1, 11, and 13).

2. Man should be temperate in all his pursuits (Eccl.4:6).

3. Man should appreciate the contribution of others (Eccl.4:9).

4. Man needs to pursue his worship of God with a conscientious obedience (Eccl.5:1-2).

5. Fairness and equity need to characterize all of man's dealings with others (Eccl.5:8-9; 7:7).

6. Honest physical labor helps to bring contentment to life (Eccl.5:12-3).

7. Integrity of heart needs to govern all of man's activities (Eccl.7:1).

8. Man should live in light of his death and the life hereafter (Eccl.7:2).

9. Man is called to make the best of the circumstances in his life

(Eccl.7:14).

10. It is wisdom to be undemanding of one's own way (Eccl.8:1-2).

11. A fear of God needs to govern all of life's activities (Eccl.8:12-13).

Summarizing the Lesson

The pursuits of the natural man do not yield soul satisfaction or meaning in light of eternity. Being actively engaged in the furtherance of the Lord's kingdom brings deep satisfaction. The joy of Christian victory belongs to those who labor faithfully and persistently in those things that are worthwhile. Let us not sit by, allowing others to do our work for us. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:20-21).

Research Guide

1. Meditate on Psalm 90 in light of the stewardship of our lives.
2. Consider the following Scriptures regarding stewardship of material things: Genesis 14:17-24; 1 Chronicles 29:11-16; Haggai 1:1-6; 2:8; Matthew 23:23; and Acts 4:32-35.
3. Read Romans 1:18-32; 8:1-13; and 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 on stewardship of mind, body, and spirit.