

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES
“THE MID-LIFE CRISIS”

STUDY NUMBER THREE – Whatever Will Be, Will Be! 3:1-22

TEXT:

- v. 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
- v. 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- v. 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
- v. 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- v. 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
- v. 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- v. 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- v. 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.
- v. 9 What does the worker gain from his toil?
- v.10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men.
- v.11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.
- v.12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.
- v.13 That every man may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God.
- v.14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it, so men will revere him.
- v.15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.
- v.16 And I saw something else under the sun: in the place of judgment – wickedness was there, in the place of justice – wickedness was there.
- v.17 I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.”
- v.18 I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like animals.
- v.19 Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.
- v.20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.
- v.21 Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”
- v.22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

INTRODUCTION:

“When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, ‘What will I be? Will I be pretty, will I be rich?’ Here’s what she said to me: Que sera, sera – Whatever will be, will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que sera, sera.

Since I am just a boy in school, I asked my teacher, ‘What should I try? Should I paint pictures, should I sing songs?’ This was her wise reply: Que sera, sera – Whatever will be, will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que sera, sera.

When I grew up and fell in love, I asked my sweetheart what lies ahead. Will we have rainbows day after day? Guess what my sweetheart said. Que sera, sera - Whatever will be, will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que sera, sera.

Now I have children of my own. They ask their mother, ‘What will I be? Will I be pretty? Will I be rich? I tell them wait and see.

Que sera, sera – Whatever will be, will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que sera, sera.”

*Sung by Doris Day from the movie “The Man Who Knew Too Much”
Words & Music: J. Livingston & R. B. Evans*

Learning how to order our lives according to God’s order of things is one of the great perplexities that we each face.

ISAIAH 55:8,9 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

JUDGES 21:25 “And everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.”

ACTS 9: “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But arise and enter the city and it shall be told you what you must do.’”

Watchman Nee in his book Spiritual Authority says, ‘Before being enlightened Paul kicked against the goads without realizing what he was doing. After enlightenment, however, the first thing which happens is that the eyes of Paul are opened to see authority. And this seeing continues to increase thereafter. Though Paul met only a little brother by the name of Ananias, he never questioned what kind of man Ananias was, whether learned or illiterate because he was not looking at man. Paul recognized that Ananias was sent by God and he accordingly subjected himself to the delegated authority. How easy it is to obey after one has learned authority.’

Williams in his book Do Yourself a Favor, Love Your Wife says, “If you are disrespectful and disobedient to your heavenly Father and your son imitates you, what do you think will be the results? He looked a little white around the mouth

and then replied, ‘I don’t like what you are pointing out to me, Preacher, but I think I am beginning to see what you are getting at. You mean, If I don’t recognize the authority of God over my life, then my sons won’t recognize my authority over them?’ ‘You said yourself, Sam,’ I reminded him, ‘that Mike never shows you respect and has been unruly all his life. That is because you didn’t take time as a father to teach him to respect the role of authority while he was a youngster.’”

J. I. Packer in his book Knowing God says, “God’s almighty wisdom is always active and never fails. All His works of creation and providence and grace display it. And until we can see it in them, we just are not seeing them straight. But we cannot recognize God’s wisdom unless we know the ends for which he is working. Here many go wrong. Misunderstanding what the Bible means when it says that God is love, they think that God intends a trouble-free life for all, irrespective of their moral and spiritual states. And hence they conclude that anything painful and upsetting (illness, accident, injury, loss of job, the suffering of a loved one) indicates either that God’s wisdom or power or both have broken down or that God, after all, does not exist. But this idea of God’s intention is a complete mistake. God’s wisdom is not and never was pledged to keep a fallen world happy or to make ungodliness comfortable. Not even to Christians has he promised a trouble-free life. Rather, the reverse. He has other ends in view for life in this world than simply to make it easy for everyone.

God always gives freedom to choose, to be an individual, a person. But God also knows our weaknesses, our problems, our sins. He sends circumstances into our lives, circumstances that work much as a sculptor works on stone, chipping away that temper, trimming away the pride, the deceit, the jealousy. Each Christian is a different creation but God works on us all for our good with His Son as the model. Paul Adolph in his book Release from Tension says, “However, when we realize that God is on the throne and that as for God, his way is perfect (Psalm 18:30), boredom and frustrations are replaced by a perpetual joy in the Lord. This is the Christians’ viewpoint. If he is at all consistent with his beliefs, no matter what situation may face him, in it he can hear God saying to him as he did to Rehoboam of old. ‘This thing is from me’ (I Kings 12:24). He recognized that there are difficulties to be overcome but he faces them in the knowledge that the difficulties have been ordered for his discipline and for his growth in Christian grace. He abides in the knowledge that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

When a man is going through a mid-life crisis, we have already learned that he begins to look at life selfishly rather than socially. He becomes more concerned about his own comforts and interests than he does about what he can do and give to others.

He sees the grave as the end of all existence and life here and now becomes all-important.

With this kind of thinking also comes a rebellion against God for what he has experienced to this point in his life. Because of this, there is a resistance and a rebellion against divine authority.

The weariness of this kind of lifestyle finally produces that moment of resignation when the individual realizes that he is fighting a losing battle against a sovereign God and comes up with the statement: “Whatever will be, will be.”

Thus far in our study, we saw the foundation of the mid-life crisis in chapter 1, when the questions were raised, (1) “What is the gain from all my labor, (2) “What else is new?” and the sober observation that (3) one generation does not remember the next.

This brought us to study #2 where we find our individual trying to find meaning and purpose through the success syndrome. He builds projects and tries all sorts of things to find meaning and purpose in his life.

Having tried all these things, he now comes to the realization that he is bumping against a wall at every turn. And that wall is the restraining hand of God designed to bring him to his senses and to have a total and complete surrender to the perfect will of the Father.

v. 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. Solomon argues that more than humility is needed in life. Total submission to what God has determined is the best way that one can go. God’s planned time is the first evidence he offers in his argument. The gray conclusion helps us understand Solomon’s point. The whole range of life, note that the events he lines out are all opposites. They are beyond human control. Our toil is basically profitless because God has so planned and controlled the events in our life that all our efforts make almost no basic change. Our frustrating restrictions are a major theme of the Preacher’s argument. Submit to God’s determinations, he has counseled, and accept his plans for your times. His plans are what count because our lives are restricted by the great gulf between him and us.

PROVERBS 3:5,6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path.” David Hubbard in his book Beyond Futility says, “full freedom we do not have, the Preacher concluded. God keeps the calendar of our lives. The red book that schedules our hours and days sits on his desk and is filled out by his hand. Our task is to submit to his determinations, though we are not to do this lying down. We do have possibilities for productive effort, for contributing to our welfare, for enjoying life. We should receive life as God’s gift and make the best of it. The simple delights of food and drink and work come from his hand. They are tokens of his grace. Great and grand plans we cannot make. Our attempts to have full freedom to form our own futures are futile. God sets our times and does so without letting us in on his secrets. I know that whatever God does endures forever. Nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it. God has made it so in order that men should fear before him. Perhaps that verse says it best. God has fixed our courses and veiled them in mystery so that we may not take him for granted but may serve him in reverence and honor all our days.

Joni, in her book A Step Further says, “Wow! Sometimes as Christians we’re just not given any choice in the matter. If we care at all, we have to handle things God’s way.”

Derek Kidner points out, “Who would have imagined, we sometimes say, that the day would come when I should find myself doing such-and-such and seeing it as my duty. So the peace loving nation prepares for war. Or the shepherd takes the knife to the creature he has earlier nursed back to health. The collector disperses his hoard. Friends part in bitter conflict. The need to speak out follows the need to be silent. Nothing that we do, it seems, is free from this relativity and this pressure, almost dictation, from outside.”

Robert Foster points out, “Be assured nothing just happens to God’s man. There are no mere accidents in your life. In this world of perpetual change, fluctuating events and shifting circumstances, it is great to have a stable center that says, ‘Our times are in his hands.’ (Psalm 31:15) Listen to the way that John Wilder puts it, ‘A loving Father has obligated himself and guarantee that everything that takes place in the lives of those who love him is for good. That means that every tear, every sorrow, every misfortune, every catastrophe, every calamity, even hurricanes and tornadoes, famines and freezes, depressions and plaques, sickness, pain, disappointments, and even death, all things work together, cooperate, move in a mighty teamwork for good to them that love God.

J. I. Packer’s Knowing God says, “Similarly, the statement ‘God is love’ means that his love finds expression in everything that he says and does. The knowledge that this is so for him personally is the Christian’s supreme comfort. As a believer, he finds in the cross of Christ assurance that he as an individual is beloved of God. ‘The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.’ (Galatians 2:20) Knowing this, he is able to apply to himself the promise that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose.’ Not just some things, note, but all things. Every single thing that happens to him expresses God’s love to him and comes to him for the furthering of God’s purpose for him. Thus, so far as he is concerned, God is love to him, holy omnipotent love, at every moment and in every event of every day’s live. Even when he cannot see the why and the wherefore of God’s dealings, he knows that there is love in and behind them and so he can rejoice always, even when humanly speaking things are going wrong. He knows that the true story of his life, when known, will prove to be, as the hymn says, ‘mercy from first to last’ and he is content.”

De Haan points out, “Solomon does not tell us how we can fully harmonize the age-old problem of the relationship between man’s freedom and God’s sovereignty, nor does he give us a complete answer to our questions about his ways. Our humanity limits us to such an extent that all our efforts to resolve these baffling mysteries will lead us down dead-end streets. But the Preacher, through inspiration, does give us special practical guidelines by which we can live joyously and hopefully in this present world. He says that we must not try to solve theological problems that are beyond us. We are to accept God’s blessings with a happy and grateful heart and live before him in reverence and love. We who live on this side of Calvary and the empty tomb have far more reason than Solomon to be joyous and triumphant in the face of the mysteries of Providence. We can rejoice in the certainty of the salvation already purchased for us, for Jesus has come and his work is completed.

When the apostle Paul reflected upon the wonder of what God has done for us in Christ, he broke out in this shout of triumph, ‘What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?’ (Romans 8:31,32) God is on our side. He who designed, created, sustains and rules the universe loves us. This is all we need. We do not even have to walk the dead-end streets of futile speculation for we can live in faith. We know God and trust him, that is enough.”

The problem of the mysterious ways of God’s providence, including the question of human freedom and God’s inflexible decrees has puzzled thinking people through the ages. Certain factors forced upon an individual obviously have an influence upon what he does. On the other hand, society just could not function if everyone denies human responsibility. Solomon discussed the relationship between man’s freedom and God’s providence in these verses. The Preacher begins by setting forth two conclusions he reached through observation and reflections:

1. Man cannot control the events and circumstances of his life.
2. His efforts to improve his lot are therefore superfluous.

These conclusions are goads because they arouse us like a sharp pointed instrument spurs an ox.

J. Vernon McGee said it so well: “All things, good and bad, bright and dark, sweet and bitter, easy and hard, happy and sad, prosperity and poverty, health and sickness, calm and storm, comforts and suffering, life, and death are working together for good is the causative and means that God is working all things. There are no accidents. Jacob said, ‘all things are against me.’ Paul said, ‘all things are for me.’ Joseph could look back over his life filled with vicissitudes, disappointments and suffering, and say to his brethren who were responsible for his misfortune, ‘you thought evil against me but God meant it for good.’ Job could say, ‘though he slay me yet will I trust in him.’ Jeremiah said, ‘why did you let me see trouble?’ At the San Francisco earthquake, a saint of God was asked as she stood smiling, ‘How can you smile at a time like this?’ She responded, ‘I rejoice that I have a God that can shake the world.’ Peter could face the future without flinching, knowing that shortly he must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shown me’ (II Peter 1:14). Paul could face death unafraid. ‘Then Paul answered, “What mean you to weep and to break my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”’ (Acts 21:13)

Finlayson points out “And now in this catalogue of times and seasons Ecclesiastes adduces another consideration which shows how greatly man is restricted in his most strenuous endeavors to make himself happy.”

We have to face the fact that another will besides our own is at work in our history – the will of God. He is restricting and limiting us by times and seasons, circumstances which we did not create, which we could not foresee, which we cannot alter, and which we cannot explain may occur to cross our wishes and to thwart our plans. Is this a reason for folding our hands in idleness? No. But it is a reason for

remembering that our lot is not entirely in our own hands. It is a reason for bending with reverence before the will of the Supreme.

Cox points out, 'If the true God is not to be found in the school where wisdom utters her voice nor in the garden in which pleasure spreads her lures, may it not be found in the market in devotion to business and public affairs. The Preacher will try this experiment also. He gives himself to study and considers it. But at the very outset he discovers that he is in the iron grip of immutable divine ordinances by which season are appointed for every undertaking under heaven. Ordinances which derange man's best-laid schemes and shape his ends. Rough hew them how he will – that no one can do anything to purpose, apart from God, except by conforming to the ordinances or laws in which he has expressed his will.'

Leupold points out, "The last thought that has been suggested at the close of chapter 2 is now developed in its broadest application. It has been intimated that no man can give himself any enjoyment unless God wills it. The sovereign rule of God is now unfolded in its broadest aspects – not with the purpose of developing this truth as such but for the purpose of affording comfort in a two-fold way. In the first place if the manifold activities of man are controlled by God's plans, then the present calamities of Israel did not befall his people without his predetermined will and counsel. Already, that thought takes the sting out of adversity for men who trust God. In the second place it behooves afflicted persons to put their hope in the deliverance which God will bring about in his own good time. For the times of all constructive work among God's people depend on God's appointment."

MacDonald points out, "As a research, it appeared to Solomon that there is a predetermined season for everything and a fixed time for every happening. This means that God has programmed every activity into a gigantic computer and, as the Spanish say, 'Que sera, sera – What will be, will be.' It also means that history is filled with cyclical patterns and these recur with unchangeable regularity, so man is locked into a pattern of behavior which is determined by certain inflexible laws or principles. He is a slave to fatalism's clock and calendar. In the verses that follow the Preacher enumerates 28 activities which are probably intended to symbolize the whole round of life. The list is made up of opposites – 14 are positives and 14 negatives. In some ways they seem to cancel out each other so that the net result is zero.

Swindoll in his book Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back says, "That is all our Father asks. You can't carry yourself through the storms. It is too much for you. When will we come to the realization that the blizzards in our lives are allowed by God. Those threatening storms are designed to slow us down, to make us climb up into his arms, to force us to depend on him. Maybe it's time to say, 'Lord, I love you. Thank you. Through your strength I will not be moved. I will stop running, stop striving. I will not fear. I will hold on to you. I will count on you to build that tent around me and protect me from the blast. Thank you for giving me in love this blizzard of stress. Thank you that I can't even see the distance or the goal. I admit my weakness. I need your strength.'

Beginning now with verse 2 and running down through verse 8 we have these 28 circumstances of life, played opposite one of the other. So there are actually 14 couplets or contrasts that the writer outlines as parts of God's sovereign purpose that relate to each of our lives under heaven.

Let's look at these together.

v. 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.

1. The first is 'a time to be born and a time to die.'

Galatians 4:4, 5 "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of woman, made under the law to redeem them that are under the law."

Jesus often said, "My hour is not yet come" but in the hour of his death, as he prepared to go to the cross, he could say to his men. "my hour has come."

2. 'a time to plant and a time to uproot'

Just as the Father has designed the seasons of the year, so He has also designed the times for the planting and the times for the uprooting.

v. 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.

3. The third contrast is 'a time to kill and a time to heal.'

There is the right time for the calf to go to the slaughterhouse to be prepared for meat and there is a time when that same animal is sick and in need of healing.

4. 'a time to tear down and a time to build'

There are times when the building has outlasted its usefulness and must come down. And there is a time to build, even as we have had described under the projects back in chapter 2:4 – "I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them."

v. 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

5. 'a time to weep and a time to laugh'

Bridges points out, "Let God's afflicted ones mark the wisdom and grace of these appointments. He giveth both these times in their season. Yea, He makes the one to spring out of the other. Joy is the harvest of the seed time of tears. I will make them rejoice, so runs the promise, from their sorrow. The sorrow may not, for the present, seem acceptable to us but let it be accepted by us."

6. 'time to mourn and a time to dance'

Oswald Chambers puts it, "Nothing touches our lives but it is God himself speaking. Do we discern his hand or only mere occurrence? Get into the habit of saying, 'Speak, Lord' and life will become a romance. Every time circumstances press say, 'Speak, Lord.' Make time to listen. Doors open, doors close. God is speaking to you. Lights turn green to say 'go.' Lights turn red to say 'stop.' Lights turn yellow to 'caution.' Through what happens in the developments around you, God is speaking. Telling you what to do."

v. 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain.

7. 'a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them'

We scatter the stones when we are in the process of making the roadways, spreading the gravel so that they will be passable. And when we are ready to plant the garden, we gather the stones.

8. 'a time to embrace and a time to refrain'

I Corinthians 7:5 "Stop depriving one another except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

v. 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away.

9. 'a time to search and a time to give up'

For King Saul there was a time that he searched for his father's donkeys and then he met the man of God, Samuel, as he sought his wisdom. The search was terminated when he learned that the animals had been found. There is a time to search and there is a time to give up.

There was ninety and nine safely in the fold but there was one lost sheep. And the shepherd looked long into the night to find that one sheep that was lost.

10. 'a time to keep and a time to throw away'

This is a regular cycle around the house. We keep and we keep and we keep and then we either have a garage sale or call the Salvation Army or Good Will.

v. 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak.

11. 'a time to tear and a time to mend'

When the garment has worn out, it is torn and used for rags. But when it has a small tear and still much usefulness, it is time to mend.

12. 'a time to be silent and time to speak'

James 1:19 "This you know, my beloved brethren, but let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."

Watchman Nee points out, "Speaking inadvertently is largely responsible for the breaking of the unity of the church and the losing of power. Probably most difficulties in the church today are due primarily to slanderous words. Only a major part of the difficulties are real problems. In fact, most of the troubles in this world have been created through lies. If in the church we can stop slandering we will have eliminated the major part of our difficulties. How we need to confess our sins before God and ask for His forgiveness. All our words of reviling must be carefully and thoroughly terminated before God. 'Does the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter? There ought not come from the same lips loving words and slanderous words.' May God set a watch over our lips; and not only over our lips, but also over our heart. That we may be delivered from rebellious thoughts and reviling words. May reviling words for ever depart from us.

v. 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

13. 'a time to love and a time to hate'

We love because God's love is flowing through us. We hate the injustices and the sin which we see all around us.

Someone has characterized God as being a God who loves the sinner and hates the sin.

14. 'a time for war and a time for peace'

Hal Lindsay in his book The Late Great Planet Earth says, "Inside of man there is a selfish, self-centered nature. This is the source of what God calls sin. Sin is basically self-centered, seeking and striving, going our own way with our backs turned on God. It is because of this selfish nature with which we were born that we cannot have consistent peace with ourselves, our family, our neighbor, or on a broader scale, with other nations. As one man has said, 'What's wrong with the world?' And answered himself truthfully, 'I am wrong with the world.'" Matthew 24:6 "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened. For those things must take place. But that is not yet the end."

There will really be no peace until the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ himself shall come.

v. 9 What does the worker gain from his toil?

This reminds us of that key question back in chapter 1:3 – "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?"

Bridges points out, "The question is again repeated: 'What profit can man's labor bring out for his true happiness?' We may thank God for a thousand disappointments if only we have learned the valuable lesson not to look for indulgence where he intends discipline. He may permit some apparently casual event to sweep away the result of years. After all, it is only a broken cistern. All man's best labors here only increase his heap of vanities. The soul is impoverished. Nothing is added to its comforts. The Lord alone offers the substance. Looking then to him, anxious soul. Stretch your expectation to the uttermost. The world has left you dissatisfied, restless and unhappy. Now let God's remedy be fairly tried."

DeHaan points out, "The Preacher's observation that man is not really free is a disturbing thought and it leads to distressing statements like this, 'Well, if what will be will be, regardless of anything I do, why should I try to do anything?' This is the basic meaning of Solomon's next statement, 'What profit has he that works in that wherein he laboreth? I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.' If what Solomon said thus far were wholly true, then man is ever victimized by some unknown, unconcerned fate. Why should a person laboriously seek worthwhile goals? After all, whether his endeavors will succeed or fail is determined by laws or accidental occurrences outside his control. If this is how everything works, it is futile to extend mental and physical energy in any direction. Why not sit back and let the world go by?"

v. 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men.

This takes us back to chapter 1:13 – "I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men."

Now as a result of Solomon's study, he can actually see by all of the happenings under the sovereign hand of God that he has placed a burden of life with its unchanging events as being a burden.

Proverbs 16:9 "The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps."

Psalm 37:23 "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord."

v. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Bridges points out, "The field is so wide, the capacity so limited, life so short, our knowledge of the past so imperfect and of the future so clouded that no man can find out the work. That God maketh from the beginning to the end.

Indeed, much of his work is begun in one age and finished in another. The development, therefore, is necessarily imperfect. Many things seem to lie in a confused heap but when one part is compared with another, when all is put together and God's work viewed as a whole, all is beauty and order. The elaborate work in the loom is often only seen piece by piece. The wise mixture of the colors as the work advances tends to form the elegance of the piece. The full beauty of the work from the beginning to the end is only known to the great director who sees the end from the beginning. We can neither unravel the thread of his counsels nor grasp the infinite perfection of his work. Thoughtful study and reverential praise are our most profitable exercise. O the depth!"

Bob Foster in his book A Challenge to Men from Ecclesiastes calls upon a little poem called "A Miracle for Sale":

I paid a dime for a package of seeds
And the clerk tossed them out with a flip.
"We've got 'em assorted for every man's needs,"
He said with a smile on his lip,
"Pansies and poppies and asters and peas!
Ten cents a package! And pick as
you please!"

Now seeds are just dimes to the man in the store,
And the dimes are the things that he needs,
And I've been to buy them in seasons before,
But have thought of them merely as seeds;
But it flashed through my mind as I
took them this time, "You have purchased a miracle here for a dime."

"You've a dime's worth of power which no man can create,
"You've a dime's worth of life in your hand!
You've a dime's worth of mystery, destiny, fate,
Which the wisest cannot understand.
In this bright little package, now isn't it
odd? You've a dime's worth of something known only to Go."

These are seeds, but the plants and the blossoms are here with their petals of various hues;
In these little pellets, so dry and so queer,
There is power which no chemist can fuse;
Here is one of God's miracles soon to unfold,
Thus for ten cents an ounce is Divinity sold!

Occasionally I catch glimpses of God's high and holy purposes and then I must trust Him for the rest which I cannot see and understand. The story is told of Napoleon's soldiers carrying a map of the world over their hearts. Why? So they wouldn't be thinking of the mud, shortage of food and tired bodies. Daily this military leader wanted his men to think in terms of world conquest. Think

big. Think of the world. Get in step with your Creator, who alone can give a true view of eternity and the big picture. This verse tells me that there are many things that the almighty God is doing that I cannot comprehend. But I can trust him that the timing is beautiful and what he wants me to know I can know for eternity has been placed in my heart.

J. Vernon McGee points out, “God has allowed men to set the world in their hearts so that they will see that the world does not satisfy. Their hearts are still empty. Many men start out with the philosophy that they are going to get all they can out of life. They say life is like an orange and I am going to squeeze it for all it’s worth. Solomon did that but it didn’t satisfy him at all.”

MacDonald points out, “The question lingering in Solomon’s mind was what lasting gain has a worker for all his toil? For every constructive activity, there is a destructive one. For every constructive activity there us a destructive one. For every plus a minus. The 14 positive works are cancelled out by 14 negatives. So the mathematical formula of life is 14 minus 14 equals zero. Man has nothing but a zero at the end of it all. Solomon had conducted an exhaustive survey of all the activities, employments and pursuits that God had given to man to occupy his time. He has just given us a catalog of these in verses 2 – 8. He concluded that God has made everything beautiful in its time. Or better, that there is an appropriate time for every activity. He is not so much thinking here of the beauty of God’s creation as the fact that every action has its own designated time and that in its time it is eminently fitting.”

Paul says in I Corinthians 13:12 – “For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part but then I shall know fully, just as I also have been fully known.

v. 12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.

John 10:10 “I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly.”

v. 13 That every man may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all is toil – this is the gift of God.

To be able to eat and drink and find satisfaction in work, this has to be a gift from God’s hand.

v. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so man will revere Him.

Oswald J. Smith put it this way: “The Savior can solve every problem. The Savior can lift every burden, the heavy as well as the light. His strength is made perfect in weakness, in him there is power and might. The Savior can strengthen the weary, his grace is sufficient for all. He knows every step of the pathway and listens to hear when we call. The Savior can break sin’s dominion the victory he won long ago. In him there is freedom from bondage, He is able to conquer the foe.

The Savior can satisfy fully the heart the world cannot fill. His presence will sanctify wholly the soul that is yielded and still.

The Savior can solve every problem the tangles of life an undo. There is nothing too hard for Jesus, there is nothing that he cannot do.”

Swindoll points out, “Now our problem is that we hold on to our problem. If your Swiss Watch stops working, you don’t sit down at home with a screwdriver and start working on it yourself. You take it to a specialist. What if you do work on that watch and then you take it to the specialist. ‘Sir, my watch stopped working.’ ‘Oh really, let me take a look at it. What in the world have you done to this lovely watch?’ The problem is that the Lord gets all the leftovers. We take all the mistakes and get thing tied into 19 granny knots then dump it into his lap and say, ‘Here, Lord.’ No, right at the first say, ‘It’s impossible. I can’t handle it, Lord. Before I foul it up it’s yours.’ He is able to handle it.”

v. 15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

Chapter 1:9 “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

1:10 Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.”

Romans 14:12 “So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God.”

II Corinthians 5:10 “For must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

v. 16 And I saw something else under the sun: in the place of judgment – wickedness was there, in the place of justice – wickedness was there.

Solomon now makes another observation, and that is that at the place of judgment there was wickedness; and in the place of justice, wickedness was also there.

I have a dear friend who was nearly killed in an automobile accident by a drunken driver. The authorities, because they were friends of the drunken driver, never placed a word on the accident report about his intoxicated condition.

v. 17 I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.”

Revelation 20:11 – 15 “And I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. And the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them and they were judged, everyone of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire – this is the second death – the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

v. 18 I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals.

J. Vernon McGee points out, “It is interesting to observe animal behavior with this in mind. I watched a family of little kittens. Believe me, they have no regard for each other. They played together all right but when food was given to them, they didn’t mind pushing one little fella out. The owner of the cats had to personally

feed that little kitten. His brothers and sisters would have been perfectly willing to let him starve to death. Don't they have any compassion? No. Their egoism is their philosophy of life. You see little birds in a nest acting the same way. Each little fella is taking care of himself. This is the viewpoint of the animal world. The reason man is beginning to react like an animal is because he is being taught in our schools that he is an animal."

The stress and the test will often reveal the heart as to its true condition, as to whether it is selfish or stable.

v.19 Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.

Just as the animal dies, so does the man or the individual. Just as one returns to dust, so the other.

v. 20 All go to the same place; all come from dust and to dust all return.

v. 21 Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

Philippians 1:23 "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."

II Corinthians 5:8 "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord."

All of these are thoughts and questions at mid-life that come to the individual.

v. 22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

The conclusion that Solomon reaches at the end of this particular study is that there is nothing better than for a man to enjoy his work which has been given to him because that is his lot. This is his portion which the Lord has predetermined for him. And then he concludes with the question: "For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?"

CONCLUSION:

Perhaps the area of greatest need for submission to the divine decrees is seen when we suffer.

Joni says, "My focus changed from demanding an explanation from God to humbly depending upon Him."

I remember coming across a book by C. S. Lewis called The Problem of Pain in which he dealt with that very problem. How could a loving God allow a world with so much pain and sickness? Everything he said was right on target but one thing especially hit home. He explained that in accusing God of not being loving many of us have taken just one aspect of love – kindness – and blown it up as if it were the whole thing. But what about the other aspects of love – the constructive criticism or correction or pushing a person to do his best. If by love we mean keeping another from all suffering or discomfort then God is not always loving and neither is the doctor who sticks a needle into the bottom of a crying infant. Before almost any

good thing can be achieved in our lives, we need to be broken. This involves losing our pride, bowing our wills and seeing our sinful selves for who we really are. Usually when we first enter God's family, we are full of brokenness. But like a poor man who stumbles upon sudden wealth, we soon forget the pit from which we were lifted. Bit by bit, pride and self-sufficiency seep back into our lives and, unlike our first few weeks with Christ, little sins slip by unchecked and ignored. To keep us from totally sliding back down the spiritual hill which we started to climb. God chastens us. When he does, we may think it's because he has given up on us and wants to trade us in on a newer model which will give Him less trouble. But the fact that he disciplines us proves we are his very own children, for a parent doesn't spank a child who isn't his. It also proves he loves us, for wise parents spank their children if they truly love them. Someday when we stand before God's throne to receive our rewards for the lives we have lived as Christians, imagine how glad we will be that God didn't just let us go our way with all our sinfulness while still on earth."

McDaniel in the book Stewardship of Sorrow says "submission is the other way. It is the triumph which comes when we lay our sorrowing soul at the Father's feet and accept what he sends. Knowing that it must be best for us since it is His way. Sure that one day it will all be made plain with no bitterness and no questioning but with serenity, saying, 'Even so Father, for thus it seemeth good in thy sight.' Billows of peace will sweep over the soul thus trusting."

Fenelon says the same thing: "I am saying this because I have noticed a tendency in you to talk about problems rather than abandoning yourself to God and leaving them with Him. And you will be better off both physically and spiritually when you quietly place everything in God's hands."

Watchman Nee says, "God's hand is upon you to break you, not according to your will but His. Not according to your thoughts but His. Not according to your decision but His. Our difficulty is that as God withstands us, we blame others. We react like that prophet, who blind to God's hand, blamed the ass for refusing to budge. So the reassures in the earthen vessel. But if the earthen vessel is not broken, who can see the treasure within? What is the final objective of the Lord's working in our lives? It is to break this earthen vessel, to break our alabaster box, to crack open our shell. The Lord longs to find a way to bless the world through those who belong to him. Brokenness is the way of blessing, the way of fragrance, the way of fruitfulness. But it is also a path sprinkled with blood. Yes, there is blood from many wounds. When we offer ourselves to the Lord to be at His service, we cannot afford to be lenient, to spare ourselves. We must allow the Lord utterly to crack our outward man so that he may find a way for his outworking."

Fenelon says, "When it comes to accomplishing things for God, you will find that high aspirations, enthusiastic feelings, careful planning and being able to express yourself well are not worth very much. The important thing is absolute surrender to God. You can do anything He wants you to do if you are walking in the light of full surrender."

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: There is a time for everything and a season for every activity.

LESSON #2: A man in mid-life is often found rebelling against the decrees of God's eternal purpose.

LESSON #3: God sees the total picture and is working everything in accordance with His eternal purpose.

LESSON #4: Cooperating with God's plan brings joy and fulfillment.

LESSON #5: God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked.

B. J. Thomas in his book Home Where I Belong describes his wife Gloria's salvation experience and then his own:

"Whether or not it would work, she didn't know. As always, she was willing to try anything. She had always been so self-sufficient. Little Miss Get It Done. Little Miss Handle It. He will had needed breaking and she had needed to see her own weaknesses. That was what the past few months had all been about. But she was ready for God now. There was nothing left of her old self.

Without telling Jim or Micah of her intentions, she drove home, telling herself, 'All right, you're going to try it. You're going to see what happens. Even though you've been down the aisle of more than a hundred churches trying to get saved and/or recommitted, you're going to give God a chance again.'

It shocked her that this decision was so attractive after all her similar attempts had failed. But there was something different about his. It wasn't religion. It wasn't trying. It was simply trusting Jesus Christ."

B. J. Thomas tells also of his own experience:

I've just recounted all of the old memories for you, at least the way I saw them through my clouded sensors, and I don't want to have to dredge them up again. It makes me emotional to think of the pain I inflicted, the months away from my wife and precious daughter...You can see, I want to put all that behind me. If this book helps in any way, then I'll be glad I got it down on paper, but for now, I want to look ahead.

I'm in my third year as a Christian and I never realized how beautiful life could be. I have new resources and perspectives for dealing with the little irritations (and the big ones) that come along. It's a struggle, but it's a lot easier when you remember what we have to look forward to.

This old earth is really pretty to a mind that's been cleared by the power of God, but when we leave here, we'll really be home. Home where we belong."