

ARE WE STUCK IN ENDLESS CYCLES OR IS THERE SOMETHING *More?*

THE SKEPTIC'S GUIDE TO LIFE WITH GOD: ECCLESIASTES · ECCLESIASTES 3 · JANUARY 21, 2024 · PASTOR MATT ERICKSON

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

The Seasons of Life (Ecclesiastes 3:1-14)

The range of personal and corporate experiences described
The limitations of human experience
The greatness of God

The Cycles and Struggles of Life (Ecclesiastes 3:15-22)

What we see in society:

- Cycles of struggle
- Justice and judgment not upheld rightly where they should be

What we wonder in our own lives:

- Are we just like animals?
- Or are we different?

What about God in all this?

- In the struggles and cycles of injustice, God will judge
- In the struggles and cycles of our own lives, God has still given meaning

An Aside About Life's Pattern: Cycles, Progress, or Something Else?

Life as cyclical (Eastern)

Life as linear progress (Western)

A different perspective in the Bible with 2 images:

- Like a tree
- Like seasons

Making It Real

How do you see your life?

What is the season of your life right now?

How might you be present and move forward with God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When have you experienced change in your life? Have you ever experienced change that felt like you were returning to something you had already faced in your life?

2. This week we continue our preaching series, "The Skeptic's Guide to Life with God," based in the book of Ecclesiastes. Whether you are on your own or with others, begin your study in prayer, asking God to speak to you, and then read Ecclesiastes 3 aloud.
3. How would you summarize the range of human experiences described in verses 1-8? What aspects of life, relationships, and society are discussed?
4. Which of these stand out to you based on how you are experiencing life right now?
5. In verses 9-14, how does the author describe human experience in relationship to God's providence over history and existence?
6. Which of these verses connects with you most profoundly?
7. The author grapples with the imperfection of our world in verses 15-17, specifically around the topic of judgment and justice. What does the author say and how does this resonate for you in relation to our world today?
8. Verses 18-22 offer a comparison and contrast between humans and animal life. What is similar and what is different?
9. What does the author decide is a good way to approach life on earth according to verse 22?
10. What is God speaking to you through this study? If you are with a small group, discuss that with one another and then pray about what you shared. If you are on your own, write it down, pray about it, and share this with someone during the next few days.

DIG DEEPER:

- Memorize Ecclesiastes 3:11 or 3:22
- Take some time to interact creatively with this chapter. Draw, ink, or paint Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. As you do so, pray through these verses and allow God to speak to you in a personal way about your own life.
- Using the following descriptions, consider what season best describes your life with God? Journal or pray about that. Consider talking with someone you trust about this question together.
 - Spring – the season of new birth or spiritual awakening
 - Summer – the season of spiritual strengthening or vitality
 - Fall – the season of spiritual surviving or decline
 - Winter – the season of emptiness or spiritual deepening
- Consider reading one of the following books:
 - Greg Boyd and Edward Body, *Letters from a Skeptic*
 - Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*