

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-3/ecclesiastes-39-13/>

Solomon reveals the foundation for the enjoyment of life: faith in God's goodness. When we treat the opportunities of life as a gift from God, we can enjoy all we do. Without faith, life is nothing but frustration. When we accept the mysteries of reality, we are free to trust God and enjoy life.

Solomon summarizes the *task* ([Ecclesiastes 3:9-11](#)) and counsels a response ([Ecclesiastes 3:12-13](#)). His question, "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" essentially repeats his opening question ([Ecclesiastes 1:3](#)). At this point, Solomon has explored two paths to find an answer. The first is the path of using reason and experience. He has already made it clear that reason and experience will not discover a satisfactory answer to the meaning of life. Solomon restates that lesson here. Although God has *set eternity in our hearts*, and created within us the desire to understand the meaning of life, humans will *not find* the answer to God's purposes through reason and experience.

Solomon expresses God's purpose with the phrase *the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end*. This is a poetic expression of the totality of God's design and purpose for creation. For history, for humanity and the human experience, for this age, and for all ages. There is a plan. God has made *everything appropriate in its time*. But our lot is not to discern that plan through our own experience and reason. We will *not find out* God's purposes through our own labors. The path to finding meaning and purpose lies in choosing a perspective that our role in God's plan is a *gift of God*.

What is our role in God's plan? First, God made each human to be a *worker*. One of the first things God did after creating Adam was to give him several jobs to do. God gave Adam the task of cultivating the garden. God also gave Adam the job of "keeping" the garden, to protect and steward it ([Genesis 2:15](#)). He brought the animals to Adam and had Adam name them ([Genesis 2:19](#)).

The expectation was that the work of humans would create *profit*. Food to eat. Clothes to wear. However, when Adam fell, work was cursed. It became *toil* ([Genesis 3:17](#)). *Toil* here is the translation of the Hebrew word

“amal,” which means troublesome labor. We must work hard to grow fruit-bearing plants, but the weeds grow by themselves.

God has assigned a *task* for *men* to *occupy themselves*. He has given us a desire to work and to seek understanding. If we seek to satisfy that desire through our own efforts, we will be chasing after the wind. But if we choose to view this assignment as a wonderful *gift of God*, we will enjoy life and find our purpose through faith in our Creator.

Solomon asks *What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?* One area of *profit* is to *rejoice and do good* in our *lifetime*. When we *do good* in our work, it brings *profit*, even though our work will be wearisome. The key is to *rejoice*. To live life in gratitude, seeking purpose and understanding with a foundation of faith.

The desire to know and understand God’s purposes was placed within us by God. He placed *eternity* in our *heart*. The Hebrew word translated *eternity* can also be translated “generations” “ages past”, “everlasting”, and “forever.” It carries the sense of spanning time from the beginning to the end of an age. We inherently want to know the meaning of all the events that take place within time and where we fit in. But Solomon concludes that *God makes everything appropriate in its time*. That includes the *time* for explanations.

The Hebrew word for *appropriate* is “yapheh” It is translated in [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#) as “fitting.” It can also be translated as “fair” or even “beautiful,” as it is in [Genesis 12:11](#) in describing Sarai as a “beautiful” woman. A significant aspect of beauty is proportionality. Harmony. Fit. Art and music are beautiful when the parts work together to reflect the theme assigned by its creator.

God is the Master Artist. He has *made* (worked) *everything appropriate*, or beautiful, *in its time*. All events are choreographed in His cosmic ballet. The heavens sing the score in perfect harmony to accompany the performance ([Psalm 19](#)).

There are three elements at play when Solomon observes the *task* of *toil* given to man. The first is that it is *appropriate in its time*. The second is that *eternity is set* in the human *heart*. This means that even though we are bound by time, we are aware of eternity. We are able to understand the limits of our understanding. A paradox, for sure, but an important one. Because the third element here is that *man will not find what God has done from beginning to end*. So, we know enough to know we cannot know fully.

We know that tasks are *appropriate* for their *time*, yet we are aware of such a thing as *eternity*, a reality not bound by *time*. An age beyond our age.

God is eternal and understands all things from a perspective we cannot have. God created us in His image. Part of that image is a desire to understand cause-and-effect connections and purpose that transcends mere time. God has *made us* with the yearning to know the significance of ourselves, and of our works and labors, as these may have effects that go beyond *time*.

This is Solomon's task, his grand quest. He set out to discover a key that would allow him to trace every given cause-and-effect relationship as God sees it, that is, "to put it all together." It is not a wrong desire; God Himself *has given* it to us. But Solomon concluded that it was ultimately unachievable from our efforts alone. It is only achievable when we look at life and the opportunities we have to labor in this life as a *gift of God*.

When we approach life, and all we do in life as a *gift of God*, then our labors on earth are no longer purposeless. They are still vaporous, mysterious, but they now make a certain paradoxical sense. For *there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and do good in one's lifetime*. Solomon gives us three examples that make it clear that this is a comprehensive statement.

Solomon's observation applies to *every man*. No one is excluded. Solomon's observation applies when anyone *eats and drinks*. That includes all the mundane necessities of life. Finally, accepting life as a *gift of God* allows any human to see *good in all his labor*. Solomon has, therefore, successfully included every activity of every person.

It is a *gift of God* to *eat and drink* and see life as a *gift of God*. It seems therefore that gratitude and faith are the foundation for successful living, while independently seeking purpose guarantees futility.

Solomon seems to suggest that God, the one who can understand eternity, has given us glimpses of purpose, joy, and meaning. These are *God's gifts* to us. This admonition to *rejoice* and enjoy life as a good gift from God is repeated throughout Ecclesiastes (see [Ecclesiastes 2:24](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:18-20](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:7-9](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:9-10](#)). There is *nothing better* than to live this way.

Life can and should be lived with a positive, joyful disposition—a glad disposition that extends to not only the mundane activities of taking our daily meals (eating and drinking) but to actually seeing the delightful aspects of

work, even wearisome labor. This is a perspective we can choose, if we begin with faith and gratitude. The alternative is to attempt to find purpose within our own strength, which results in the futility of chasing after the wind.

Biblical Text:

⁹ What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? ¹⁰ I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. ¹¹ He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

¹² I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; ¹³ moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.