

For everything there is a season...
and a time for every matter under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1



HOLY GHOST
— LUTHERAN CHURCH —

2017 Lenten Devotions
by the Holy Ghost Lutheran Family of Faith

A Time For Every Matter Under Heaven

The season of Lent has historically been a time of fasting, repentance, moderation, self-denial and spiritual discipline. The purpose is to set aside time for reflection on Jesus Christ - his suffering and his sacrifice, his life, death, burial and resurrection. In the early church this scope of time was used to instruct new converts to the faith who would then celebrate Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil on Easter Sunday, rejoicing in their new life in the church. Christians today continue to honor the traditions of the church along with a desire to grow deeper in our faith and closer in our relationship with God. Some will choose to fast, or give up something during this time frame, to reflect on their faith. Others will spend more time in prayer and reading God's Word.

This Lenten devotional is a tool to help you grow deeper and spend time each day with God. The focus this year is on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Solomon is considered the author of this collection of wisdom sayings. In these verses, Solomon reminds us that everything comes and goes at a time that God has appointed. We might say, these are things over which we have little control. Amid this rhythm of life, we are compelled to look to the one who alone can give us help and hope—our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we face various times and trials in our lives, may we find peace and comfort in the assurance of God's promises!

The following devotions are written by people whom God has touched in special ways through various times and trials in their lives. Their witness is a tremendous testimony of the promises we have through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May you be touched as you read them devotionally!

Pastor David Priem

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

A time to be born, and a time to die.

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.

A time to kill, and a time to heal.

A time to break down, and a time to build up.

A time to weep, and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn, and a time to dance.

A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together.

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.

A time to seek, and a time to lose.

A time to keep, and a time to throw away.

A time to tear, and a time to sew.

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

A time to love, and a time to hate.

A time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to be born, and a time to die

Ecclesiastes 3:2a

Beneath a chapel in Rome, there is the Capuchin Crypt, where the skeletal remains of thousands of Catholic friars who died in earlier days of the church are displayed. These friars were first buried, and then exhumed by their order and their bones displayed in the crypt. I found myself transfixed by a placard beneath one of the skeletal displays that read: "What you are now we used to be; what we are now you will be..." Though I knew that my time on earth was brief, this long passed friar gave me a concrete and sobering reminder of the inevitability of death.

As I reflect on my visit to the crypt, Solomon's words regarding "a time to be born, a time to die" come to mind. The "time to be born" makes me think of the wonder and joy of seeing a precious child take her first breath. However a "time to die" is much harder for me to think about. I can't help but think about how painful it was to say goodbye to loved ones and how much I miss them.

John records that Jesus wept because of the pain and grief that Mary and Martha experienced following the death of their brother, Lazarus. Christ comforted them by assuring them, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if He dies." (John 11:25). Praise the Lord that we have the promise of eternal life and are able to comfort one another with the reassurance that Christ gave to Mary and Martha. Though our physical bodies will die, we will live eternally with Christ. Furthermore, we don't mourn as those who have no hope of ever reuniting with loved ones. As believers we are promised eternal life and reunion with Christians who have gone before us. Though our physical remains will one day be like the skeletons displayed in the Capuchin Crypt, we are promised eternal life. And we'll never again experience the pain of saying goodbye to our loved ones when we are in our eternal home.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Rhonda Gross

Thank you Lord, for your death and resurrection that allows us to live forever with you in eternity. Amen

Thursday, March 2, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to be born, and a time to die

Ecclesiastes 3:2a

We so eagerly embrace times of a child's birth, or look forward to the new plants or flowers blooming, chicks hatching, or starting an adventure that originated as a dream. Through experience, we have witnessed countless times how God's ways are perfect and how He goes out of His way to make simple things spectacular and creative. So why is it we struggle so much with the "...a time to die..." part?

Death of a loved one, an unborn child, a favorite tree or plant, relationship, job, or even a dream brings us such sorrow. The sorrow can remain with us for a lifetime and these emotions are so uncomfortable and painful to experience. We have heard consistent stories from those that reportedly died and returned to life or those that are actively dying that tell us vivid details of visiting with loved ones that have gone before them—validating that there is some life beyond the one we are currently in. Yet, we still struggle with the "... time to die."

God sent His one and only Son to suffer and die for us so that we can be cleansed from sin and come live with Him, FOREVER! Jesus promised He was going to help prepare a place for us in Heaven and that it will be better than our lives here on earth. Just think, God created this most intricate masterpiece for us in 6 days. Can you imagine how amazing heaven will be since He has been working on it for nearly 2000 years?

Amy Montgomery

Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing us to be born and providing us with so many blessings. We know your plan is perfect and that you have a perfect time for everything to happen as it should. We are so grateful for your constant love during our times of hurt, pain, and fear. Thank you for sending your Son so that through Him, we will be able to be born again into eternal life and live in your Kingdom with you and Jesus and all the loved ones that have gone before us. Amen

Friday, March 3, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to be born, and a time to die

Ecclesiastes 3:2a

How cool is it that, even though he was a busy king, Solomon took the time to reflect and write about emotions and their opposites? How wise Solomon was to know there's a time to be born and a time to die! Dang! Who even thinks about thinking about stuff like that? Our Mighty God has **appointed** both the day of our birth and the day of our funeral! I was thinking there's **nothing** and **no one** who can take your life away before God says your days are finished . . . but then I think about my brother Joe, his 12-year-old son Simon, my good friend Barron, his brother-in-law Robert.

My mind reels and shuts down to think about these suicides. I wasn't going to go there . . . but I find myself here just the same. You are here with me. Right?

God didn't **want** that! He treasured them. He still had something valuable in mind for their lives when they decided to go. I think of the anguish they had to be going through, of a pained face twisted even after death. And I think if they had only **known** . . . if they had waited **one more day**, maybe just one more hour, they could have seen past the horrible problem, realized that it would be hard but it would be okay. I'm not being flippant or simplistic; I've been there; I've been close. I say, "Wait one more day – and **one more day after that!**"

Solomon knew we were going to go through this stuff. He wanted us to think about it too. He wanted you to **WAIT** until the day **God** has appointed for you! He wanted you to get past the pain. He wanted you to **live!**

Tammy Vitek

God, in those times when all we can pray is, "God," remind us of your Son, the One you appointed to die for us so we wouldn't have to. Give us the faith, the strength to wait and to live, knowing it will be hard, but it will be okay. Thank you, God, for the good days and many more to come. Amen

Saturday, March 4, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to be born, and a time to die

Ecclesiastes 3:2a

And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:7

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:46

Jesus' birth and death - 21 short chapters; 33 short years. How quick it went. All the travels and all the stories, everything he did, over in a flash. It makes me think about how fast my life is going by. Where am I? I'm older than 33 so maybe Chapter 36?

I remember my childhood and going in the pasture with my Opa, looking at deer and feeding the cows. Riding around in his rattly old pickup with the old Chlorox jug he carried for drinking water sitting on the floor board. He pointed out places of interest or where he saw a big buck last week. I can remember it as clear as yesterday.

And now look. I'm an Opa! And I'm taking my grandson in the pasture. But instead of an old pickup, we like taking the Mule. He can even sit in my lap and drive (sort of). I've shown him the cool place to play on the big rocks near the pipeline. We feed the cows. He already knows how to check if there is enough water in the storage tank at the windmill. He's growing up so fast. It makes me wonder how many chapters do I have left until the end of my story?

But that is the great thing about Jesus' story. It wasn't over in Chapter 23! There was another chapter. And the angel said: "*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*" Luke 24: 5b. Jesus died but didn't stay dead and we have that same opportunity. The apostle Paul writes:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
Romans 6:4

Doyle Moellering

Dear Lord, thank you for your Son's death and resurrection, so that we don't have to fear our final chapter here, but look forward to our next chapter in Heaven. Amen

Sunday, March 5, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted

Ecclesiastes 3:2b

My younger brother still farms where I grew up in Illinois. Around mid-March, when winter weather begins to settle into more sunny days, the planting equipment emerges from the sheds for maintenance. Fertilizers applied to the acreages are according to the seed and soil needs. The ground temperature rises to a degree for successful germination of the seeds. Finally, the massive tractor with its planter attached makes its way into the field to drop seeds into the prescribed rows.

The months following, the seedlings and plants face trauma of too much or too little rain, hail storms, insects, and an early or late freeze. When fall arrives, farmers begin checking for the proper moisture content of the grain. Grain harvested with too much moisture yields high drying costs. The proper timing for harvest is extremely important.

I've been reading about Nehemiah's call to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He recognized a calling from God and worked through many challenges to achieve God's goal. We at Holy Ghost have a unique opportunity to begin planting seeds through the ministries of our various properties. Any one of us could be inspired to develop a plan for presentation to the congregation, as Nehemiah presented his plan to the people of Jerusalem. We may find opposition and many obstacles may appear. If God has plans for us to bring more people to faith through our efforts, then we will reap the blessings of our labors. Like Nehemiah (2:20), we can say, "The God of heaven will give us success." Prayer and faith were Nehemiah's strength.

Linda Christensen

***Lord, guide us to use our gifts, our money, and our possessions to your great glory.
Amen***

Monday, March 6, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted

Ecclesiastes 3:2b

I was raised on a farm. This verse struck a chord with me because of my background. I was astounded growing up that my Dad would pursue a profession in which all your hard work could wash away in front of your eyes or be eaten up by a tiny bug. Instead of shaking his fist, he would shrug his shoulders and replant – looking forward to the next harvest. He knew that some things were beyond his control and that all he could do was ‘his best’.

I believe that we are encouraged in this chapter of Ecclesiastes to pursue God’s guidance in the actions we take and accept His timing of the results, trusting in the knowledge that He is with us at all times and in every season.

Mandy Herber

Father in heaven, give us the strength to trust Your timing in our lives. Amen

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted

Ecclesiastes 3:2b

As soon as I read this verse I thought of carrots. They are planted, allowed to grow, and then totally uprooted. We plant seeds all the time; a new job, starting a family, or any other major life event. When the carrot is ready, or in the case of a career, it is time for retirement, we pluck. But what happens when we don't think the carrot is ready and God says it's time to pluck it? Too often, we question His timing when we shouldn't. We won't ever know the right time to pluck up what is planted, but He always knows.

Instead of questioning His timing, we should appreciate it and willingly submit to what He has in store. There may be other fruits or vegetables that He wants us to plant.

One of my favorite verses, Jeremiah 29:11 reads: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Anytime I don't understand God's timing, I remember that verse. Even if we don't think it is what's best for us, He always has our best interest at heart. His plans for us are more wonderful than we could ever imagine and we must submit to Him and His plan wholeheartedly. There is a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. By accepting God's perfect timing, we can grow closer to Him and live His will each day.

Amanda Bush

Dear Heavenly Father, help me to realize that anything you bring into my life and anything you reveal to me is for my good. Help me to live out your will, in your way, with your timing, as long as I am here on Earth. Amen

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to kill, and a time to heal

Ecclesiastes 3:3a

If I am honest with myself, I realize I have many sins in my heart. Those sins, and/or the effects of those sins, creep out and spread anger and bitter words, unkind and immoral thoughts, criticisms, lack of understanding, impatience, etc.

But I also know there is power in the Holy Spirit within me to destroy those sins. This is a time to kill. These sins, left unchecked, swell into damaging proportions. Because I seek eternal life, I must attack them before they destroy me. I must meditate on the Word, call on the Holy Spirit in prayer and ask God to help me overcome the sin(s). Just feed them to the Scriptures and they die. We do not accept, settle, or compromise with sin. We fight and we kill.

Ah, but there is more to the verse...a time to heal. Through God's grace and Jesus' death on the cross we are allowed to heal from the repercussion of sin. I must stay in the Word, have a relationship with God, and pray, pray, pray. Redemption is a wonderful thing. "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." (Colossians 1:13)

This spiritual battle and the spiritual victory is ongoing but know that there is a time to kill and a time to heal.

Barbara D. George

Gracious God, help me, through Your Holy Spirit, to kill the sins that are destroying me. Help my heart heal in grace. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

Thursday, March 9, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to kill, and a time to heal

Ecclesiastes 3:3a

After loving a dachshund for 18 years, the time came to make a decision. Mobley was going blind, deaf, and she had a rupture. She was too old for an operation.

I sometimes work until midnight or go in at 5:00a.m. I could handle taking Mobley to the vet and putting her to sleep. What I couldn't handle was driving her over early in the day or late in the evening.

I carried her to the vet. He put her to sleep. I transported her to the ranch, buried her, and made a cross for her. Memories will be with me always as I heal.

Karen Immel

Dear Heavenly Father, give us guidance to do everything for your glory. In your name we pray. Amen

Friday, March 10, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to kill, and a time to heal

Ecclesiastes 3:3a

Through the years of prison ministry, I have heard many touching stories. Some have really made me realize how lucky I am. "He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber. Indeed, the Protector of Israel does not slumber or sleep. The Lord protects you; the Lord is a shelter right by your side." Psalm 121:3-5. Many of the men in white, (we call them that because they wear white), had no childhood, and many came from broken homes. Their parents often abused drugs and/or alcohol, which led to abusing their children mentally and/or physically. Most of the men in white have no idea what a "normal" childhood is like. I heard some have witnessed drug deals, gang fights, stabbings, shootings and much more, not knowing this was not normal. "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." First John 2:1.

When the inmates come to one of our Christian retreats, the first thing we do is give each one them a hug and introduce ourselves. On my first retreat one of the young men I hugged stepped back with a strange look on his face. I asked him if he was okay. With tears in his eyes he said he had never been hugged before. "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail." Lamentations 3:22. I could not even imagine what it would be like to never even experience something as simple as a hug. This took place on a Thursday morning, the first day of the retreat. On Saturday, the last day of the retreat, the inmates get a chance to stand up and say a little something about how the retreat helped them. This young man stood up and bared his soul. As a child his father would take him along while he did his drug deals. His father ended up killing someone, then was arrested, convicted, and given a death sentence. His father was executed in Huntsville just a few months before this retreat. With tears in his eyes he said that he wanted to change and not follow his father's footsteps. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." II Peter 3:9. With God now in his life he could make that change. "This God - his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." II Samuel 22:31.

Jim Parker

Good and gracious God, you work everything out according to your will. May we trust in you, that you are mindful of us everyday. Thank you for loving us so much. Amen

Saturday, March 11, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to kill, and a time to heal

Ecclesiastes 3:3a

In April 1862 President Lincoln said, "Slavery must die, so that the nation might live." When President Lincoln took office there had been strained tensions about states' rights and federal powers. This tension caused some states to leave the Union which caused major upheaval. The Civil War was the costliest war fought on home soil. Over 620,000 soldiers were killed and many more were severely wounded from both the North and the South. It devastated the south.

The ending to the Civil War is one of my favorite parts to teach my students. I set the ending scene to a very bloody, devastating war by describing the very tenacious, intelligent, and gentlemanly Generals Grant and Lee. I describe how General Lee was a proud man and did not want to surrender. General Grant, being an honorable man, wanted the healing of a great nation to begin that day. Taking no prisoners, he sent the Confederate soldiers on their way with Union supplies, food, and horses so that they may be able to restore their families and way of life. As the Confederate soldiers were leaving, the Union soldiers celebrated; however, General Grant rebuked the Union soldiers by saying, "The war is over; the rebels are our countrymen again."

Rhonda Eckert

Lord, I pray for all warring nations, soldiers, and their families. I pray for resolution, peace and the healing of your people. Amen

Sunday, March 12, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to break down, and a time to build up

Ecclesiastes 3:3b

Time and time again throughout the Old Testament, we see Israel's disobedience. We see how Israel turned away from God's commandments and spurned his decrees by worshipping false idols, ignoring His prophets and lacking faith in His promises. Perhaps after having had enough ill treatment from generations of His chosen people, the time came for God finally to break them down by dividing their kingdom and ultimately sending them all off into captivity.

Likewise, God, after having broken them down due to their disobedience and sin, restored Israel. He ended the captivity and allowed His people to return to the land He had promised them so long ago. The time to build up Israel once again had come.

In many ways, we are exactly like Israel in our continual sin and disobedience. We fall short of the glory of God repeatedly because we are mired in sin. We need God to break us of our sin and rebuild us in His image, renew our strength and zeal for Him and His commandments. There is a time to break down and a time to build up.

On this day, I would encourage you to think of a time in your life when you were broken by God and then rebuilt by Him. Perhaps the time for your breakdown is coming. Welcome it. It is from God. Then, look forward to His renewing of you in a way that will bring Him glory.

Reagan Grau

Heavenly Father, we acknowledge our need to be broken of our sin and our further need for You to rebuild us and renew us. We thank you for your willingness to love us enough to break us and build us back up into a person who may bring You glory. Amen

Monday, March 13, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to break down, and a time to build up

Ecclesiastes 3:3b

Some of us have, at one time or another, experienced a break down in our lives. It was either a death of a parent at a young age, an unexpected illness, or the death of a child.

It is a feeling than cannot be described when you are told that your child is no longer alive. The mind just does not function; you hear words but nothing makes sense. There are various agencies that need to be contacted: pastor, family, friends, but the absolute hardest is the funeral director. Pastors, friends, neighbors, and family gather to offer assistance which is so very helpful. After all have left to go to their homes, the house becomes so very quiet. "Why, why, why?" is all that can be uttered. No sleep, but then morning arrives. Services need to be planned, visitors come, food is brought to the family, but there is no desire to eat.

After the funeral, acknowledgement cards need to be written expressing thanks for all the beautiful flowers, memorials, and food brought to the family. It is also time to return to work and carry on a regular family life. All seems to be going as well as can be expected and then the holidays arrive. Certainly the birth of the Christ child will be celebrated, but gifts, tree, or decorations are put on hold; the family is not complete.

Slowly, day-by-day, it is back to a routine. Even though, with all the sadness, we are ever grateful for God's presence and guidance. Through all this, we are made stronger to face whatever lies before us. This is how it is possible to build back up: FAITH in God and believing in his promise that HE is with us; we are not alone.

Laverne Boos

Lord, give us strength to keep our faith in you in time of grief, to find joy in your blessings. Amen

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to break down, and a time to build up

Ecclesiastes 3:3b

There are different ways to think about this verse;

- breaking down an old house and building up a new, more sturdy one,
- breaking down bad habits and building up new, better ones,
- breaking down (hurting) a shoulder and through physical therapy building up the muscles and tendons to make it better
- breaking down bad relationships and building up communication for better ones.

This leads me to a situation that swimmers, as myself, have to deal with.

The time to break down is when you get disqualified in an event at a swim meet. You don't feel good about what happened in the first place, and then the coach will come and talk to you about it to let you know what you can do so it doesn't happen again.

A time to build up is when you can be a friend to someone who just got disqualified. You show her support, encouragement, and reassure her that it will get better. Sometimes we are the one who is on the end of a bad situation (either a disqualification, bad grade at school or another difficult time) and it is good to know there are people who will help build us back up with either a prayer or words of encouragement.

This is a wonderful way to show God's love and be his light, all the while being there for a friend when she needs to be built back up so she can do better in the future.

Amanda and Debbie Phelps

Dear God, thank you for helping us get through this past year and helping to build us up for a better year ahead. Amen

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to weep, and a time to laugh

Ecclesiastes 3:4a

My message: Don't waste your life waiting for "the other shoe to drop." Experience joy every chance you get!!

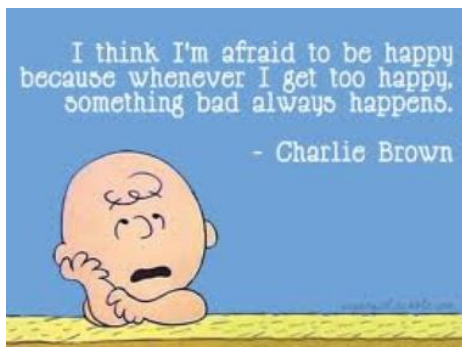
I learned at an early age that life is way too short. I lost all 4 of my grandparents and my Dad in less than 4 years. Then a few years later I almost lost my son to illness, followed by 27 years of worrying and "waiting for the other shoe to drop." It seemed every happy event in my life was always clouded with sad and fearful ones. I found myself constantly holding my breath waiting for the next bad event to happen. I feared happiness and joy because if I experienced it, I would then be cursed with more tragedy.

Recently, a friend of mine loaned me a set of Brene' Brown CD's. Brene' has done extensive research on vulnerability and has written several books on the subject. Here is what I learned from Brene':

"None of us are immune to bad times and tragedies. They will happen, no matter what, and while we are spending so much of our time worrying about the tragedy that is to come, we are missing many opportunities to experience joy and happiness along the way. If we put our defenses down and allow ourselves to feel joy and happiness, we will have many memories to carry us through the bad."

So now I am allowing myself to experience joy and happiness every chance I get. Life is way too short to squander away this wonderful gift from God!

Stacey Moellering



***Dear Heavenly Father,
Open our hearts to the Holy Spirit so that we can be filled with joy and happiness. Let us rest our worries on you. Help us to see that there is a time for weeping but also a time to laugh with happiness and joy. Amen***

Thursday, March 16, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to weep, and a time to laugh

Ecclesiastes 3:4a

On the last day of 2016, I attended a funeral of one of my mother's good friends and it was the best funeral I have ever attended. That may seem odd to you to say that is was the best funeral, but let me explain.

The service was an informal service held at the funeral home, where her son and daughter shared stories about their mother. Others were also invited to share their memories of her as well. Throughout the service there were many tears shed because she will be missed dearly. There was also a lot of laughter. It is hard to even think about laughing at a funeral because we all understand how it feels to lose those we love. It was a funeral, but more than that it was a celebration of her life. While on Earth she made an impact on everyone she met. When folks shared the moments that impacted them the most, it all revolved around the love and laughter she brought them.

Death is hard on all families whether it is a family member, friend or even a pet. Weeping seems to help wash away some of the sadness we feel. When my dad died in 1999 after a long illness, it took me years to find a reason to smile or even laugh even though I had a wonderful life. It was not until I read the book Room of Marvels that my way of thinking about death changed. The part that helped me the most discussed how we weep for our loved ones to come back. When we ask something like that, we do it for our own good without even stopping to consider if it would be good for them. At that moment, I knew my dad was watching over me and would not want me to continue to weep all the time. He would rather I laugh and enjoy the wonderful life the Lord has provided me.

Kim Wilson

Dear Lord, thank you for always being with us at all times. Continue to shower your love and grace upon us. Help us to live lives that always look to you in times of sadness and in times of happiness. Amen

Friday, March 17, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to weep, and a time to laugh

Ecclesiastes 3:4a

To be honest, I was moved to pick this scripture for a very personal reason. A little over a year ago, I lost my dearest, longtime friend in a tragic accident. Over the years we had shared so many memories, joys, sorrows and so much laughter! Through it all, she always had her feet firmly planted on the ground and her eyes on heaven, and never wavered in her faith in the Lord. Although I may always grieve the loss of my friend, there is such a comfort in knowing with certainty that she is in heaven with the Lord and all the loved ones she had lost on earth. Our God understands our sorrows and weeping. I am comforted by many scriptures. John 11:35: "Jesus wept." Yes, He cried tears over the loss of his friend, Lazarus, whom he loved. Isaiah 53:4: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." God gave us feelings and emotions. We rejoice, we mourn, we grieve and we celebrate, and we do this with Jesus as one of us. He understands our feelings because he experienced them while here on earth.

"What a friend we have in Jesus-All our sins and griefs to bear."

What a comfort it is and so a time to laugh and celebrate.

Jane Remmert

Heavenly Father, in our sorrows, losses and troubles, please hear us when we call out to you, and have compassion on us for the sake of your Son-our Savior, our Lord and our Comforter. We rejoice and thank you for all our blessings in this life, and may we always keep our eyes on heaven and you. Amen

Saturday, March 18, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to weep, and a time to laugh

Ecclesiastes 3:4a

A time to weep and a time to laugh... And those times can be surprisingly close. If you watch little children they laugh or cry with their whole hearts and can go from one to the other in an instant. There is in fact an inextricable link between joy and sorrow, for each defines the other. As C.S. Lewis writes "a man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."

Both joy and sorrow are gifts from God. The scriptures abound in declarations of the joy which may be found in Him. Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all **joy** and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." But because of sin, our own as well as the pervasive sin of the world, we must inevitably experience pain; and sorrow is how we should respond to sin. Isaiah 24:6 "Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;"

But because of His mercy, He will not leave us in sorrow. He provides both a relief from sorrow and a way out of sin. Jesus says in John 16:22 "So also you have **sorrow** now, but I will see you again, **and** your hearts will rejoice, **and** no one will take your **joy** from you."

Gil Becker

Lord, thank you for the gifts of laughter and of tears. Let us cry and laugh as the little children, holding nothing back, reveling in the true emotional release they provide when we are presented with the highs and lows which make up life in this world. And though we will weep with good reason, there will come a time when we will also laugh because we know the reason for the joy which is in us. Amen

Sunday, March 19, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to mourn, and a time to dance

Ecclesiastes 3:4b

Let's face it! Loss is not on the top of anyone's bucket list. No one relishes mourning. We avoid the mere thought of death. We have no idea what to say to someone who has recently lost a loved one. Loss leaves us, well... lost! Yet clearly, we will all mourn. No way around it – life and breath culminate in death. Fact is that these bodies gifted to us by our Creator have expiration dates. My father's expiration date came during the middle of the night, December 10, 2015. Jack successfully navigated the waves of life for 93 years. He lived a life full of adventure that took the shape of cattle ranching, serving our country, adoring my mother, loving his four children, and storytelling.

Recounting one's adventures, reminiscing one's heartaches, simply remembering our loved one in silence – each of these are avenues of mourning. Sometimes they bring tears. Thank goodness they do! Tears drench the soul in a shower of healing. Other times our memories bring a smile, a laugh, a reflection, even an introspection – how precious!

This autumn my siblings and I mourned together as we cleaned out our parents' homestead in preparation for selling. It was a lengthy, cluttered, difficult job. And yes, it was painful at times, but we weathered it together. We walked for those few days a little further along the path we call "mourning." In the end, it was an unexpectedly joyful and blessed time as brother and sisters.

Recently, David and I returned to check on the property. As I prepared to leave the place of my upbringing for the final time, I lingered in each empty room to reminisce. Upon exiting the house, I casually walked the grounds and replayed childhood and adolescent memories in my mind. As I stood under the vacant carport, my mind's eye flashed back to the evening I stood at that very place as a brand-new bride. I paused for a moment as tears gently moistened my cheeks, then I turned to go. It was at that instant, that my sweet husband began playing an old country tune that had been one of my dad's favorites. He gingerly grabbed my hand, twirled me around, and then and there, we danced.

Lisa Bullion

Gracious, loving Father, every detail of Your Word is truth. Every second of Your timing is perfect. May I both mourn and dance to your kingdom clock. Amen

Monday, March 20, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to mourn, and a time to dance

Ecclesiastes 3:4b

My grandmother, my Mema, died on May 2. She was my mom's mother and the times I spent with her as a child are some of my brightest memories. She could bake the best coconut cake around, she had incredible fashion sense, and the only thing she loved more than grandbabies and great-grandbabies was Jesus! While this is not the first time that I have mourned, experiencing this loss was particularly difficult. My sadness seemed more profound as I navigated this loss through the eyes of my own mom and my children. Following her death, it was a struggle to know how to talk about this with my kids. However, something we said must have made an impact. Just last week my 7-year-old came up, out of the blue, and said to me, "It's kind of good and kind of bad that Mema died." His words stopped me in my tracks. Trying not to sound surprised, and wanting him to continue, I asked him to tell me more about that. He said, "Yeah, so, it's bad because we miss her. But it's good because she's in Heaven with Jesus."

It is this kind of joy, found through mourning, that reminds me how important it is to celebrate life and the presence of loved ones in our lives, even when they are gone. For several months, the sounds of *Amazing Grace*, *In the Garden*, or *It is Well with my Soul* brought me to tears, as they did at her funeral. But now, after months have passed, I can hear these beautiful reminders and smile as I reflect on her life and the lives she continues to touch through her husband, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

In the words of an innocent 7-year-old, it is kind of good and kind of bad that Mema died. We have mourned and she is missed, but there is joy and dancing to be found in remembering.

Carrie Culpepper

Dear God, thank you for the comfort you provide as we mourn, and for the joyful reminders of our loved ones that bring laughter and peace through our tears. Thank you for the blessings you bestow during the times that we mourn and also when it is time to dance. Amen

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to mourn, and a time to dance

Ecclesiastes 3:4b

Even though its been almost 29 years since I received the phone call that my Daddy had been in a wreck, I remember like it was yesterday. I even remember what I was wearing that day - that is how life-changing a simple phone call can be.

Mom and I got to the hospital to learn my Daddy had a heart attack while driving a school bus full of children. The doctors were working on him. My mom was worried about the children, but luckily none were hurt except for a couple of bruises. The principal and superintendent came up to us and said how sorry they were. When we questioned what they meant, they just backed away. We were then ushered into another room where the doctor told us he had a fatal heart attack. He was only 61!

The following week went by in a blur - most of it anyway. By Saturday, the dam broke and I couldn't stop crying. I didn't want to see or talk to anyone. I wanted no comfort - I wanted my Daddy.

Over the next several months I got angry - really angry. I was mad at God. He took my dad. HOW COULD HE??? Being by myself was the worst. That's when the anger really surfaced. I let God have it. I cried. I yelled. I screamed and through it all God let me and just held me. He let me take my hurt out on him and just said, "I know, my child, it hurts. Just remember, I love you."

I still think of my earthly Daddy every day, but I know he's ok. I also know my heavenly Daddy will never leave me. My relationship with God grew that year and continues to grow stronger and closer every day.

Kim Jung

Lord, Your love fell so gently on my troubled heart until it formed an armor of strength about me that would protect me in the rough times. I give you praise and thanks for both hearing and comforting your humble servant. Amen

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together

Ecclesiastes 3:5a

Throwing away and gathering stones...who ever heard of that? How could it possibly be relevant in this day and age? And how did I get stuck with such an obscure verse? Why would anyone want to hear what I might have to say about it? These are just a few of the more acceptable thoughts racing through my mind as I approached the task of writing my devotional. So I leaned back on my favorite verse of Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will direct your paths.” So after praying this verse, here is the stream of consciousness that flowed in response: In my seventy-fifth year, I experienced the joy of watching my granddaughter’s testimony to the spiritual experience she enjoyed as a Holy Ghoster on the mission trip to Mexico. I was inspired by all the witnesses to the joy of living out the Gospel on this adventure, but I was also struck by the significance of our youth investing their time in the Lords work at this time in their lives. This investment was done before they have chosen a spouse, before they have had children of their own, and before they have watched their grandchildren grow into mature and capable young adults. Not just any young adults. But those overflowing with the Love of Jesus and knowing the Joy of serving others regardless of their material life situation. Knowing in the core of their being that this Love is God’s Gift to everyone, everywhere, and that they have the power to share it with others who have yet to experience its transformative power. After bumming a Kleenex from Sandy and regaining my composure, I chanced to talk with Norm Nevins (we share three of the same grandchildren). He observed that we must have had some pretty good genes. And now I have a better idea what this verse refers to. God, in his infinite wisdom, designed us to live, to find someone to share our life with. Then our genes, like stones, are torn apart. And only a very few are recombined in miraculous ways. Though our lives will end before long, new life is created so that others might know His timeless love. While the Psalmist likely thought little about today when penning this verse, I believe it was written for this very moment! What Joy might you share from your unique collection of “stones?”

Mike Birdlebough

Almighty and omnipotent God, I am humbled by the thought that you have created me with a unique heritage never to be replicated. Show me the path You would have me follow in this very moment to help build up Your Kingdom. Amen

Thursday, March 23, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together

Ecclesiastes 3:5a

You have probably heard many times the phrase "timing is everything."

Timing is important in cooking, if you want your food to taste good. Timing is important in medicine, if you catch a problem early, you will be able to treat it more effectively. Your timing is important in taking medication, if you want to feel better, timing is important for keeping schedules (clocks, alarms, calendars, etc.)

In Ecce 3:5, Solomon tells us that life is really a matter of timing, for timing is everything. A family might skip a vacation until they have saved the funds. A neighbor might put off going out to dinner to sit with her grieving friend.

Solomon makes a persuasive case for the brevity of life. "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven." (3:1) The key word in this section is "time" and it is used thirty times in 3:1-8.

Solomon implies that there is a good sense that one experiences by fitting into a given event at the right time. In other words, there is a sense of success based on appropriate timing—even if the activity, by its nature is not delightful. Again, timing is everything.

How are you spending your time: What priorities influence your choices of how you use your time?

Laverne Cuddy

Gracious God, You have gifted us with the gift of time. We pray that you would give us discernment to use that time wisely, not so that we can be noticed for our good works, but so that you may be honored and glorified- In His Name, Amen.

Friday, March 24, 2017

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...
A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together*

Ecclesiastes 3:5a

My freshman year at Texas A&M University was an eye-opening experience for me, a very naive fresh-out-of-high-school girl from a small town. I saw and experienced things I had never seen before, for better (Bible studies and worship services full of college students) and some for worse (seeing students who had too much to drink and were barely able to stand up). For the first time in my life, I could see there was a world much bigger than the one I had known growing up.

I soon became involved in a campus ministry to students and we had a huge support system of upperclassmen as well as adult advisors who were amazing mentors. I was truly able to experience fellowship in a way I had never seen before. It was so exciting to be amongst other believers, growing together, keeping one another accountable, and with a shared passion for the Lord. I really began to understand what the Bible meant when it spoke of "The Body of Christ" and how the many parts fit together.

All too soon, summer came and it was time to head back home. I found myself struggling to be consistent in my walk with the Lord without the support system I had found at school. It felt like a relative spiritual desert compared to what I had been immersed in for the previous school year, and discouragement descended upon me.

What a relief when the proverbial light bulb in my head went off...I had been so blessed to experience such growth and encouragement in my journey when I was together with so many other students who were believers. This time was vital and very productive. We "stones" had been gathered to build the Body, just as stones can be gathered to build amazing and strong structures such as walls and homes.

However, the time when I found myself scattered, as the stones are--taken out of the place where they have been, removed for the purpose of clearing the land for greater purposes--was also critically important to my growth. It was during this time that I learned to rely on the Lord as I never had before. I had to know-- *really know*-- that if it were just Jesus and me, He would be enough. It was during this time of being scattered that I learned that it wasn't about seeking His blessings....it was about seeking HIM.

Stacy Sander

Dear Lord, thank You for what you do in us during this time of gathering. Thank You as well for the times when we are scattered as stones, so that You can teach us that You are truly all we need. Thank You that you are faithful to use both of these times. Amen

Saturday, March 25, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together

Ecclesiastes 3:5a

In the Bible, stones have important symbolism. They were stacked by Jacob and Laban to symbolize a covenant. Jesus used a stoning as a teachable moment when he said 'let he who has not sinned cast the first stone.' Jesus himself was referred to as the 'cornerstone of the church'.

We think of 'throwing stones' as criticism, but it can also be a positive thing. A friend recently told me about his visit to the Holy Land with his spiritual mentor. Toward the end of the trip they decided to throw stones into the Jordan River to symbolize the release of the emotional baggage they no longer wanted to carry. The way his face lit up telling this story, it must have been the highlight of the trip of a lifetime.

Another friend recently sold her acreage, closing out an important chapter of her life. She would be parting with a lifetime of possessions, moving to a new community. I suggested she go to the pond on her property and have her own Jordan River moment, leaving behind the regrets that might have otherwise burdened her new life.

The sorts of stones to gather are the ones that teach us, and remind us of important people and things. The stones to throw are the ones that no longer serve us well; anger, regret, hurt feelings, shame. We might throw our stones from the rim of the Grand Canyon or the shore of a mighty ocean, or closer to home, from the heights of Enchanted Rock, the banks of the Pedernales, or the top of Cross Mountain.

Cindy Harper

Father, as we reflect on the stones we carry, we pray to wisely choose the ones to gather, and the ones to throw. Thank you for the faith that is our bedrock, and for Jesus, our cornerstone. Amen

Sunday, March 26, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing

Ecclesiastes 3:5b

When you hear the word embrace what do you think about? My first thought is a hug or holding a child. During my service in children's ministry, I was occasionally asked by a parent to hold their child – who is desperately clinging to them – so they can depart. In that situation you quickly understand the phrase “a time to refrain from embracing” as the child struggles to gain their freedom! But most often children find it comforting to be held. One little boy I know has sudden outbursts of love. He will throw his arms around me and say emphatically, “I love you!” and then go on about his business. These outbursts of love may hit him when he is close by or he may have to come rushing across a room or playground to enthusiastically deliver them. What joy they can bring. Sometimes I wonder if only a small child can get away with such outbursts of love, after all we are all God's children. Maybe He would be delighted if we shared His love with such abandon?

By participating in Lent, I can better appreciate and embrace the awesome and miraculous love God has bestowed on us through Jesus Christ: ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** Wow! Now is our time to embrace His love, Jesus sacrifice and the hope it gives each of us.

Sue Gustin

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and giving us the hope we have through Jesus Christ. Embolden us to embrace and enthusiastically share Your love with others. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

Monday, March 27, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing

Ecclesiastes 3:5b

To embrace can mean anything from a friendly hug to the kind of embracing intended for husbands and wives. To embrace can also mean to accept a concept completely, willingly, and enthusiastically. Who and/or what is God calling you to embrace?

2016 overflowed with change for my family. God sent a new season with purposes and timing that only He could orchestrate. Between May and July, we embraced a new state, community, ministry, home, job, and daughter-in-law! God has faithfully carried us through this abundance of transitions. Though it hasn't all been comfortable, we've grown in learning to embrace the plans He has for us. Knowing God's good character helps us to accept His call on our lives willingly. When we need a new attitude, we ask Him for that, too!

Refraining from embracing can mean setting apart time to be alone with God. Being a little bit lonely has its benefits! It reminds me to lean on the Lord, to listen for His voice, especially when I'm facing a major decision. Family and friends can be wonderful blessings, but a relationship with God is what being a Christian is all about! Reading in Psalms and Proverbs leads me to praise God and seek His wisdom. I suggest reading a chapter of Proverbs according to the day of the month, since there are 31 chapters. What might you need to refrain from embracing so that you can devote more attention to growing closer to God?

Grace Watson

Lord, we love you. Teach us to spend quality time with you and to embrace the times, seasons, and purposes You have for us. Amen

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing

Ecclesiastes 3:5b

Many commentators on this verse consider this embrace to mean only intimate relationships between husband and wife, while others expand the meaning to include actions between friends and relatives by way of touches, hugs, and kisses. With regard to husband and wife, love for one's spouse should determine whether the place, conditions, and timing for embracing is beneficial for strengthening and growing their intimate relationship in a favorable God pleasing way.

Some of us were raised in a culture where touches, kisses, and hugs were much more limited than our current culture practices. Hugging and kissing were much more limited and reserved for only those who were in close personal relationships. Men rarely hugged other men. Kissing in public was frowned upon. An embrace was reserved for special occasions or events in appropriate settings.

Embracing as an expression of love, concern, comfort, compassion, greeting, or mutual celebration of joy with another person is not a small thing. Being aware of what current culture accepts as proper, and more importantly assessing if your embrace will be received as proper by the recipient, will help you to give a God pleasing embrace that will build or strengthen your relationship. If not certain, a kind thoughtful word might just do just as well.

Lyndal Remmert

O Lord, our life is a collection of many opportune times to show our love and reverence for you and love and care for people we know and serve. Send your Holy Spirit to help guide our use of an embrace to serve your will and serve those who want or need that embrace. Amen

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to seek, and a time to lose

Ecclesiastes 3:6a

My husband and I set out on a scenic drive to Camp Verde along Center Point Road. I was looking at and remarking about all the beer and soda cans strewn alongside the road and in the ditch. We came to the top of a hill and as Gene slowed the car he said with awe in his voice, "Look at that view." I looked up and admired the breathtaking scenery – rolling hills covered with green cedars and live oaks off in the distance, bright blue sky overhead with puffy white clouds, a ranch house and pond down in the valley. I said, "Guess I should look up and not at the ditch."

And how many times do we look at the ditches of life instead of the beautiful view? Yes, it is hard to notice a lovely view when we are facing the ditches of illness, financial loss, ridicule, or depression. But God calls us to seek Him and to lose our doubt, our anxiety, our fear.

"If you seek Him, He will be found by you." I Chronicles 28:9 NIV

"...seek the LORD your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul." Deuteronomy 4:29 RSV

"Guess I should look up and not at the ditch." A good plan for life as well as a scenic drive.

(And kudos to those Holy Ghost members who pick up trash from the ditches as a community service project.)

Kathy Roberts

Gracious Father, thank you for your awesome creation. Forgive me when I look down on others, on circumstances, and on life. Help me to remember to look up and seek your presence, your glory and your perfect plan. Amen

Thursday, March 30, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to seek, and a time to lose

Ecclesiastes 3:6a

Recently one of my college-aged sons had a day trip planned. He would be traveling more than four hours from his campus to another campus for a job fair, and then returning the same evening. With both campuses being located in somewhat rural areas, the path between is not direct and includes several smaller back roads. The night before the trip my signature sin of worry set in. Wanting to control the situation, I picked up the phone several times to remind him to “drive safely,” “don’t text and drive,” “keep it under the speed limit...” all those things that he might not remember if for me not telling him one more time. But, knowing that my words of wisdom would not be well-received, I resisted. During the night I awoke several times with thoughts of his trip on my mind. Each time I thought to ask God to watch over him and to calm my fears. But each subsequent time I awoke, I was again filled with worry. When I woke up in the morning I realized how ridiculous I was being. I had sought God (over and over) and it was time to lose the worry.

Throughout the Bible, we are told to seek the Lord. In Matthew 7:7-8, Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms to ask, seek, and knock. He wants us to seek him at all times, and certainly when we are worried. But, there comes a time when we must move on. Our concern has been duly turned over and is no longer ours’ to carry. We must quit taking it back. Let go and let God. Lose it!

The words of Jeremiah 29:11-12 bring me comfort in my worry: “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen.”

Kim Gibbs

Dear God, help me remember to seek you at all times, but also help me to discern when it is time for me to turn over my concerns to you a final time and to lose the worry. Amen

Friday, March 31, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to seek, and a time to lose

Ecclesiastes 3:6a

Love and the Outcome, a Christian music group has a song that says: *A newborn cries, we say good-bye. Blink and life it passes. Chasing dreams, we break our wings but we'll just keep on dancing and You lead the way. You're my constant in the change; You are the color that never fades. Every season I go through brings me closer to You.* Working with Hospice patients and families puts me into contact with a lot of grief in response to the loss of a loved one. Someone once said, the person who died is not lost. We are lost without them. The writer of Ecclesiastes takes into account that part of our life: a newborn cries, we say good-bye. What helps the singer is that God is ever present and does not change even though our lives change and are affected by change. Job, who has lost most of what gives his life meaning, has not lost his faith. He says: (1:21) "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." This God who never changes loves you dearly. You know that because He sent His only Son to die for us. Our task is not only to believe that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, but to come to know Him and love Him. That can be your prayer. In the end as we gain or lose (NKJV), or as some translations say, search and give up (NIV), we know and love the One Who knows what tomorrow brings and Who will walk with us on this journey called life through joys and sorrows.

Alan Williams

Lord, help us to get to know you and grow in our love for you that we trust your companionship on our life journey, in Jesus' Name. Amen

Saturday, April 1, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to seek, and a time to lose

Ecclesiastes 3:6a

Many explanations of this passage point to having and losing wealth. God put material things on the earth for the use of mankind. He gave us talent and creativity to use these resources.

God doesn't mind if you have nice things as long as you are a good steward of these gifts and know these earthly valuables could disappear as quickly as they arrived and are only temporary.

A man called Job was a blameless, God-fearing guy who had received an abundance of wealth and blessings from God. Satan caused Job to lose everything. After proving faithful, God gave twice as many blessings back to Job.

During various stages of life, we must choose to let go and have faith. It may be at work, in relationships or during any number of major life changes. If we trust in God enough to risk loss, he usually shows up on the other side to reward and bless our decisions. Many times we realize the value of that decision later.

Jesus said it is impossible for man to get to heaven using possessions and riches. You can't buy your way into Heaven. Only by God's grace and believing in Jesus can anyone, and everyone, achieve eternal life. The Bible says that in heaven, the streets will be pure gold and the walls of the city will be adorned with every kind of jewel. Sounds like some day we will all be rich!

Robin Barnes

Heavenly Father, please guide me, direct me and help me to make good decisions and choices. Amen

Sunday, April 2, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep, and a time to throw away

Ecclesiastes 3:6b

If a day began by reading the Bible passage in Ecclesiastes 3: 6b, “a time to keep, and a time to throw away,” one might rise and begin to do a thorough house cleaning. During the Lenten season of 2004, my mind was nowhere near any such thought.

As a CASA (court appointed special advocate for abused and neglected children in foster care), I was immersed in preparation for a trial during which it would be determined by a jury whether or not the parental rights of two small children would be retained or terminated. There was an unexplained death of an infant sibling in the home. The home was in a small community. Some of the residents alleged abuse and neglect of the living children. No effort was made to verify this allegation. With the death of the youngest child, Child Protective Services (CPS) placed the older ones in a foster home. The court appointed me, a CASA volunteer, to be a voice for the children to assure a positive placement outcome for them. The parents hired a private attorney.

The trial preparation was contentious. Only the four year old obviously bright child was verbal, but had made no outcry of abuse. The parents’ attorney was by reputation ruthless. The children’s attorneys and CPS felt the case should be dropped due to lack of evidence. The unification of a family unit was always considered first. After many visits with the frightened children and review of evidence, I felt that in the best interest of the children, it was “time to throw away parental rights.”

Children are thought to have “no voice,” so an advocate was appointed. The attorney for the parents subpoenaed the oldest child to testify in court. A panel of all attorneys involved interviewed the child to determine his ability to identify the difference between truth and a lie. I was allowed to stay with him. He passed!

We went to trial. The child sat on my lap in the witness box. His parents sat right in front of him. He told the court that his father had sexually abused him. The child and I left the court room. The jury went into a short deliberation. Parental rights were terminated. Neither child would return to an abusive home. It was Good Friday. After court, I went to the foster home. The boy met me at the door shouting, “I won the case.” Indeed, he with God’s help, was able to “throw out,” the abuse in his life. He and his sister were kept as a family unit in a loving, Christian home.

Annette Sultemeier

I pray God that you continue to watch over our children so they may grow in grace, protected by your love. Amen

Monday, April 3, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep, and a time to throw away

Ecclesiastes 3:6b

To me, Ecclesiastes 3:6b has always meant hanging on to your possessions until closets, attic, and garage are bursting at the seams. The “throw away” part never comes to fruition because you just might need something in that closet someday.

But I now feel that there is more to this particular season and every matter under heaven. I know all of us have experienced a time of not being able to forgive someone who has wronged or hurt us. Or the forgiveness was a long time coming. We can hang on to that hurt for years, believing it is our right to not forgive. It is our time to keep that unforgiving nature. We can become obsessed with the effort to forgive, but the forgiveness is just not there.

Eventually we have a desire to be free of our hardened heart and be at peace. This is when we sincerely turn to God because we realize that we cannot accomplish this task alone. We have to ask God to change our heart so that we can more fully follow his Word – Matthew 6:14-15.

When our goal has been achieved, we know that it is “a time to throw away” that hardened heart. There is a passage in Anything by Jennie Allen “...to truly be able to forgive people who have hurt us must be one of God’s greatest miracles.”

Yvonne Holleman

Dear Heavenly Father, let those who find it difficult to forgive others be the recipient of that great miracle. Amen

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep, and a time to throw away

Ecclesiastes 3:6b

My wedding dress had hung in the back of my closet for years. The first years of marriage, we didn't have excess money to do that "preserving the dress thing" where the cleaners place it in a fancy show-through box. I did keep it nicely with a cleaner's bag over it; dusted off the bag frequently; admired it; and was realistic enough to know that no family member would likely wear the dress that I had picked out. But gosh, that sure was a pretty dress!

Fast forward ten years. I could afford the extra money to do the "preserve the dress thing." I paid for it. I admired how pretty it looked in the box when I picked it up. I put it back into my closet. I moved it around into a couple of different closets. I admired that dress every time I opened a closet; moved the box around. Shut the door.

For women, wedding dresses are very special. For most young women, their parents pay for their weddings. In our case, we were established business professionals and paid for our own wedding, albeit, on a dime. Perhaps a curious scenario, but my dress and veil, were a gift from the best man of our wedding. He was a dear friend to both of us. Unfortunately, he passed away young; perhaps another reason I kept moving that dress around.

One day, I was working with one of my senior clients. She had just returned from volunteering at a place called Threads of Love. She passionately explained this 501(c) faith-based ministry sews and makes items for premature babies. In the unfortunate event babies pass away, bridal gowns are used to make burial garments and linings for handmade wooden caskets.

I couldn't get home fast enough to load that dress into my vehicle and deliver it.

In retrospect, I feel so silly for the emotion attached to that dress; but many of us tend to be that way with whatever we perceive to be our treasures.

Threads of Love is located on the campus of Oak Hills Church in San Antonio and has satellite ministries, including one in Fredericksburg. www.threadsoflovessa.org

Kathleen Jacoby

Loving Father, please help us to remember that everything, everything, comes from you. Help us to remember that earthly things will go away. Our treasure is with you, Lord. Amen

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to tear, and a time to sew

Ecclesiastes 3:7a

As a little boy in the 1940's I caused my mother to often give serious consideration to whether it was "a time to tear or a time to sew." Money to buy a new pair of pants for the pair whose knees I had just eliminated completely was not an easy thing to come up with, particularly when she knew that, whether these were repaired or whether they were replaced, the same question would soon arise again as I came home after another hard day of playing with the knees again totally wiped out. So, as a general rule, it was "a time to sew" and she would give the britches a good washing and then spend time sewing up the gap or sewing on a patch. This would go on until the surrounding fabric would be of insufficient fiber to hold another thread or patch. Then it became "a time to tear." But this "tearing" was not simply a job of destruction, because the ripped up fabric from these pants then became the rags for heavy duty wiping around the house. Everything had its purpose, much as God has a purpose for everything that goes on in our lives and around us. Sometimes lives are damaged, but only to an extent that allows them to be mended by the application of minor acts of recognition or discipline. However, at other times the brokenness can be of such a magnitude that the evil must be torn completely away and a totally new direction must be given to salvage that life. The tearing is not easy. However, God is there to answer whether this life can be saved by mending or whether it must first be torn apart. Only He can provide the direction and strength to move forward in the manner required.

Bill Petmecky

Dear Lord, when we are faced with a broken life in family or friends, bless us with the knowledge to know whether the problem is one that can be mended or whether it requires first tearing apart the underlying causes of that problem. Then Lord, give us the strength to move forward as you would direct. In Jesus name, Amen.

Thursday, April 6, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to tear, and a time to sew

Ecclesiastes 3:7a

Turn, turn, turn

The Byrds released Pete Seeger's classic song, *Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season)*, on my birthday, October 1, 1965. Taken nearly verbatim from the Bible, the song reached #1 on the Billboard music charts, and melodically framed the choices we face every day.....

Turn, turn, turn,

"a time to tear, and a time to sew"

Turn, turn, turn

As a dermatologist, I've faced this dichotomy countless times. Is it time to tear (cut, remove, treat, intervene), or is it time to sew (soothe, heal, repair, leave alone)? With time, I've come to appreciate the necessity and importance of these two options. A surgeon's typical mindset is "a chance to cut is a chance to cure," and in many cases, that's the only chance a patient has. In other instances, however, a surgeon must "sit on his (or her) hands," use discretion and forbearance, and not intervene. The hard part, derived from education and experience, augmented (by the wise surgeon) through prayer, is to recognize the time for each option. After all, we're told, "there is a time for every matter under heaven."

I don't see advice in these verses from King Solomon, but I do see wisdom. It's a "big picture" look at the choices we face every day. It's the reassurance that we're not blazing new trails here; rather we're playing our part, with God's presence and guidance (if we seek it). Don't worry. Take action when called for (tear). Show restraint or a spirit of reparation when called for (sew). And do this with the knowledge that we're carrying out our roles as intended.

Turn, turn, turn

Mike Majors

Dear God, Thank You for Your Wisdom as we face our choices, and make our decisions. Help us to remember that You are with us as we do so, and we need only read (or listen to) Your Word to receive Your Guidance. Amen

Friday, April 7, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to tear, and a time to sew

Ecclesiastes 3:7a

Lent is weird. We go from the happiness of Christmas, to the strange in-between of January, to the depression of this pre-Easter season. Why do we do this to ourselves every year? Why think about our sins when we could celebrate our forgiveness? It's almost masochistic.

Lent is weird, but it is necessary. Without it, we would never remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. We would never turn our heads to thoughts of His torn and tattered body upon The Cross. Without it, we would live in a world where grace comes to us like bubble gum at a cash register: a quick impulse purchase without weight or meaning.

There is a time for tearing...A time for slashing, for breaking, for rending. For our Savior, that time was on The Cross at Golgotha, when His hands, His feet, and His side were split open for our sins. For us, it is Lent whenever we confront our sins. We fall to our knees, cursing our own selves and the bad things we've done. We rip ourselves apart because we know in our bones that we are undeserving, that we alone are not enough and will never be. This is our time of tearing.

Even with all this grief and sadness, we do not despair! The sorrow may last for the night, but Joy comes in the morning! The time of tearing is followed by a time of sewing! Our Savior has bought us at a price, and we now celebrate! Our souls are stitched! Our hearts are mended! Our hands are washed! Our sins are gone!

Engaging fully in the Lenten season is to fully understand why it's so needed. When we take time to confront our blemishes, the purifying Grace is that much sweeter.

Daniel Hofmann

God, help us use this time of Lent to quietly reflect on our sins and Your grace, to truly take in the significance of what you have done for us through your Son. Amen

Saturday, April 8, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to tear, and a time to sew

Ecclesiastes 3:7a

All of the verses for this devotional speak about the importance of timing. Different things are important at different times. To me this particular verse talks about a time for things to come apart and a time to mend back together. As a quilter, I start with a whole piece of fabric or several of them. It is important to find the straight grain of the fabric so the end product lies flat and doesn't ripple. This is done by tearing across the fabric. The tear will always then be on the straight grain. The fabric then gets cut into small pieces and is then sewn back together to make something much greater, more beautiful and stronger than the individual fabrics.

I think God works like that in our lives. Sometimes we get "rippled" or a little "wonky" and God tears us in a way that straightens us up. It may be an illness, death of a loved one, an argument, a rude person or a hurtful comment that gets us sideways with God and with others. At those times we may unravel a bit and need some mending. When we trust and ask God to help us, he will give us the words or the situations that will straighten our grain and strengthen us so we can mend what needs mending in our lives. The finished product, then, is more beautiful and stronger than our original building blocks.

Sandy Birdlebough

Dear Lord, you who made all the pieces of the world, thank you for sewing them together so perfectly. Help us see your pattern for our lives and follow that pattern as you want. Amen

Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak

Ecclesiastes 3:7b

People have become too sensitive these days. Comics have quit performing on college campuses because their humor is “insensitive.” Talk risks one being called a racist, judgmental, etc., in our politically correct culture, yet “trolls” verbally assault others on the internet and social media.

Words have power. After all, God spoke the universe into being. Demons are cast out, and people are healed by them. James talks about how untamed the tongue is: we have domesticated all sorts of animals but not the human tongue, a tongue steers a person like a ship’s rudder, and my favorite, “A mouth cannot bless and curse at the same time like a spring cannot give freshwater and salt water.”

Silence has power. In a moment when someone should speak-up, we say “the silence was deafening.” When someone is hurting or grieving, a silent hug can say “I know,” “I understand,” or a myriad more.

Those last days before Christ’s crucifixion prove interesting. On Palm Sunday Jesus said that if the crowd was quiet even the rocks would shout out. Christ carefully chose silence and speech during his “trial.” The Romans had authority over executions so he spoke to Pilate. But because they had no authority, Christ met Herod and the High Priest with only silence, except when he was forced by oath of the high priest. The words “I am” from Jesus’ mouth caused a violent response. “I am” was the name of God, too holy to be spoken.

Craig Sander

Lord, be with us and guide our thoughts and help us to manage our tongue to serve you. Help us to know what needs to be said when, and how, but also when to be silent. May we say neither one word more nor one word less than is your will. In Christ’s name we speak, Amen.

Holy Monday, April 10, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak

Ecclesiastes 3:7b

Occasionally my mouth gets me in trouble, because either I don't speak when I should or do when I shouldn't. I struggle with this more than I can say. Once words are out, you can't take them back. This applies not only in times when I have said something wrong, but sometimes no matter how much I think it through it sounds better in my head than in the air after it escapes my lips, even when it is meant to be good.

Sometimes saying things helps me to understand myself as well as others. Other times, I know that what I have to say needs to be said, but it won't be well received and most likely put down. In those times I don't say a word, and usually wish later that I had. Speaking the truth, or what I perceive to be the truth, is often greeted with opposition whether I am right or wrong.

They hate him who reproves in the gate, And they abhor him who speaks with integrity. Amos 5:10

Finding that balance of when to speak and when to keep silent is always a struggle of mind, heart, and spirit and requires much help from the Holy Spirit as a guide.

Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time. Amos 5:13

This doesn't mean we should never speak. Instead we should weigh our words carefully with much soul searching and prayer so that when we do feel moved to speak, it may be on the behalf of the Holy Spirit and the Lord.

Here ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you. Jeremiah 10:1

Ginger Burow

Lord, may we ever be mindful of your will in our lives, that we may be obedient to it in all we say, so that our words may be Yours and not our own. Let us hear your still small voice and allow it to guide us. In Your name we pray. Amen

Holy Tuesday, April 11, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak

Ecclesiastes 3:7b

When I was a child, my Dad would say, “children should be seen and not heard.” It seemed to always come at a time when I was asking; *why*, or *what*, or *how about* something. Of course, I never understood what that meant at the time. My dad was a patient man, but I’m sure as a child I likely pushed the limits from time to time.

As I have aged and now have adult children, I finally realized what my father’s quote really meant. The focus (no matter if you’re a child or an adult) is that sometimes, it is better to listen than to speak. As a parent, I need to listen more than I speak. Their view should be important enough to me that I just “listen.”

Every person, young or old, needs to be heard. When we listen to others, we are putting their needs above our own selfish needs. Listening is a form of expressing love. Christ always expressed love and I think he was a great listener. In the fourth chapter of John, Christ knew everything about the Samaritan woman at the well, but he still asked the woman questions and then let the woman share her story. Why? I think it was in part to make a connection. Christ listened to her story, then shared the good news... “Jesus answered her, ‘everyone who drinks this water will become thirsty again. But those who drink the water that I will give them will never become thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give them will become in them a spring that gushes up to eternal life.’”

Today, quit talking so much and work on being a “good listener.” Try to hear more than you say. You will convey that others’ needs are more important than your own. Work on sharing God’s love with everyone you encounter today. You never know what others might need, but God has a plan. So remember; “it’s better to be seen and not heard.”

David Bullion

Lord, may I be a good listener today. Help me to listen more than I speak. Allow me share your love with someone in need so that they might know you better. Amen

Holy Wednesday, April 12, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak

Ecclesiastes 3:7b

The Lord tells us there is a time to keep silent. Think about that statement. Wouldn't it be much better if we would hold our tongue when we are angry or when we are having a heated argument? If we would keep silent and consider carefully what the other person is saying and where they are in their life at that particular time, instead of closing our mind to their words and ideas. After all, God gave us two ears and only one mouth, He must have intended for us to listen more than we speak, especially when it is *'time to keep silent'*.

The Lord also tells us there is a time to speak. I have had moments when I knew I should have spoken and didn't. A time when a friend was hurting, when I should have offered to pray with them. There have been times when I felt I missed an opportunity to tell someone about God's Amazing Grace and what a difference Jesus Christ has made in my life. Perhaps I failed to visit someone who is lonely and read to them from God's word, or tell them I am praying for them. These are times we are to *speak...* after all we are the messengers of Jesus Christ in our world today.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer." Psalm 19:14

Nan Hengst

***Heavenly Father, give me the ability to keep silent when it is appropriate, and the words to speak when I know I should, and the wisdom to discern the difference.
Amen***

Maundy Thursday, April 13, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time to love, and a time to hate

Ecclesiastes 3:8a

Love and hate. As Christians, we tend to have a positive view of the former and a negative view of the latter. Yet, we often refer to both emotions in a flippant manner. “I love to watch football” or “I hate spinach.”

Is it always right to love something? Is it always wrong to hate something? Can we love something too much? Can we hate something too little?

How much do we love football? More than we love our family? More than we love our fellow Christians? More than we love God? If we love our hobbies and our possessions more than we love God, then we have turned our hobbies and possessions into idols.

Love can come in various forms: romantic love (eros), brotherly love (philos), and finally agape love. A healthy church is built on agape love. In John 21, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” After Peter answers in the affirmative, Jesus replies, “feed my sheep.” This is agape love. We are called to exhibit agape love as we equip each other to spread the Gospel. Without agape love, the Church will be weakened by the forces of evil that seek to destroy it.

How much do we hate spinach? More than we hate sin? More than we hate false teachings? More than we hate evil? Are we willing to renounce spinach to a greater extent than we are willing to renounce the Devil and all of his empty promises?

As members of a fallen humanity, we are born into sin. Without Jesus, we cannot escape it. We cannot save ourselves from it. Lying, cheating, stealing, immorality, hubris, narcissism, and a host of other sins come naturally to a fallen humanity. Yet, as Christians, we should hate these things. We must reject them, renounce them, and turn away from them. Romans 12:9 states, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, cling to what is good” (NIV).

Robert Elder

Lord, help us to discern what is right and what is wrong. Help us to speak truth and denounce falsehoods. Help us to love our families, our church family, and you more than we love our earthly hobbies and possessions. Help us to renounce sin, the Devil, and all false teachings. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Good Friday, April 14, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time for war, and a time for peace

Ecclesiastes 3:8b

When I read this verse, it brings so many different thoughts to me. War and peace can be within ourselves, our minds and our bodies. We can have war and peace in relationships between our family, friends and neighbors. We can have war and peace within our own country, between nations and the world, as well as between humans and nature.

People have been at war throughout time. What is so important to people that drives them to forgo peace and to go into conflict? It is the need for control and valuable possessions for those who are immoral, have greed, and have hatred for others. These will always be at the root of war. At times, war is necessary, but we must work hard at living in peace with others each day. God's people need to ask for the wisdom to know when to withdraw and when to fight.

Peace on Earth. It sounds so wonderful and we pray for peace all the time. I wonder if it is hopeless to pray for peace within such a sinful world? Peace on earth could be achieved, if all people obeyed God, and believed, loved and followed Jesus. Is this realistic? Probably not, but should we give up praying for this? Absolutely not, God loves peace. We as Christians should continue to pray for peace and peacemakers and spread the good news of Jesus Christ and his great love for us.

True peace of heart and mind is available to us through faith in Jesus Christ and true peace comes from knowing God is in control. We will have peace on earth, when Jesus Christ, the Messiah, returns to earth to bring justice and peace to his people.

Kathy Boos

Loving God, We pray for all those in conflict. Lord, let us continue to look to you for peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Holy Saturday, April 15, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

A time for war, and a time for peace

Ecclesiastes 3:8b

Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes states there is a season for every purpose under heaven. The last purpose listed is “a time of war, and a time of peace.” Jesus has said that we will hear of wars and rumors of war until He returns. (*Matt. 24:6 and Mark 13:7*)

We consider war a terrible occurrence, so why does the scripture teach us that there is a season or purpose for war? Sin is in the world and history shows us that there is a time when war is morally necessary, as we learned in World War II for example.

Fortunately, the scripture also teaches us that there is a time for peace. We all know that at the time of Christ’s birth, the angels proclaimed “on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” (*Luke 2:14*) In John 14:27, Christ tells us, “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you ---.” Even though we live in a troubled world, the Lord promises peace.

We should pray for peace. Psalms 34:14 directs us to “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and preserve it.” “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of their troubles.” (*Psalms 34:17*)

There will be seasons of war (trouble) in our lives, but the Lord will give us seasons of peace if we are faithful and seek his guidance.

Sandra & Norm Nevins

Dear Lord, we know that evil surrounds us and that there will be difficult times. Help us to be a part of the season of peace in your name. Amen

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Rise and Shine!

The Lenten journey began by distributing purple bracelets that all were invited to wear *everywhere*—church, work, the gym, school, parties, downtown, HEB, bed, and even in the shower (Yes, they are waterproof!). The inscription on the bracelets simply reads: *“A Time for Everything!”*

It served as a way for us to be reminded of 1- God, as we go about *“everything”* that a day or week can hold for us, and 2- to give us opportunity to point others to God when they may inquire about what the bracelet you’re wearing means.

We now have arrived at a new time in our Lenten journey—*a time for Resurrection!* The time which God had planned from the very beginning of time for the salvation of sinners! Yes, resurrection time means it’s time for us to..... *“Rise and Shine!”*

When I was a kid, almost every single school morning my day began with me semi-waking to the footsteps of my Dad coming down the wood floor hallway toward my bedroom. His hard sole shoes offered a *“clump, clump, clump”* as they then paused at my bedroom door, and he would softly, but firmly pronounce, *“Rise and Shine, Bobby! Rise and Shine!”* I would immediately cover my head with the pillow, but would eventually roll from the rack, dress and head to meet the new day.

In this new time of living on the resurrection side of things, our Heavenly Father bids us to *“Rise and Shine, Christian! Rise and Shine!”* And in faith, we rise from our rest or restlessness to meet the highs and lows, the good and bad, the happy and sad—and *everything* in between that life may issue.

And further, this Easter time is about *“Rising and Shining”* in the things that we have possibly gone to sleep in: our marriages, parenting, obligations, work, Bible reading, worship patterns, financial giving, serving, and being joyful over the fact that we have been forgiven and our eternal fate with God is set!

This is now the season in which we enter—the *“time for everything”* in which God will be foremost in our lives, leading us to *“Rise and Shine!”* Yes, Christian-- it’s time to *“Rise and Shine!”* Amen? Amen!

+Pastor Bobby Vitek

Heavenly Father, I know that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that lives in me. So give me faith to let this resurrection power lead me to “rise and shine” in “everything” that I experience! In Christ’s name, Amen!