

HE HAS MADE  
EVERYTHING  
APPROPRIATE  
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HAS ALSO SET  
ETERNITY IN  
THEIR HEART.

ECCLESIASTES 3:11A

# PURPOSE

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## OF THE HEART

### DATE

August 8-9

### WEEK

10 of 10

### OVERVIEW

Ecclesiastes 3

### KEY VERSE

Ecclesiastes 3:11a

## SETTING THE STAGE

Throughout the summer we have looked at the Story of Purpose as it pertained to various aspects of life. In Ecclesiastes 3 Solomon writes about the extremes of life reminding the reader that there is a purpose to everything under heaven. We have looked at the purpose of different things over the last few months. Whether we are looking at the purpose of work, home, community, freedom, or valleys, it all comes down to the heart of the matter.

The heart is the most vital of all physical organs as it pumps blood to the entire body. Without the heart doing what it is designed to do, the other organs in the body have no chance of accomplishing their purpose. The purpose of the heart is to give life to the body. If the heart does not fulfill its purpose; if the blood ceases to be pumped throughout the body the result is death.

The heart is just as important in the spiritual side of life. We are to love the Lord with all of our heart. The heart is the core of our being both physically and spiritually. Proverbs 4:23 says, *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.”* Solomon realized the importance and significance of the heart both physically and spiritually. The heart represents life. The physical heart represents that which is temporary. The spiritual heart represents that which is eternal. In the passage today we will see that when all is said and done, it all comes down to the heart of the matter and the matter of the heart.

### LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Purpose of the Heart in the Past
2. The Purpose of the Heart in the Future
3. The Purpose of the Heart in the Present

### THINGS TO KNOW

- People tend to follow their hearts spiritually, emotionally and physically.
- Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).*

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# PURPOSE

## OF THE HEART

### Introduction

If you read through a book on leadership or business, there is typically a section in the book that talks about the vision of the leader and the purpose of the business. If we are honest, most of us want to read the secrets of vision but we skim through the chapter on purpose. We attribute the practical “secrets” of someone’s leadership or the magic of a company’s business success to what they do. We want to read about their unique selling point, how they saw around the bend to corner the market, or the timely business connection that they made at a networking dinner. Rarely do we desire to read about the why and their purpose. But if you were to sit down with any great leader, businessperson, or entrepreneur they will tell you the most impactful thing in their life is the purpose, the why they do what they do.

The purpose of the company or business is what ultimately drove that leader to develop a unique selling point. Purpose motivated the long hours to research the market for them to predict what was coming around the bend. Without purpose, the methods would be impotent and the strategies would be ineffective. Knowing your purpose dictates what you do, how you do it and what sets you apart from the competition.

This does not just affect the business world but the importance of purpose sweeps across every arena in life. Purpose convinces new moms to push through new levels of exhaustion. Purpose drives the man on the treadmill to run an extra mile. Purpose motivates the missionary to leave his home and risk his life to share the Good News. Purpose drives the medical school student to wake up early and study just a little bit more because someone’s life might depend on it. Purpose leads the elementary school teacher to spend extra time and extra money developing her lesson plans because the future generation depends on that educational experience. Purpose dictates what you do and how you do, life.

In the spiritual realm, understanding purpose transforms our devotional life. In his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney writes, “discipline without direction is drudgery.”<sup>1</sup> When we understand the purpose behind spiritual disciplines it changes our mindset from mere duty to devotion. Knowing the purpose of prayer revamps our understanding of the task. It changes prayer from talking to God to being with God. Knowing the purpose of reading God’s Word, changes our mindset. We no longer view it as reading through a checklist, but as a way to know the heart and mind of the Living God.

Today as we look at the book of Ecclesiastes we will see what God’s Word has to say about the purpose of our hearts. God as Divine Author chooses to show us our purpose, not in specific narrow corridors; instead, He paints broad strokes to cover the purpose of every human heart that has ever beat. When we think of our heart, we typically think of the muscle in our chest that pumps blood to our body. Perhaps when we hear the word “heart” we think about our emotions,



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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Nav Press, 1991.

predominantly love. When the Bible mentions the heart it typically is referring to the entirety of a person; the seat of the mind, will and emotions. It encompasses the totality of a person's life.<sup>2</sup> What we are going to discover in the book of Ecclesiastes today, is God's purpose for our whole life is placed in our hearts.

God uses the human author, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, to unpack the purpose of the heart most uniquely, through the lens of time. When Billy Graham was 64 years old, somebody asked him, "What is the greatest surprise in your life?" Dr. Graham responded so poignantly, "The brevity of life." Time has a way of passing quickly, but as it passes it profoundly reveals purpose.

Let us look at Ecclesiastes 3.

## 1. THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART IN THE PAST

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**ECCLESIASTES 3:11A** *He has made everything beautiful in its time.*

One of my favorite apps right now is Google Photos. I like it because it protects all my pictures by uploading them to "the cloud," automatically. This photo app is eerily smart, it will let you search through your photos for just about anything. You can look for a particular individual. You can search by location to pull up a trip that you took this past year. You can search for flowers or all of your food pictures. You can even search for those pointless firework pictures you take on the fourth of July and New Year's Eve. It's remarkable! One of my favorite features in the app is "Rediscover This Day." The app searches through your photos over the past several years on that date and pulls up all the photos. There is something beautiful about looking back and reflecting on what God in His providence has led you **through** as well as what He has led you **to**.

One of the reasons we are nostalgic is because when we look at the past, we have a better understanding of how the Lord has taken the tattered threads of our lives, and masterfully woven them into a beautiful tapestry of His grace. We can agree with Solomon and look back at the past and say, "*He has made everything beautiful in its time*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11a). For the Christian, reflecting back on our journey is not an exercise to pat ourselves on the back and applaud our own resolve, strength, and creativity. When we reflect on our journey, we should pause in awe of how good God has been to us.

Our hearts emotionally have the unique ability to recall the past and find a deep purpose. When we were going through difficulties, heartache, and pain we often perceived them as stumbling blocks to where we wanted to be. We viewed the difficulty as an obstacle that impeded our progress. Reflecting on the past confirms that God was not using our difficulties as stumbling blocks but as stepping stones to where He wanted us to be. What we thought of as obstacles that were impeding our progress turned out to be opportunities for personal growth to take place.

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Standing in awe of the hand of God shaping the purpose of our past is not a difficult concept for us to grasp, because it is familiar, and we often do it. Solomon moves to a much more difficult realm of purpose regarding our future. He transitions from reflecting on past experiences to investing in eternity.

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<sup>2</sup> William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*. Zondervan, 2006.

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART IN THE FUTURE

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**ECCLESIASTES 3:11B** *Also, He has put eternity into man's heart.*

The “General Social Survey” questions 50,000 people in America and asks questions about religious preference and life after death. In 2014, the results showed that 80 percent of the people surveyed said they believe in life after death.<sup>4</sup> Yet we know from day to day conversations that many are asking the question: what will happen to me when I die? What will eternity hold for me? Solomon tells us that God has put eternity into man's heart, and even Believers wonder exactly what happens after we take our last breath. Eternity for those who trust in Jesus brings the thought of great comfort, but for those who have not trusted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, it brings great anxiety. Puritan Pastor, Thomas Watson said, “Eternity to the godly is a day that has no sunset, eternity to the wicked is a night that has no sunrise.”<sup>5</sup>

Weddings illustrate the great anticipation of what Christians will find in eternity. On January 14, 1632, Samuel Rutherford wrote a profound letter drawing close parallels between the Christian's anticipation for Heaven and a bride's anticipation on her wedding day. He writes, “Our love to [Christ] should begin on earth, as it shall be in heaven; for the bride taketh not by a thousand degrees so much delight in her wedding garment, as she doth in her bridegroom.” No matter how beautiful the bride's dress might be she does not walk down the aisle gazing at her dress; instead, she sets her gaze toward her groom. For Christians, this is the reality that we live in. As we walk through this present world, we set our gaze toward our Heavenly Groom in eternity.<sup>6</sup>

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The purpose of our heart is eternal. Everything that we do as Believers should be done considering eternity. Life on earth is brief, yet eternity can be determined by the decisions we choose to make in this life. When we recognize this incredible truth, it re-purposes how we spend our time. Eternity is too long and too permanent to be wrapped up in surface-level pleasantries. The weight of eternity moves us to ask probing questions and to exhort others to live for Christ. The weight of eternity in our hearts drives us to love others deeply. Eternity re-purposes our finances. Investing in eternity prevents us from being wasteful with the resources God has given us. Instead, eternity urges us to invest in advancing the Kingdom of God, to wring every drop of our finances to spread the Good News of Christ, and to point others to God's glory with our lives.

Christians are to live with an eternal focus. Everything we do should filter through the lens of “how will eternity be impacted” by our lives. The Apostle Paul writes to the Church at Corinth encouraging them to endure the temporal for the sake of the eternal. He writes to them saying,

**2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18** *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (ESV)*

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<sup>4</sup> Maggie Fox, “Fewer Americans Believe in God - Yet They Still Believe in Afterlife,” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 10 Feb. 2017, [www.nbcnews.com/better/wellness/fewer-americans-believe-god-yet-they-still-believe-afterlife](http://www.nbcnews.com/better/wellness/fewer-americans-believe-god-yet-they-still-believe-afterlife).

<sup>5</sup> Martin H Manser, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> John Tweeddale, “Eternity in Our Hearts.” *Tabletalk*, Ligonier, 17 Sept. 2018, [tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2018/09/eternity-in-our-hearts/](http://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2018/09/eternity-in-our-hearts/).

Living for eternity does not promise a life of comfort. In fact, Paul calls it affliction. But it does promise great value!

Jonathan Edwards famously said, “Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs!” His prayer is that he would be conscious of the reality of eternity and his life would be impacted by its weight. God has purposed our hearts to live considering eternity. We are like the bride walking down the aisle on her wedding day, not caught up with her garments but focused on her future with the groom who pledges his love to her.

### 3. THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART IN THE PRESENT

**ECCLESIASTES 3:11-13** *Yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them to be joyful and do good as long as they live; also, that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God’s gift to man.*

Solomon tells us that our hearts should rejoice in God’s work in the past. He tells us that we should live with a sense of purpose for the future and then he moves to what we should do in the present. Solomon tells us that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil — this is God’s gift to man. In the Creation narrative, as God looked at His creation repeatedly, He stepped back and declared it “good.” God looked at all His toil and work and enjoyed it. Since we are made in the image of God, we have the unique ability to enjoy our lives. To take pleasure in the present. This is one of the distinguishing factors of humanity: the ability to enjoy the richness of life.

When the well-known British preacher, William Sangster was diagnosed with progressive muscular atrophy and could not get well, he made four resolutions for the rest of his life:

- I will never complain.
- I will keep the home bright.
- I will count my blessings.
- I will try to turn my disease to gain.<sup>7</sup>

Sangster’s goal was not to be positive for the sake of being positive but to focus on all the good gifts that God allowed him to receive, despite his disease. These are all practices that each of us can put into place daily. We recognize that everything we possess in life is “God’s gift to man.” Often, we do not enjoy the life we have, because we believe that we deserve to have a better life. But the message of the Bible tells us that what we truly deserve is hell and death (*Ephesians 2:1-3*). Anything a degree better than Hell is a gift of God’s grace and we should enjoy it. The Book of James tells us that “*every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*” (*James 1:17, ESV*).

This is so antithetical to the way our culture thinks about life. So many people view their life as a purposeless grind. They go throughout their week miserable and moping like a human Eeyore, pessimistic and characterized as gloomy. Work is a grind. Family is a grind. Our spouse is a grind. Keeping up with friends is a grind. The message of this chapter in Ecclesiastes is that life is not a grind, it is a gift from God. If Christians are going to represent Christ to the world, they cannot go throughout life like Eeyore and expect to

**If Christians are going to represent Christ to the world, they cannot go throughout life like Eeyore and expect to draw people into the Kingdom of God.**

<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied: Looking for the Answer to the Meaning of Life: OT Commentary, Ecclesiastes*. David C Cook, 2010, p. 56.

draw people into the Kingdom of God. The world does not need to see Christians who view God's purpose for their life as enduring the misery of the grind. The world needs to see Christians who are enjoying the wonder of God's gifts.

We get to enjoy the taste of hot coffee in the morning. We get to enjoy a cotton candy colored sky as the sun rolls down in the evening. We get to enjoy the company of our family. We get to enjoy our health. God has given us the gift of our jobs as a means of provision in life and we should enjoy that. We live in a segment of history where we have access to more information at our fingertips than at any other time, we should enjoy that. Every hug we receive, each smile that is given, every meal that is served is a gift from the kind and generous heart of our Heavenly Father.

## HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The Book of Ecclesiastes shows us that without God at the center of our lives, life is meaningless. It is vanity. Throughout the book, Solomon compares life to trying to catch the wind. But God transforms a vain life into a life of purpose. With Christ at the center of our lives, the past is not merely a series of events that happened to us. The past is an archive of God's grace toward us. We see that with Him nothing is wasted. The broken pieces are transformed into a beautiful purpose.

When we commit our plans to the Lord and keep ourselves fixed on eternity the future is not daunting, it is exhilarating! To know that everything we do in this life can reap dividends in eternity brings joy. It is refreshing to know that God's love toward His children allows us to enjoy life. Our heart's purpose is to be in awe of God. To fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man (*Ecclesiastes 12:13*).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism was written in 1648 to teach new converts to the Christian faith core truths about Christianity. The Catechism is a tool that asks questions and gives biblical answers to the questions. The beginning of the Catechism asks the question, "What is the chief end of man?" It succinctly answers "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever and ever." Eternity has been placed in our hearts, giving us purpose each day and for all the tomorrows.