

## **ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8**

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 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.

## **MATTHEW 5:43-48**

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy; but I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.

## **BE YOUR PURPOSE**

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**  
**Matthew 5:43-48**

There's an old joke about three umpires in a bar. The first one says, "They're balls and there're strikes, and I just call 'em as I see 'em." The second umpire, trying to top the first, says, "Well, there're balls, and there're strikes, and I just call 'em as they are." Finally, the third umpire speaks the Truth and says, "There're balls and there're strikes, but they ain't nothin' till I call 'em."

How do you call the events of your life? Ecclesiastes makes clear

that we are going to see everything under heaven during our time on this earth. And Jesus too alerts us to the fact that our Heavenly Father makes the sun rise and the rain to fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous. There are going to be joyful times and there are going to be catastrophic times. No one is exempt from either. So the question isn't whether we will experience any of this, but how we respond to it. As the third umpire said, these events aren't anything until we call them.

Given this reality, when we are enduring severe emotional or physical pain, we have all at times raised existential questions about the purpose of life imagining that ending our existence is a viable alternative to continuing to live in this state. In fact, I would surmise that many of us have at one time or another at least thought about suicide. Most of us did not follow through. I didn't, but I sure thought of it when more than once when circumstances in my life went topsy turvy. Fortunately, I was old enough to logically understand that I could get through this and that I had the power to make my life better. I knew the difference between striking out and hitting a foul ball. There are at-bats when you just have to fight off a pitch you cannot put into play.

Not everyone has the spiritual maturity to do that. Adolescents in particular do not have the life experience to understand this. One group in

particular—those who experience gender identity conflicts—are at high risk to actually attempt suicide. The LGBTQ community is extremely vulnerable. Not only are they struggling within themselves about who they are, they experience condemnation from conservative religious entities, often too from their own families and their own classmates who may bully them. And now numbers of state legislatures are intent on passing discriminatory laws which seek to protect the public from them. Did you know that a full 40% of adolescents who fit this profile have seriously considered suicide? And I swear I do not get these hateful discriminatory attacks on people's personal lives which are no one else's business. In fact, correct me if I'm wrong, but do we not in this country enjoy freedom of personal expression within the confines of the law? What are these legislators afraid of? Can't you understand how the pressure you are imposing upon these young people lead them to wonder if non-existence wouldn't be less painful? There are times when we have to fight for ourselves. There are times when we have to affirm who we are, warts and all, and resist not only the negativity directed at us from others, but the judgments we have cast upon ourselves. There are indeed balls and strikes but who is making the calls? If someone else makes the call, we become their slave. The only way we can live authentically is to accept

who we are. We will strike out at times—it goes with the territory--but we must also move on and get ready for our next at-bat. As Nelson Mandela said, “Do not judge me by my successes. Judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up.”

Standing in our way from getting back up is often drowning in a puddle of self-pity. “It’s not fair!” we cry. But that’s a child’s response to disappointment. It labels their experience from an egoistic perspective and all it does is intensify their pain. In a sense, they are exclaiming that life is against them. Fairness has moral implications and assumes that God does not, in fact, make the rain to fall on everyone—just me. And that then raises the question of “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” Just asking those questions—to which there are no answers—sets up a blockade to moving on. Perhaps the question we need to ask is, Why Not Me?

The issue lurking beneath this dilemma is identifying what we believe to be the purpose of life. If life has no purpose, then what is the point of going through all of this? The Ukrainian people have been forced to grapple with this question. The Russian invasion has literally torn apart their country and their lives. It’s not fair! What did they do to deserve this? If they stay in that space, Russia will win the war. But no, their

ability to shift their focus to a higher purpose is what will eventually lead them to victory. It's exactly what Winston Churchill did when Great Britain was being devastated by German bombing. The Battle of Britain alone lasted over three months and claimed more than 40,000 British lives. Churchill however, placed his attention on positives and changed despair into hope.

Jesus answers this question for us in this brief section from the Sermon on the Mount. Not only does he identify love as the purpose of our existence, he calls on us to take it to the next level: *If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?... And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?...Be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.* We are not God, of course, but Jesus says that we need to continually grow toward spiritual maturity. And if we love only those who love us and care only for our friends, we have stalled in our growth. The early church was at constant risk of persecution so that loving one's enemies set a high bar for them. Indeed, but if love is the purpose of our lives, it can exclude no one.

The sun is going to shine and the rain is going to fall. We have the opportunity every day to make the sun shine on someone else even if we are standing in a puddle. Know why you are here. Be Your Purpose!

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