

Chapter summary – Ponder these quotations from two famous professors: “Why shouldn’t things be largely absurd, futile, and transitory? They are so, and we are so, and they and we go very well together.” That’s from philosopher George Santayana, who taught at Harvard from 1889 to 1912.

“There is no reason to suppose that a man’s life has any more meaning than the life of the humblest insect that crawls from one annihilation to another.” That was written by Joseph Wood Krutch, professor of English at Columbia University from 1937 to 1952.

Both of these men were brilliant in their fields, but most of us would not agree with what they wrote. We believe that something grander is involved in human life than mere transitory existence. We are not like insects. Surely Dr. Krutch knew that insects have life cycles, but men and women have histories. One bee is pretty much like another bee, but people are unique and no two stories are the same. You can write *The Life of the Bee*, but you can’t write *The Life of the Man* or *The Life of the Woman*.

If we as individuals are not unique, then we are not important; if we are not important, then life has no meaning. If life has no meaning, life isn’t worth living. We might as well follow the Epicurean philosophy: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”¹

The argument in this section revolves around the repetition of the word “time” in 3:1-8, 11, 17 and other repeated phrases such as “I have seen” or “I saw” (3:10, 16; 4:1), “I know” (3:12, 14), and “I thought” (3:17-18).²

Let's play "Let's Pretend."

Let's pretend that your banker phoned you late last Friday and said he had some very good news. He told you that an anonymous donor who loves you very much has decided to deposit 86,400 pennies into your account each morning, starting the following Monday morning. That's \$864 a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year.

He adds, "But there's one stipulation . . . you must spend all the money *that same day*. No balance will be carried over to the next day. Each evening the bank must cancel whatever sum you failed to use."

With a big smile, you thank your banker and bang up. Over that weekend you have time to plan. You grab a pencil and start figuring: \$864 times seven equals over \$6,000 a week . . . times fifty-two. That's almost \$315,000 a year that you have available to you if you're diligent to spend it all each day. Remember, whatever you don't spend is forfeited.

So much for "Let's Pretend."

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COMMENTARY:

¹ Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Logos Library System.

² Walvoord, and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Logos Library System.

Now let's play "Let's Get Serious." Every morning Someone who loves you very much deposits into your bank of time 86,400 seconds of time-which represent 1,440 minutes-which, of course, equal twenty-four hours each day.

Now you've got to remember the same stipulation applies, because God gives you this amount of time for you to use each day. Nothing is ever carried over on credit to the next day. There is no such thing as a twenty-six-hour day (though some of us wish there were). From today's dawn until tomorrow's dawn, you have a precisely determined amount of time. As someone has put it, "Life is like a coin. You can spend it any way you want to, but you can spend it only once."

One of the most fascinating (and, I might add, *frustrating*) of all subjects is this four-letter word *time*. It's amazing. We all have the same amount of time. Whether we are penniless or whether we happen to be the richest person on earth, whether we are young or old, single or married, employed or without a job, an adolescent in school or the President of the United States of America-we have exactly the same amount of time.³

CRONOLOGY OF TBE MAJOR EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11

Approximately 8:50 a.m. American Airlines Flight 11, a Boeing 767 with 81 passengers, 9 flight attendants and 2 pilots aboard, headed from Boston to Los Angeles crashes into the World Trade Center, the northernmost of the twin towers.

Approximately 9 a.m., a second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, a Boeing 767 headed from Boston to Los Angeles with 56 passengers, 7 flight attendants and 2 pilots strikes the World Trade Center, the southernmost of the twin towers.

At 9:38 a.m. American Airlines Flight 77, a Boeing 757 with 58 passengers 4 flight attendants and 2 pilots, heading from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles, crashes into the west side of the Pentagon, where about 20,000 people work, including most of the nation's highest-ranking military officials.

At 10:09 a.m. the World Trade Center (the southernmost tower) collapses.

At 10:30 a.m. the World Trade Center (the northernmost tower) collapses.

At 10:42 a.m. United Airlines Flight 93, a Boeing 757 with 45 people aboard headed from Newark, N.J., to San Francisco, crashes in Somerset County, Pa., ---*Source: abcnews.com*

Can we say that there is ever a time for those kinds of events to take place?! A Job experience for the United States.

Solomon [argues in chapter 3] that God has appointed a time for everything (3:11), even for injustice (3:16-17) and oppression (4:1-3). All this is part of the eternal (3:14), immutable (3:14), inscrutable (3:11) providence of God which renders a person's selfish toil profitless (3:9).⁴

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³ Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, p. 67

⁴ Walvoord, and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Logos Library System.

III. In Solomon's search for an answer to his question, he reflects upon his observations, (Ch. 3:1-6:12)

1. SOLOMON FIRST GIVES A PROPER VIEW OF EARTHLY ACTIVITY, (3:1-15)

1) Its various and divinely appointed events, (1-8)

(1) God determines the events of our lives, (1)

INTERPRETATION:

¹ **To everything** (that takes place under the sun, upon this world), **there is a season** (a divinely appointed duration of time at), **a** (divinely appointed point in), **time for every purpose under heaven**, (for every activity on the earth):

F APPLICATION:

This alone teaches us a couple of things, one is that there are seasons of life like there are seasons in the year, (spring, summer, fall and winter). The seasons of life could be labeled as birth, childhood, school, young adult, college, work, marriage, child rearing, empty nest, retirement, death—or—joy, boredom, fear, trials, failures, victories, testings, worry, broken heartedness, sickness and health. Each of these earthly events comes **AT** a divinely appointed point in time and lasts **FOR** a divinely appointed duration time.

Another thing we learn from this principle of life's events is that there is order in these events that instills reassurance. The God of the universe has created a stable universe where there are secure patterns to our daily circumstances and situations. The daily events that take place in our lives "are not human accidents; they are divine appointments."⁵ What divine appointment is taking place in your life right now?

(2) Examples of how God determines the events of our lives, (2-8)

² **A time to be born** (a time to come into this earth), **and a time to die**, (a time to leave it—neither of which you have any control over [but like all of the other matters that will be listed, both (being born and dying) are of divine importance. Neither your birth nor your death is any accident. They both occur at exactly the right time]); **A time to plant** (which is in the spring, not the fall), **and a time to pluck what is planted**, (which is in the fall, not the spring—both of which you have no control over)—(there is also a time to grow where you are planted and a time to move on to new soil);

³ **A time to kill** (to take life through capital punishment, self-defense, or by plagues), **and a time to heal** (to recover or end the plague); **a time to break down** (an old building, bridge, fence,

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etc.—or a person, a family, a church, a nation, a business,

⁵ Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Logos Library System.

etc.), **and a time to build up**, (a new building, bridge, fence, etc.—or—to put the person, family church nation, business, etc. back together again new and better);

⁴ **A time to weep** (there is a time for pain, tragedy, loss, crisis, separation, sorrow, loneliness, fear, hurt, etc.), **and a time to laugh** (a time for shouting for joy, celebrating an event, having a good time with a friend, to tell a joke, or exercise a good sense of humor, etc.); **a time to mourn** (the death of a mate, child, sister, brother, parent, grand parent, friend, neighbor—or even mourn the death of a dream like a business venture, career, friendship, marriage, or sinful action), **and a time to dance** (a time to kick up your heels, to play, to skip about, to have a good time);

⁵ **A time to cast away stones** (that are undesirable like those found in your yards, roads, paths and fields—[some say its a time to throw stones in judgment, but you would gather and throw then]), **and a time to gather stones** (when they are desirable when you are building a bridge, house, barn, dam, fence, sheepfold or memorial);

"Darling, I read your new book yesterday. I loved it. Who wrote it for you?" To which he replied,

"I'm glad you liked it. Who read it to you?"

a time to embrace (a time to be encouraged and to encourage, to love and be loved, to find compassion and show compassion, a time accept forgiveness and to forgive, a time to be affirmed in a friendship and a time to affirm a friendship, a time to say hello as well as good-bye), **and a time to refrain from embracing** (a time to express an offense to an offender, a time to express some painful but necessary truths with someone, a time to allow healing to take place, a time to just be alone, a time for prayer);

⁶ **A time to gain** (get a bargain, make good on an investment, make more investments), **and a time to lose** (a time to miss a sale, lose on an investment, or lose some other opportunity [some people translate this verse this way, "There is a time to buy a bargain at a garage sale, and there is a time to sell it at a better bargain at your garage sale. =]);

A guy who had been trying to get a young woman's attention said to her, "If you would give me your phone number I would give you a call."

She replied that it was in the phone book.

"Good," he said. "What is your name?"

"That's in the phone book, too," was her reply as she walked away. (The guy wanted to gain, but the woman wanted to lose.)

a time to keep (what you have), **and a time to throw away** (what is no longer useful or useable);

⁷ **A time to tear** (to rent ones cloths in grief or repentance), **and a time to sew** (a time to sew them back together or sew new ones); **a time to keep silence** (not say anything, keep your thoughts,

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comments, criticisms, to yourself—whether because of the timing, your attitude or motive), **and a time to speak** (a time to voice your thoughts, comments, criticisms);

⁸ **A time to love** (a time to reach out and touch someone and to love all that is good around us [acts of grace, mercy, compassion, kindness]), **and a time to hate** (a time to separate from others and to hate all that is evil around us [acts of injustice, prejudice and partiality]); **a time of war** (a time to go to the battlefield to stand against evil), **and a time of peace**, (a time to make, enjoy and maintain harmony).

2) The purpose in the execution of these various and divinely appointed events, (9-15)

(1) The question of their profitability, (9)

⁹ (Solomon has now stated the principle concerning human events and has given some examples that illustrate it. His point is clear as crystal. Man is locked into a series of divinely appointed events that he cannot select, reject or control. No amount of human effort can change the seasons of events that God has determined for us. Solomon thus asks a question.) **What profit** (or advantage then), **has the worker from that in which he labors** (Good question! What good is it then to try to control your future, to try to be in charge of your life, to try to be in control of your activities and experiences? What does a person get for all of his self-effort, working to the point of exhaustion, wearing himself to a frazzle—as he tries to arrange and control his destiny)? God makes both the rich and the poor.

F APPLICATION:

Did you have plans for your life that did not come to fruition? Plans that involved your career, marriage, friendships, children and home. The changes are very likely not your or your mates fault. It's just the way life under the sun works.

Proverbs 16:9—A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. (Robert E. Lee always said after planning an attack, "*God's will be done.*")

Proverbs 19:21—There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand.

Proverbs 20:24—A man's steps are of the Lord; how then can a man understand his own way?

Jeremiah 10:23—O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

What can a man promise himself from planting and building, when that which he thinks is brought to perfection may so soon, and will so surely, be plucked up and broken down? All our pains and care will not alter either the mutable nature of the things themselves or the

immutable counsel of God concerning them.⁶ In other words, there is a divine time and a season for what you are going through right now.

In our daily lives God is constantly and completely in charge. He sovereignly exercises either His decreative will or His permissive will over our actions, inaction, thoughts, attitudes, motivations and plans. It is just as easy for God to use your disobedience as well as your obedience to get you where He wants you; geographically as well as spiritually. God uses blessings as well as disciplinary measures to get us where we need to be in this part of the journey of our life.

(2) The sanction of their profitability, (10)—(Who says all the circumstances of my life are profitable?!)

¹⁰ (Now Solomon tells us [in light of what he has learned here] that he has the answer to his question.) **I have seen** (perceived, discerned, distinguished in my observations), **the God-given task** (duty), **with which the sons of men are to be occupied**, (I know what is happening here on this earth, what God wants and expects of us, what will make our lives, meaningful, satisfying, fulfilling).

(3) The crux or wonder of their profitability, (11)—
(Where does the power and authority to make every event in my life profitable come from?)

¹¹ **He** (God our Creator), **has made** (caused to be), **everything beautiful** (in the sense that the event and its duration is customized exactly as God wants it—another way to put it is every event in our life becomes beautiful because God makes each one supremely meaningful [*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*. Rom. 8:28]), **in its time**, (God in His divine plans and control has an appropriate time for every activity [circumstance and situation of your life].⁷) **Also** (in addition to that), **He has put eternity in their hearts** (being made in the image of God we will live beyond this life into eternity, knowing that this life cannot be all there is, we have the capacity to think beyond life's boundaries and into the eternal⁸ [*even a very young child can ask some profound questions of where we came from, why we are here and where we are going*]), **except** (meaning with the limitation), **that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end**, (Do you know what God is telling you here?! He is telling you that this side of heaven you are not going to be able to put all of the pieces together. You are not going to understand all of the whys-and-wherefores to the events and their timing in your life.

⁶ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, Logos Library System.

⁷ Walvoord, and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Logos Library System.

⁸ God has ordered all of life's occurrences according to his will. He has also given men minds that look beyond daily occurrences to the total sweep of life. Yet the human mind has been limited, **so that no man can find out the work that God maketh**; he can never solve all the seeming paradoxes of life. Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, Logos Library System.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9)

F APPLICATION:

Harleigh M. Rosenberger has written most discerningly: "Life is like a fine piece of Oriental tapestry put together with many exquisite strands. It has the gold of success, the crimson of suffering, and the somber hues of sorrow. Through every experience, however, the Holy Spirit can help us weave these threads of time into a colorful pattern of loveliness, [humility] and wisdom."

Some lessons that we can learn about the events that take place in our daily lives.

1. Whether by God’s decreative or permissive will, God has a will for all that happens to us, when it happens to us and for how long it lasts. ***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*** Romans 12:1-2
2. We all enjoy a pleasant experience. Rarely if ever do we complain about what it is, its timing or its duration. But, it’s quite the opposite when a difficult experience enters our life. God tells us here that the difficult events and their timing in our daily lives which may appear very grievous to us, in their proper time, are really something very beautiful. They are not just what the doctor ordered, but they are exactly what God says we need. They are perfect for us. And coming from a perfect God, they could not be better designed or timed for us. ***Deuteronomy 32:4—He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice.***
3. It is true that there is a great deal of difficulty we face upon this earth. A lot of our labor is filled with sorrow. But since the fall of man, God has never intended this world to be our haven of rest. God tells us that our life upon this earth will be filled with hardships, (Gen. 3:1-19). People have been looking for ways to live forever here upon this earth for centuries! But the distress we face is not only to mature us, but it is to also make us weary of this world and anxious for Heaven. It is to help us to forget, ***those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead, [to] press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*** (Philippians 3:13b-14)
4. These human events that we face are to keep us focused on our relationship with God and His work and not ourselves and building our own empire.

Warren Wiersbe puts it this way. “In view of the travail that we experience from day to day, life may seem like a strange gift, but it is God’s gift just the same. We “exercise” ourselves in trying to explain life’s [puzzles], but we don’t always succeed. If we believingly accept life as a gift, and thank God for it, we will have a better attitude toward the burdens that come our way. If we grudgingly accept life as a burden, then we will miss the gifts that come our way. Outlook helps to determine outcome.”⁹

(4) The procurement of their profitability, (12-13)

[How do we work with God on this rather than against Him?]

¹² **I know** (now), **that nothing is better for them** (the human race), **than to rejoice** (mentally accept God’s will for our lives), **and to do good** (purposefully fulfill God’s will), **in their** (short and uncertain), **lives**, (what a lesson on the unpredictability of life! [Prov. 27:1]),

¹³ **and also that** (in rejoicing in and doing God’s will [living ABOVE THE SUN]), **every man** (who does so), **should eat and drink and enjoy the good** (the fruit, the benefits), **of all his labor—it is the gift** (the blessing), **of God**, (the satisfaction, the meaning, the purpose in life that God imparts to those who chose to live ABOVE the sun. [Solomon is telling us here that we need to accept the various & divinely appointed events in our lives as either God’s decreative or permissive will for us. We need to embrace the will of God concerning us, & consistently adjust ourselves to it if we want to find out what makes life on this earth meaningful & lasting. {John 21:18-22}])

F APPLICATION:

Flight 93 made the best of a terrible situation when the passengers voted to attack the hijackers. As a result of that decision they lost their lives, but who is not separated from a mate, father, mother, child or friend because of that decision. How many people were rescued from the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, because of the hundreds of fireman, policemen, and citizens who lost their lives putting another’s safety above their own. God, who strengthened them to make and carry out decisions like these, provided a tremendous gift to those who live today because of it. There is no greater love than for a man to lay down his life for another.

Do you think it was just a fantastic coincidence that President George Bush was President of the United States when this happened? Or could we have a God that actually put President Bush in that position for that day and our present situation of fighting against terrorism?! One news caster said concerning this question, “This is the day that President Bush was born for.”

When the well-known British Methodist preacher William Sangster learned that he had progressive muscular atrophy and could not get

⁹ Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Logos Library System.

well, he made four resolutions and kept them to the end: (1) I will never complain; (2) I will keep the home bright; (3) I will count my blessings; (4) I will try to turn it to gain. This is the approach to life that Solomon wants us to take.

However, we must note that Solomon is not saying, “Don’t worry—be happy!” He is promoting faith in God, not “faith in faith” or “pie in the sky by and by.” Faith is only as good as the *object* of faith, and the greatest object of faith is the Lord. He can be trusted.

How can life be meaningless and monotonous for you when God has made you a part of His eternal plan? You are not an insignificant insect, crawling from one sad annihilation to another. If you have trusted Jesus Christ, you are a child of God being prepared for an eternal home (John 14:1–6; 2 Cor. 4). The 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.”¹⁰

It is *in this life*, where we are in a state of trial and probation for another life. Every man’s life is his opportunity of doing that which will make for him in eternity.¹¹

(5) The duration of their profitability, (14a) [How long will God continue to do what will benefit us the most?]

¹⁴ **I know** (for certain now), **that whatever God does** (in His decreative or permissive will), **it shall be forever**, (it’s permanent, unchangeable, inevitable).

F APPLICATION:

- No one will ever forget September 11th.
- No one will ever forget those who helped rescue others during that terrible event.
- What happened on September 11th permanently changed not only the lives of those personally involved, but our nation as well, and probably even the world.

Nothing, the world says, is as permanent as that which they call temporary. But God says His work is as permanent as He Himself is. Only God can do a work in you and through you that will last for all eternity. God clearly tells us in Matthew 6:19-20, “**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth** (by living life under the sun), **where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven** (by living above the sun), **where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.** The world can supply you with tons and tons of temporary satisfaction, but only God can supply you with eternal contentment. “**By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be**

¹⁰ Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*. Logos Library System.

¹¹ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible," (Heb. 11:24-27)

(6) The extent of their profitability, (14b) [Will God ever leave anything out—hold anything back from me, that I truly need?]

Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it, (the events and their seasons will be as God wills and allows them to be. When God does something He doesn't need to ever add anything to it, subtract anything from it, or make any adjustments in it. It's as perfect as it can be. There is no way to improve upon what God is doing in your life. Nothing in the events of your life are unnecessary, nor—can they be spared—if you are truly going to experience lasting meaning and contentment).

F APPLICATION:

On the morning of September 11th, thousands had an appointment with death. Others would barely escape death and yet others would escape it altogether.

Jane Ceterko, a manager for the Port Authority of NY and NJ, had an appointment with her lawyer that morning and was planning to go to work in the afternoon at her office on the 63rd floor of one World Trade Center.

One man took his daughter to kindergarten and lost about 700 of the employees who worked under him.

A woman who was pregnant started her maternity leave on that day.

Many got to work late, were sick, had other appointments that day, skipped work, were delayed in traffic or in the tower on their way to their floor, all of which escaped.

How many didn't escape, but during those terrible moments before the collapse of the towers heard the gospel from Christians who God trapped there with them?

There are so many other profitable angles to look at this tragedy as well. The Secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger was quoted as saying, "*Pearl Harbor brought us together to face a problem. Maybe this can do the same.*" The polls testify as to this act of terrorism strengthening the unity of our nation. We also hear a lot of reference to God. You see "God bless America," everywhere. People realize a fresh how precious relationships really are, (e.g., the "I love you" calls from the planes and towers. There is a lot of national pressure on terrorists now. The world is filled with righteous anger.

"As for those who carried out these attacks ... their barbarism will stand as their shame for all eternity." - British Prime Minister Tony Blair

"If they need assistance ... Canada will always be available." - Prime Minister Jean Chretien

"Israel will do all it can, and expresses condolences to the victims of the tragedy." - A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

"I'm very sad. We denounce terrorism. We denounce terrorism under any circumstances." - Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt

Do you think it would be the same if a car bomb went off in NYC killing 3 people? No, yet who could take something so terrible and use it for unbelievable good?! Only God, (Rom. 8:28). He can do the same with whatever is going on in your life or in the lives of those you love.

(7) The goal of their profitability, (14c) [Why is God doing all of this? Why does He have my life planned out in such detail?]

God does it (in order), **that men should fear before Him.** (to convince mankind that there is a God above them who is all powerful and exercises sovereign dominion over them. To convince the human race that they are at God's disposal; they, all their ways, and all the events that make up their life. To convince all that they ought to transfer their affections and trust to God, worship and adore Him, and acknowledge Him in all their ways. To be careful not to tempt or provoke Him realizing that He will discipline us when we persist in disobeying Him. He is infinite, we are finite.

F APPLICATION:

God changes the way He deals with each of us; He deals with us all differently. But, God is unchangeable in the goal behind His arrangement of the events of our journey through this life. This journey is not to perplex us, or to drive us to despair, but to teach us our duty to Him and engage us to do it.

Until Tuesday, the bloodiest day in U.S. history was Sept. 17, 1862, when about 4,700 Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War battle of Antietam. Pearl Harbor killed 2,388 Americans, and the first day of the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944, killed 1,465. 1,635 persons perished with the Titanic.

Death is inevitable for us all. Life is short and unpredictable in its seasons and times. We are vulnerable 24 hours out of everyday. Evil and good are always present around us. But who knows about it all and (even more incredibly), has it all under control!? God our infinite Creator.

(8) The conclusion of their profitability, (15)

¹⁵ **That which is** (i.e., the events of your present), **has already been** (the events of your past), **and what is to be** (the events of

your future), **has already been** (in the respect that nothing is going to change them); **and** (although they will one day all be in the past, done and maybe forgotten by you), **God requires an account of what is past**, (i.e., God seeks or calls back what has past. This means that these cycles of events will continue to happen in the lives of the living and at the end of our journey here on the earth, God will hold us accountable for how we dealt with each one of them).

F APPLICATION:

Go back to the “*I love you*” calls during the terror itself. It would not be surprising at all to find out that the circumstances helped some of those who called to get past some differences they may have had in their relationships. It helped them to put everything in perspective.

A lot of things were brought into proper perspective September 11th. One survivor of the Twin Towers reported that “All the hallways were flooded with jet fuel. One of my friends was going down with someone who had emphysema. She saw all these people passing her, but she stayed with her. She didn’t have the heart to leave her.” Perspective. We will never know this side of heaven, who most of the heroes were. But God knows each and every one of them.

Although each of the events that we discussed are human activities and experiences, their moral character and eternal value is determined by whether one executes or experiences them in a godly way or not. Solomon ends this very book repeating what He says here. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil,” (Ecc. 12:13-14).

FOR THE GOSPEL BELIEVER this evaluation takes place right after the rapture of the church. The evaluation is not a judicial judgment and thus will not pertain to whether the believer will get into heaven or not (that is already established through faith in Christ [Rom. 5:8-10; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21]), it establishes the believers heavenly reward, (1 Cor. 3:8ff; 2 Cor. 5:10). It determines the magnitude of the present the believer will give to Christ in appreciation of all that Christ has done for him.

One woman only wanted to know if her husband was dead or alive. She said, “If he’s dead, I know he’s OK.”

FOR THE UNBELIEVER this evaluation takes place right after the 1000 year millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. The evaluation is a judicial judgment and thus will pertain to whether the unbeliever will get into heaven or not. It determines the eternal destiny of this person, and since no one can earn or merit their salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), it finalizes their consignment to hell, (Rev. 20:11ff). Hell is a place not created for man, but a place created for the devil and the other fallen angels, (Mat. 25:41). The terrorists believe that to sacrifice their lives

in such a way that they did, it's grants them instant access to heaven. It's a works based salvation.

3) Our personal accountability regarding the various and divinely appointed events, (16-22)

(1) An example of the mishandling of a situation, (16)

Solomon here, wants us to know that just because every event in our lives is under God's sovereign control and has great meaning and value to us—it doesn't mean that everything is going to be just like we would like it to be.

¹⁶ **Moreover** (looking around me then with this new understanding of our situations), **I saw under the sun** (what's happening around me on a human level—using human strength and resources for human gain): **in the place of judgment** (for instance I saw that), **wickedness** (corruption), **was there** (in the judicial system); **and in the place of righteousness** (godly justice), **iniquity** (sinful practices), **was there**. (E.g., in the legal system, they may be calling good evil and evil good. They may be turning a blind eye to those in need. They may be helping only after a bribe.)

F APPLICATION:

Many examples could be used here such as people crowding in line in person or in their car, someone getting credit for your work, getting blamed for something you didn't do, etc. These kinds of actions really don't make your day. Ruining the perpetrators day would make your day.

There is something within humanity that longs for judicial justification. [If someone punches you, you want to punch him back, and harder. If someone calls you a name, you want to call them a worse name back.] If one is oppressed, there at least ought to be someone there to comfort. Better than that, there ought to be someone there to relieve the oppression, [like a big brother]. When such support is absent, it isn't right. Something inside us recoils.¹² It's not right, but it always has been and always will be, a daily experience while we live on this planet that rests under the sun, [and Solomon wants us to know that—nations needing armies are a good example of that]. But, God wants us to live above it! We must remember that God will reward all accordingly somewhere in the process of life. We must respond to these situations by rising above them, living above the sun.

(2) A warning of judgment as a result of mishandling the situation, (17-21)

A. Solomon sees God's judgment ahead, (17)

a) The subjects of God's judgment, (17a)

¹² Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, p. 100.

¹⁷ **I said in my heart, “God shall** (without question), **judge the righteous** (affirming those who live above the sun), **and the wicked** (condemning those who live under the sun),

F **APPLICATION:**

God says very clearly in the Scriptures that He is not mocked and that we will reap what we sow.

b) **The parameters of God’s judgment, (17b)**

for there is a time there (Where? at that moment of judgment—whether it is soon, after a long time, or even after death—there is a time), **for every purpose** (reason, motivation), **and for every work**, (action, lack of action, or word, to be judged/evaluated [Heb. 9:27—*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*, John 12:48—*“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*]).”

B. **Solomon reveals that the interval of time between life and death is similar to a time of probation, (18)**

¹⁸ (As a result of the actions of those living under the sun), **I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men** (or the sons of Adam), **God tests** (or proves), **them** (during the course of their life), **that they may see** (meaning come to the realization), **that they themselves are like animals**, (in the sense that [left to themselves] they live only for themselves—taking and doing what they want, with no or little regard for those around them [cp., 2 pet. 2:4-17; Romans 3:19—*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*]).”

C. **Solomon cautions us to decide wisely how we choose to live, like animals or like the godly, because it is only for a short time, (19-21)**

¹⁹ **For what** (ultimately), **happens to the sons of men** (the sons of Adam), **also happens to animals; one thing** (in particular), **befalls them** (both): **as one dies, so dies the other**, (there is no difference—neither can escape it). **Surely, they all have one breath** (they are all animated by the same life source [Job 34:14-15]); **man has no advantage over animals** (in this particular area), **for all is vanity**, (anything that man does under the sun, [even if he should gain the whole world], is futile and meaningless; [he does something and dies, big deal.])

²⁰ (Because of the curse that Adam brought onto man [Rom. 5:12]), **All** (animals and humans), **go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust**, (Psa. 49:10-20).

²¹ **Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?** (The NASV translates this verse better—*Who knows*

that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth? [Under the sun, we can only see the death of the animal or the person. We cannot observe the spirit leaving and watch it ascend or descend. {cf., 3:11}]

(3) Solomon's advise on how to handle every situation, (22)

A. People are to rejoice in their labor, (22a)

²² **So I perceived** (or concluded concerning this matter of God's sovereignty and life's injustice), **that nothing is better** (in this fallen world and its various meaningful and valuable, but defective/rotten experiences), **than that a man should rejoice** (take inward pleasure), **in his own works** (the labor he performs, the attitudes he holds and the motivations he lives by [Gal. 6:2-10]),

B. People are to confidently rest in God regarding their every circumstance, (22b)

for that is his (divinely appointed), **heritage**, (i.e., lot, portion, destiny [3:13])

F APPLICATION:

Don't try to understand everything that is happening to you, simply accept it. Confidently rest in God and that He will (in His sovereign control), use your situation for His and your good. [You see], "This attitude of joy is not so much resignation as it is confidence resulting from God's control of all events."¹³

C. People are to leave their future in God's hands, (22c)

For who can bring him to see (the future concerning), **what will happen after him**, (after he dies)? (Enjoy life now because no one knows, or has any control over what will happen to his labor after he dies.)

F APPLICATION:

Does [Solomon] say, "Try to understand your circumstances"? No. Does he say, "Compare your lot with another person's and see how much better yours is than his"? Hardly. Does he say, "Retaliate, resent, become bitter; you didn't get a fair shake"? No way. Does he say, "Move to some lonely spot and grind out your... years in resentful silence"? Absolutely not.

How about this one? Does he say, "Get into a fantasy world; build a dream. Live there. Work here, but live there and you can make it"... No, a thousand times, no! This is ragged-edge reality, remember.

¹³ Elwell, Walter A., ed., *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company) 1989, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

Then what does he say? Namely this: "Reject self-pity. Reject revenge. Reject resentment. Reject retaliation. Find ways to discover advantages to your disadvantages."

[God is telling us that there is nothing] better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. . . .

We usually can do very little to change our lot. We can only change our reaction to our lot. We cannot change our past... I don't care how brilliant we are, our past stands in concrete. We cannot erase it. But we can learn today to see our past from God's perspective, and use the disadvantages of yesterday in our life-today and forever.¹⁴

[You see] Faith learns to live with seeming inconsistencies and absurdities, for we live by promises and not by explanations. We can't explain life, but we must experience life, either enduring it or enjoying it.

Solomon calls us to accept life, enjoy it a day at a time, and be satisfied. *We must never be satisfied with ourselves*, but we must be satisfied with what God gives to us in this life. If we grow in character and godliness, and if we live by faith, then we will be able to say with Paul, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (Phil. 4:11, NIV).¹⁵

To help you replace stale cynicism with fresh hope, I want to ask three questions.

First: *What is your unjust disadvantage?* Think about it. I don't mean little petty irritations that happened this past week. What is a major unjust disadvantage in your life? Try to name at least one example from your life.

Second: *When do you plan to replace passive self-pity with active courage?* What I'm asking is that you stop the "woe-is-me" whine and start thinking in terms of [faith hurdles. How does God want me to trust Him to get me over and beyond them? What can and should I do, and what can't I do anything about that I must accept and leave with God?]

Before I go on to the third question, let me develop this one... It [concerns] the tape of a speech delivered by a man named Tom Sullivan. He was addressing five thousand men and women in Dallas, as he spoke to the prestigious Million Dollar Round Table of the insurance companies around the world. What a great talk he delivered!

You may have seen Sullivan on the "Good Morning, America" program; he's one of their frequent guests. He's also done guest television appearances on "M-A-S-H" and "Fame." He was in the film *Airport '77*. He's a world-class athlete-with two national

¹⁴ Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, pp. 105, 106.

¹⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Logos Library System.

championship records in wrestling. He was on the 1958 Olympic wrestling team. He earned a degree at Harvard in clinical psychology. He's a musician. He's an author. He's a sports enthusiast. He runs six miles a day on the beach. He swims. He skydives ... and has thirty-seven jumps to his credit. [Anyone envying this guy yet?]

I should also tell you that Tom Sullivan is blind. [Are you still envying him?] His is the life that was portrayed so graphically in the film *If You Could See What I Hear*. Amazing man!

Five thousand successful insurance people were on the edge of their seats-applauding, enjoying, laughing, and learning-as they listened to a man who couldn't even see the podium in front of him, to say nothing of seeing the smiles on their faces.

He had one major point in his talk: "You've got a disadvantage? Take advantage of it! People don't buy similarity. They buy differences." (That's a great line!)

That disadvantage is what makes you distinct and different. The similarities are no big deal. They only mean you're like everybody else. He tells about the first time he realized he was blind. He was eight years old (that's what I call parents doing the right job).

He was in his backyard, and heard a baseball game going on next door. He heard the crack of the bat as it bit the ball. New sound. He then heard the thud of it as it hit the glove. Another new sound.

He listened and thought, "They're playing a game." He later learned it was called baseball.

So he got a rock and a stick and he taught himself how to bat a ball. He didn't know where to hit it, so he put a little transistor radio up on a tree stump. He walked several paces back and hit the rock toward the radio. He got to where he could knock that transistor radio off every time.

Shortly thereafter he told his dad, "I want to play baseball." Dad said, "Oh, really? Well, uh, which position would you like to play?"

"Oh, I want to be a pitcher."

"Uh, yeah . . . sure, Son. Right!"

So the dad talked to the guy who managed the Little League club in his neighborhood and got Tom on the team. The boy who could not see became the pitcher. He had a guy stand by him to catch the ball when the catcher threw it back.

Tom asked the crowd, "Can you picture this little, frightened nine year-old boy at the plate, ready to have the ball thrown at him by a blind kid on the mound?"

After he knocked out several boys, he decided to get out of baseball, which probably pleased his opponents greatly . . . and he took up wrestling.

He had the ability to pop his glass eyes out on occasion, so he claims he won a few of his wrestling records that way. What a sense of humor! It's an amazing story . . . the story of a man who replaced cynical self-pity with incredible courage. Let me ask you again-when do you plan to replace self-pity with that kind of courage? [Maybe it's needed in your marriage, job, a friendship, your school grades, towards your parents or in-laws, maybe you have suffered some kind of a significant loss.]

"I've determined that my disadvantage in life is blindness," says Tom Sullivan. "I will therefore become, as a blind person, all that I can possibly be. That will become my distinctive message!"

It's time for some of you to hear this. Cynicism is eating [you up]. You've been sinking in the quicksand of self-pity long enough. You're almost drowning and you're sucking other people under with you. If that's the case, you need to take this challenge personally.

Third: *Have you ever considered the impact your distinctive message would have on the world around you?* [Friends], if you could ever get above your disadvantage long enough to see how God could use you to impact the lives of others who are victims of their disadvantage, it would blow your mind.¹⁶ Your disadvantage is what God wants to use to put himself on display through your life.

¹⁶ Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, pp. 107, 108.