

THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY TWO

Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

God is engaged in our time. Maybe you thought time was all yours and God had nothing to do with it. Actually, He has everything to do with it. Your birth was because of His grace, and your living is covered by His providential care. Your day of death is planned already. Our time is in His hands!

—Charles R. Swindoll

YOU’VE heard the saying, “Time is money!” Well, what if that were true, literally? Imagine each second equals one penny. And imagine waking every morning to a fresh deposit in your bank account of the number of pennies equal to the seconds in one day—86,400. These daily deposits would grow in a year to \$315,360! If seconds were pennies, then we’d all be rich!

Time may not be money, really, but it is valuable because it forms the building blocks of living. Each day, we exchange time for activities. Individuals who make the greatest impact for good in our world invest their “pennies” over a lifetime in worthwhile endeavors. Read any biography of a notable person, and you’ll see copious examples of time well spent.

God not only gives us time as a precious gift, but He also gives us the power to use it. We can spend our seconds any way we wish . . . but here’s the catch: we can only spend them once. Each second we live is a second we spend; and once spent, wisely or unwisely, that moment can never be retrieved.

So, the real question isn’t *what is our time worth?* But *what is worth our time?*

In this study, we’ll look at two key Bible passages on how we spend our time. We’ll examine God’s perspective on what truly matters in life, and we’ll hear Him urge us to make the most of our time. Once we know His priorities for us, we must *stop procrastinating and start following through* by investing our time wisely!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to thank the Lord for His engagement in the time that fills each of your days. Even as you open your Bible and relate to your Creator through His Word, the Lord is with you. Make the psalmist's declaration of dependence on God your own prayer as you focus on being present with Him:

*But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD,
I say, "You are my God."
My times are in Your hand. (Psalm 31:14–15 NASB)*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read the first passage of our study, *Ecclesiastes 3:1–13*. These poetic lines are best read aloud. As you read, feel the rhythm of the lines in verses 1–8. In verses 9–13, notice the author's conclusions and the final, climactic line: "these are gifts from God" (*Ecclesiastes 3:13*). The passage opens by describing *life under heaven* (3:1) and then concludes by focusing on the *God of heaven* (3:13).



Observation: Wise Sayings from Ecclesiastes

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, or unlike. The poetry in *Ecclesiastes 3:2–8* is beautiful in its repetition and symmetry. Notice the groups of seven. The seven verses contain fourteen opposites in which the word *time* appears twenty-eight times.

According to Bible scholar Donald R. Glenn,

The fact that Solomon utilized polar opposites in a multiple of seven and began his list with birth and death is highly significant. The number seven suggests the idea of completeness



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and the use of polar opposites—a well-known poetical device called merism—suggests totality (cf. Ps. 139:2–3).¹

How would you define the word *time* as Solomon used the term in *Ecclesiastes 3:1–8*?

Think of the opening contrast, “A time to be born and a time to die” (*Ecclesiastes 3:2*), as the dates of birth and death on a gravestone that delineate a person’s life span. What follows in Solomon’s poem is the “dash” between the dates—a list of activities that occur between birth and death. What contrasts do you observe in verses 2–8? And why do you think Solomon listed these activities?

Rather than evaluating life’s events as good or bad, right or wrong, Solomon was simply observing the back-and-forth cycles. We plant and harvest, tear down and build up, love and hate, keep and throw away, make war and make peace—and then we do it all again! Endlessly, humanity swings between extremes. *And to what end?* Solomon must have wondered. He wrote earlier, “Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind” (2:17). Life does seem futile . . . until we observe time from God’s point of view.



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“Yet God . . .” verse 11 begins, shifting the focus from the human perspective to God’s perspective. According to this verse, what makes life beautiful (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*)? And what was Solomon’s concluding advice (*3:12*)?

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Solomon’s concluding thoughts cast a rainbow of heavenly wisdom across an otherwise dismal landscape. Let’s take a closer look at Solomon’s statement that God “has planted eternity in the human heart” (*3:11*).



Interpretation: Eternity in Our Hearts

From observation, we progress to the next phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method: interpretation, which seeks to understand the meaning of a passage.

So far, what have we learned from Solomon? The seasons of life may seem like a carousel, spinning around and around; nevertheless, God is engaged in our time. As He fits our lives into His grand scheme, which only He can comprehend, He makes the cycles of life good and meaningful—in a word, *beautiful!*

As you reflect on this context, what would you say is the meaning of Solomon’s assertion that God has “planted eternity in the human heart” (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*)?



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During the interpretation phase, it's helpful to consult a commentary or two. One excellent online resource is by former Dallas Theological Seminary professor Thomas Constable. Go to netbible.org, find the verses for Ecclesiastes 3, and click on Constable's Notes to read this scholar's interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:11. Write down what you discover in the space below.

What we do has eternal dimensions. We have a mind to think, emotions to feel, and a will to obey. God has made us like Himself, and in doing so, He's put eternity in our hearts. We can grasp the concept of eternity, and we should, because we will give account for the use of our time. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Warning and Directives

In the correlation phase, we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. The authors of the Bible considered themselves part of a cohesive story, so they alluded to God's work in the past to explain God's actions in the present.

In light of Solomon's teaching, what should we do with our time? The apostle Paul offered a warning and two directives. What was Paul's warning in [Ephesians 5:15](#)? Give some examples of the foolish deeds Paul warned us not to do ([Ephesians 5:3–11](#)).



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What were Paul's directives in *Ephesians 5:16–17*? What did Paul say the Lord wants us to do (*Ephesians 5:18–20*)?

Although fleeting, time is extremely valuable. Why? Because God, who is engaged in our time, gives eternal significance to each season of our lives. Consequently, as Paul taught, we must watch how we live and make the most of every opportunity, “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (5:16 NKJV).

“This year, Lord, I want to please You in what I do.” He will love you no matter what. But His Spirit is working in your heart to convict you of things that you need to give attention to. Look accurately at how you walk. Don't lie to yourself. Don't ignore reality. Don't act like something else is happening. Don't rationalize around it or procrastinate any longer.
—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Suggestions Applied Practically

How do we heed Paul's warning and follow his directives? By doing battle against procrastination and putting into practice three key habits.

1. *Set priorities.* Take some time to think seriously about your priorities regarding the following aspects of your life: relational, vocational, physical, spiritual, and missional. What is truly most important in each area?



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2. *Set realistic goals.* Pace yourself as you build new habits. Physical fitness takes time, and new diets require long-term management. A slow-and-steady strategy will take you further than the sprint-and-crash approach. Write realistic goals that match your top three priorities.

3. *Plan your tasks in order of importance.* Procrastination is the thief of time. Don't put off doing what's important in order to do what's urgent or more pleasing. What three actions can you do today to achieve your most important goals?

So, what is worth your time? That's a question we all must ponder. Because God is engaged in our time, He will help you set your priorities and empower you to follow through with accomplishing your goals. Rest assured that your time is truly in God's hands, both today and for eternity!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are sovereign over eternity and each moment of my life. Thank You for not standing aloof but actively engaging in time. You sent Your Son to live on the earth He created, bound by time and space, to in part show me how to use my time wisely. Please give me wisdom to steward well the time You've given me. In the powerful name of Jesus Christ, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 983.



THINGS TO STOP AND START

STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

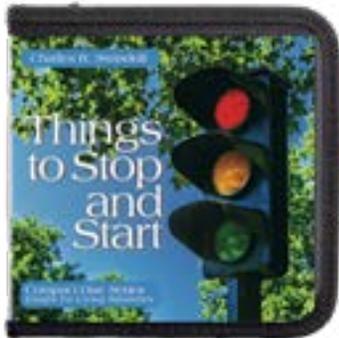
STUDY

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Tools for Digging Deeper



Things to Stop and Start
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



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booklet



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For the 2019–2020 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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