

Time for Fear

Ecclesiastes Part 4

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

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Summary: We are living on a bridge between two realities. On the one hand we are stuck in time - subject to all the futility of this cursed world. But at the same time we have eternity in our hearts, and we long for understanding and meaning. So how do we deal with the dual realities of living in this cursed, futile world and at the same time having an insatiable thirst for eternity? You get by in the cursed, futile world by trusting God with what is not revealed and just enjoying life as it comes. And you satisfy your craving for the eternal by living in fear of God.

Introduction	1
Appointed Seasons	2
Unchangeable	3
Everything Beautiful	4
Not Everything Seems Beautiful	4
Eternity in the Heart	5
We Can't See It	5
Enjoy Life	6
You Cannot Change God's Work	6
Why? So We Would Fear Him	6
The Meaning of Fear	7
Fear of His Anger	7
Fear of His Displeasure	7
Wrong Fear	7
The Mark of the Believer	8
How It Works	8
By Realizing He Controls Our Wellbeing	8
By Realizing Only He Gives Enjoyment	9
Escape from Meaning	9
A Whole New Approach	9
What Time Is It?	10
Conclusion	10
James 1:25 Questions	10

Ecclesiastes 3:1 There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven: 2 a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; 3 a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build; 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; 5 a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to avoid embracing; 6 a time to search and a time to count as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away; 7 a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak; 8 a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace. 9 What does the worker gain from his struggles? 10 I have seen the task that God has given people with which they are occupied. 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but man cannot discover the work God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and enjoy the good life. 13 It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts. 14 I know that all God does will last forever; there is no adding to it or taking from it. God works so that people will be in awe of Him.

Introduction

Of all the things you have in your life right now that are good - all the stuff you have, all the relationships, your gifts and abilities - of all those things, which would be the most terrifying to lose? There are some things that you are willing to risk losing. You don't want to lose them, but if you could gain some greater benefit, you are willing to put them at risk. There are some pleasures in life you are

willing to trade for different pleasures. But there are other things that are never on the table. You guard those things, and if anything threatens them you will take drastic action to hold on to them.

You could refer to those things as your controlling fears. They are fears that control your life because they dictate your priorities. We all have normal fears and loves, and then we have *controlling* fears and *controlling* loves. Your controlling loves dictate what you run after in life, and your controlling fears are the things that you are so afraid to lose that you will do anything to make sure you don't lose them. So they are really two sides of the same coin. Your greatest fear is always losing your greatest love (or never getting it in the first place). So, what are the controlling fears of your life? And in that list, where does closeness with God rank?

If you are anything like me then it ranks way lower than it should. I have closeness with God, then some temptation to sin comes along, and in a heartbeat I am willing to sacrifice that closeness with God so I can run after this sin. If something threatens my physical life, I panic. My car is spinning out of control on the ice and I am about to go off the cliff, everything in me goes into panic mode. If Satan came to me and said, "Darrell, I'll give you this pleasure in exchange for your family" I would say, "No way!" If something would make me lose my job, or all my money, or my health - I would say, "No, I don't want that thing." But so often some little sin comes along, and I know if I go ahead with that sin I am going to forfeit nearness to God for a time - possibly a long time, and I am willing to do it.

The Bible calls that a lack of the fear of God. It means loss of God's favor is not the controlling fear in my life. And that is the number one spiritual disease we all face - lack of the fear of God as our controlling fear (which is caused by a lack of love for God as our controlling love). So how do we change that? How can we move fear of God up to the level of the controlling fear in our lives? How can we increase our fear of God? Take a peek down at the end of verse 14...

Ecclesiastes 3:14 God did this so that people would fear Him.

Did what? Everything that comes between verses 1 and 14.

Appointed Seasons

Ecclesiastes 3:1 There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven

The word translated **occasion** (your Bible might say **time** or **season**), refers to an appointed time - a specific, set, designated appointment that someone intentionally scheduled. The word translated **activity** (or in the ESV - **matter**), that word refers to that which one delights in, or desires, or decides, or wills. It is a word that points to the will. So we could translate verse 1 this way:

1 There is an appointed, scheduled moment for everything, and a time for every intended purpose under heaven

That verse is soaked with God. Even though the word "God" does not appear, the whole verse is all about God's activity in running the world. So far the Preacher has given us a picture of life that seems kind of random. When you read chapters 1 and 2, from the human standpoint it sounds like God just wound this world up like a clock and let it go, and now the laws of physicals are just running the show while God is taking a hands-off approach most of the time. And something has gone haywire and the whole thing is running amuck. But if we think that, we are as wrong as we can be. The Preacher wants us to know that everything that ever happens, happens because God appointed it to happen. That is the point of verse 1. But it is not enough to just tell us that - he wants to give us examples so we know exactly what he means. So he lists 28 examples of things that happen in their appointed, scheduled time. And they come in pairs - 14 pairs.

And these lines are not in the same dark, depressing mood that we saw in chapters 1-2. There is a seriousness to them, but there is also a certain beauty. They have even found their way into American folk music, because they describe a certain rhythm of life and movement back and forth from one aspect of

life to its opposite that is actually somewhat pleasing to read, even though it includes some hard realities. In fact, it starts with the hardest reality of all - death.

2 a time to give birth and a time to die;

Some days you are at the hospital welcoming a new member into your family. Later that family member will be at the cemetery, standing over your grave saying their last goodbyes before trying to move on with life without you. And guess who schedules both dates - God. We had a couple here who tried and tried to get pregnant, finally decided it wasn't going to happen, and spent a couple years raising money to adopt a child from a third world country. Then finally, at the end of that whole process, suddenly she is pregnant. And just a few weeks ago she gave birth. We can try and try, but God alone decides when a new life will come into the world. And God alone decides when life is over.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 No one has authority over the wind to restrain it, and there is no authority over the day of death

God alone determines your life span.

2 ...a time to plant and a time to uproot

There are times in life when the thing you need to do is put some seeds in the ground to try to make something grow. And there are other times in life when you need to get rid of something that is growing. Some trees need to be chopped down, and some plants need to be pulled up by the roots.

Seasons of life change. It's not like you just find the best activity in life and then just do that one thing all the time. Life isn't like that. Times and seasons change, and new circumstances call for different activities.

3 a time to kill and a time to heal

Sometimes you might need to kill an animal to protect your family, or to feed your family. Other times you are putting your time and energy into healing - trying to prevent death.

3 a time to tear down and a time to build

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh

a time to mourn and a time to dance

5 a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing

6 a time to search and a time to count as lost

a time to keep and a time to throw away

7 a time to tear and a time to sew

a time to be silent and a time to speak

8 a time to love and a time to hate

a time for war and a time for peace.

What is the point of all that? I could preach a whole sermon about being wise enough to discern the seasons of life. How to decide when you should keep looking, and when you should give up. Or when to keep something and when to just throw it away. Or when to speak up and when to shut up. But I don't think that is the purpose of this passage. He does not get to the end of this list and say, "Learn how to discern what time it is in your life!" That might be a good thing to think about, but it isn't the point here. If you want to see what direction he is taking with this, just read the next verse.

Unchangeable

9 What does the worker gain from his struggles?

Remember that word **gain** from chapter 1 - the struggle against providence to get an advantage and climb up on top of the craziness of life? The Preacher says, "Where does that get you - given the reality of the divinely decreed seasons of life? You scramble and squirm to make things go a certain way, and God decides what will happen. Whatever season you are in right now in your life - guess who is in charge of that? And guess who is not in charge? God determines what happens, and we can make things worse with a foolish response, but we cannot control the times and seasons of life. God schedules everything, and His schedule is beautiful.

Everything Beautiful

11 He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Everything? What about all the bad stuff in that list? War? Hating? Giving up your search? Mourning? Death? When it says He made all things beautiful in their time, does that include death? Has God made death beautiful? Is it really just half of the things in that list that are beautiful? The good half - the loving and embracing and planting and building and giving birth? Or does **everything** mean *everything*? The word **everything** in verse 11 means exactly the same thing it meant in verse 1.

1 There is an appointed moment for everything

He says that and then gives the whole list. There can be no question he is referring to every single thing in that whole list.

So yes, God has even made death beautiful in its time. But how do we reconcile that with 1 Corinthians 15:26, which refers to death as our enemy? How can it be our enemy and also be beautiful? Notice that phrase **in its time**. The emphasis in Ecclesiastes 3:11 is on the beauty and goodness of the *timing*. It is not so much that death is beautiful; it is that God's timing in bringing about that season of life is beautiful and perfect.

Not Everything Seems Beautiful

But that does not always seem true, does it? If your child dies at age 9, on Christmas day, is that beautiful? Nothing about that timing seems beautiful. It seems like the insurance companies are right when they call that a *premature* death. There was an insurance agent from the Presbyterian Minister's Fund who was selling life insurance to R.C. Sproul. And at one point in his presentation he described the benefit Mrs. Sproul would receive in the case of a premature death. And R.C. spoke up and said, "Wait a minute, I thought you were here representing the Presbyterian Minister's Fund."

"I am."

"Oh. I didn't know Presbyterians believed in such a thing as premature death."

Sproul was right - there is no premature death. In this fallen, cursed world death is a reality, it is an enemy, it is devastating, we long for the day when it will be eliminated forever, but for now, while it exists, the timing of it in our lives is orchestrated in a beautiful way by God. Including the death of a child? Yes.

"But it doesn't seem like that's true. I can't see it as beautiful. It doesn't look beautiful to me at all. It looks hideously ugly, and in my wildest imagination I can't see how this timing could be a good thing."

"The timing of me losing my job now - that seems like terrible timing."

Someone once said life is like a beautiful tapestry being woven on a loom. And life under the sun is like looking at it from underneath the loom. When you look at something like that from the underside it does not look beautiful at all. It looks like random knots and snarls. From God's point of view looking down - only He can see the beauty of the tapestry of the times. We can't see it. And the animals can't see it. The difference is, they don't mind not seeing it, but for us, not seeing it drives us crazy.

Eternity in the Heart

Why? What is it inside us that insists on being able to see the meaning and beauty and goodness of what takes place? Why are we so intent on knowing how all the parts fit together?

11 ...He has also put eternity in their hearts

What does it mean to have eternity in your heart? It means you intuitively know that there is a top side to this tapestry, and you have a deep craving to see it. It also means the present is not enough for you. I mentioned last time that this is something that sets us apart from the animals. Animals are not concerned about eternity. They are not concerned about the past or future at all - just the present. Do you think your hamster ever gets down and discouraged because it just gets to thinking about the good ol' days when it was young and could run twice as fast in the wheel? Animals just exist in the present. No dog gets half-way through life and realizes he has not accomplished much and falls into a mid-life crisis. That happens routinely with people; never with dogs. Of all the great philosophers, not one of them is a dolphin. Every human can relate to the despair of Ecclesiastes 1 - the futility of life, but no animal ever goes through that. Animals are designed by God to be fine just existing in the present. And they have no need to know anything about eternity or the meaning of life.

The one question they never ask is the one we ask more than any other question. Animals do ask questions - not with language, but they do have questions. If our dogs hear a noise outside, they run to the window to find out if it's Tracy or one of the kids, or just some stranger. They are asking the question, "who?" When they sniff at something, they are asking the question, "What? - What is this? Is it something I can eat or not?" They do have curiosity about some things, but the question they never ask is the one we ask most of all - *why*? We want to know not only what is happening, but why. That is a uniquely human question.

And we ask it at two levels - cause and meaning. When we say, "Why did this happen?" at the basic level we want to know what caused it. If you are walking down the street and all of a sudden a grand piano crashed down on the sidewalk in front of you, your dog will just walk around it. But what will you do? You will look up.

"Where did this fall from, and why? What caused a piano to fall from a building?"

We deal with that kind of why question a thousand times a day - *What caused this?*

And once you discover the cause, you ask the deeper why question - what is the purpose or meaning? If you discover that the cause of the piano falling was someone pushing it out a window, that doesn't satisfy you. Now you're asking, "Why did he do it? Was he trying to make it land on me? Or just scare me? Or did it have nothing to do with me? Was it an accident or on purpose?" Meanwhile your dog is just asking, "Can I eat this?"

What is it about us, that makes us have to know purpose and meaning and reasons? Why is it so important for us to understand sequence and how an event fits into the big picture? It is because God planted eternity in our hearts. He made us eternal beings with eternal appetites that cannot be satisfied by the present. We have an insatiable drive to see the big picture.

We Can't See It

11 ... but man cannot discover the work God has done from beginning to end.

We have an insatiable drive for it, but we can't obtain it. No matter how much we study and figure and think and reason, we can't figure it all out. God has made all things beautiful in their time, but that beauty is like the beauty of a giant mural, and we are standing so close to it, we can only see a tiny little part of it. When I went to Germany one thing that struck me was how narrow some of the old streets are - much narrower than a typical alley here. There are big buildings, then what amounts to a wide sidewalk, then other buildings. Imagine you are standing in one of those streets, and great artist painted a beautiful mural on a huge building that spans ten blocks. And you are an art lover, and you want so badly to be able

to back up and see what the picture is. But you back up just a few steps and run into the buildings on the other side of the street. So all you can do is walk along, and see the little parts. And some of them make no sense at all, because you can't see the whole. That is what life is like. God put eternity in our hearts - He made us art lovers, but the street is so narrow we can never back up far enough to see how the piece we are looking at fits into the big picture. God has revealed some things, and the things He has revealed we can know. But we can never know anything He has not revealed.

Enjoy Life

So what are we to do? What should you do when eternity is in your heart but for now you are locked down in time? If you have been with us in this study you already know the answer.

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good while they live. 13 It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts.

Enjoy life. Stop running after what God has not revealed and just enjoy what He has revealed. You don't have to see the tapestry to know it's beautiful - all you have to do is trust the weaver. You do not have to see the full mural to know that a certain part fits in wonderfully - all you have to do is trust the artist. And if you are willing to do that - if you are willing to trust God with the circumstances of life, you can enjoy life.

But the emphasis here is not so much that you should enjoy life; it is that when you do, realize that is a special gift from God. Every time you enjoy something that is not sin, realize that enjoyment comes as a special gesture of God's love. Ability to enjoy is something that is not always there, and you have no power to make it come when it isn't there. So when it is there, make sure you receive it as a gift from God.

You will be much better off in life if you stop trying to manufacture joy yourself by seizing control of life and understanding what God has not revealed, and instead just trust God with all that and appreciate the gift of enjoyment for what it is. Trust God that this strange piece does fit in beautifully in the overall mural, and just enjoy the part that you can see. But whatever you do, don't get your little paint set out and try to touch it up.

You Cannot Change God's Work

14 I know that all God does will last forever; there is no adding to it or taking from it.

You cannot change it. Can you make a difference in those areas God has placed under your control? Yes. And you can and should do that. But guess Who is in charge of which things are under your control and which are not? God is, so even those things that are under your control are not *ultimately* under your control. Everything is ultimately under God's control, and everything that ever happens, happens at the moment it happens because God put that on His calendar before the creation of the world. And He put it on His calendar for that moment because in the big picture it fits beautifully at that moment.

Think of the strange events in your life that make no sense. Those are like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle, that can only fit in one spot. But if it is placed there, and all the other pieces are placed where they belong, you get something beautiful. That is the way life is, but the problem is God has not showed us the box cover. We can't see the big picture and we can't see the beauty of how the parts fit in many cases. Why? Why, God? Why do it that way? Why make us art lovers and put us in a narrow street? Why plant eternity in our hearts but then place it out of our reach? The reason is in verse 14.

Why? So We Would Fear Him

14 ...God works so that people will be in awe of Him.

Lit. so that they would fear before His face.

God did it this way in order to cause us to fear Him. Fearing God is going to be the bottom line all the way through this book. He will bring it up again in chapter 5, chapter 7, chapter 8, and then at the end of the book he wraps it all up by saying this:

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Now that all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this is for all humanity. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment

That is the bottom line, and that should not be any surprise to anyone because both Psalms and Proverbs tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps.110:10 and Pr.9:10). Nothing is wise if it is not governed by the fear of the Lord.

The Meaning of Fear

Fear of His Anger

So what is the fear of God? For one thing, to fear God means to be afraid of His discipline. Some translations want to reduce this word down to just awe or reverence or respect, but the passage I just read in chapter 12 is very clear that it is a fear that is connected to judgment - actually being afraid of what could happen to you on Judgment Day. In 5:6-7, fear of God is a matter of being afraid of His anger.

Fear of His Displeasure

But how does all that fit with what we saw back in chapter 2 about wanting to please God and receiving gestures of His love in ways that increase our love for Him? For some people those are two totally different kinds of relationships. They think of fearing someone in one category, and then desiring closeness with a person in a completely different category. But they cannot even fathom desiring closeness with someone they fear. It may be that for people like that, something went wrong in their relationship with their earthly father that has confused their understanding. Because in a good, healthy father-child relationship, there is always this kind of fear combined with love and a desire for closeness. The child takes his father's displeasure very seriously – there is nothing he dreads more, but at the same time loves his father's embraces of love. And that is what it means to fear God. Fearing God is not in tension with loving God in any way, because the more you love someone the more terrifying is the thought of jeopardizing your closeness with that person and being at odds with him. The greatest threat in life is always losing whatever you treasure most. That will be your controlling fear. And so if the sweetest, most valuable, most precious thing in your life is closeness with God, the most terrifying threat would be loss of that closeness.

Wrong Fear

That is the good kind of fear of God. There is also a bad kind. There is a wrong way to fear God. Any time your fear of God causes you to move away from Him rather than draw near to Him, that is the bad kind of fear. The good kind of fear makes you forsake sin so you can draw near to God. The bad kind makes you shy away from God. In Exodus 20 both kinds are mentioned in the same verse.

Exodus 20:18-20 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance

What kind of fear is that? That is the bad kind that makes you shy away from God's presence.

19 and they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid.

Don't have that kind of fear. That is not a good kind of fearing God.

God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

That is the good kind. The bad kind makes you recoil from God; the good kind makes you recoil from sin so you can draw near to God.

The Mark of the Believer

That is the background behind the concept of fearing God. And in Ecclesiastes the term is used as shorthand for a believer. Very often in wisdom literature unbelievers are called “the wicked” and believers are called “the righteous.” But in this book, instead of the “the righteous,” we are called “those who fear God.” For example:

Ecclesiastes 8:12 ...it will go well with those who fear God, who fear before His face. 13 However, it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they do not fear God.

So when he says that the bottom line is you should fear God, that is like saying, “The bottom line is you should be converted and become a believer.” And if you are already saved, it is a reminder that you should live like a believer. And the way believers live is they fear God. This is really very similar to what Paul said in Acts 17.

Acts 17:24 The God who made the world and everything in it—He is Lord of heaven and earth ...

26 From one man He has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. 27 [He did this] so they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

God determined the appointed times and places of life in order to cause people to seek Him and reach out and find Him.

How It Works

How does that work? How does the invisible beauty of all the appointed times, combined with us having eternity in our hearts, create the fear of God in us?

By Realizing He Controls Our Wellbeing

The most obvious answer is that it makes us fear Him because He is in total control of our wellbeing. There is a time to laugh and a time to mourn, and it is totally up to God which of those seasons it is going to be in your life next month. He alone ultimately decides if you will be laughing and happy or if you will be on the floor sobbing with heaves of agony that feel unbearable. He decides if it will be a time of embracing or a time of refraining. If everything that matters most in your life is totally in His hands, then He matters most.

That is really not a bad definition of fearing God. Fearing God is when God matters to you. And His opinion of you matters more than any other opinion. And closeness with Him matters more than any other goal in life. And avoiding His displeasure matters more than anything you could gain apart from Him. And His threats of judgment matter to you more than any other threat. Fearing God is when God matters to you, and so in order to bring you to fear Him, God takes all the things that matter most in your life, and shows you that they are all completely in His control.

Suppose our country put in place a system of socialized groceries - so the only way you could ever get any food is if it were dispensed to you by some government official. Suddenly that official matters in your life, right? You definitely don't want him against you. God is not only in charge of all your food, but also of everything else you need in life.

And that would not affect us if we only cared about the present. If we didn't have eternity in our hearts, and all we ever thought about was right now, then we would be just like the animals - the future would mean nothing to us. But we do understand past and future and eternity and causation and meaning and purpose, and so the One in charge of all that, matters to us.

We understand there is a future, and that we are going somewhere, but we are flying blind. God has not enabled us to see the beginning from the end. So what does that mean? It means you had better fear the One who can see it all. When you know there is a future, but you can't see it – that is like being in a car that's moving but you can't see out the windshield. The animals don't realize the car is moving - they don't know there is a future, so they are fine in the present. But God put eternity in our hearts. He told us there is a future. He told us that the car is indeed moving. And only one person can see out the windshield, and it's not you. What does that do? It makes you want to be on good terms with the one who can see and who is driving.

By Realizing Only He Gives Enjoyment

So how do you make this create fear of God in your heart? First, by realizing God controls all the seasons of life, so you don't want to be at odds with Him. And second, be realizing that not only does He control the seasons, but He controls your ability to enjoy them. This season just broke into my life - what should my first reaction be? It should be, "Wow! - my only shot at enjoying this season is if God grants it. And He only grants it to those who please Him, therefore pleasing Him matters more than anything else.

Escape from Meaning

So the reason God is doing it the way He is doing it is so that would happen - men would fear Him. They would see that He is in charge of the seasons of life, and He alone is in charge of enjoyment, and so He matters more than anything. That was the purpose. So why doesn't it seem to be working? Why doesn't everyone fear Him? The answer is because in the heart of man is such an aversion to fearing God that he will do everything in his power to suppress any truth that points in this direction. That is why they are so militant in their doctrines of evolution. You turn on any documentary, sit in any science class - wherever you go, they are just relentless in cramming the ideas of evolution and naturalism down everyone's throat (even when it has nothing to do with the topic at hand). They always have to bring it up. Why? Why is that so incredibly important to them? Why can't they just be content to believe it themselves, without trying to force it on everyone else? It is because everywhere you look in this world you see things that point to one conclusion: God matters in your life. You are a fool not to fear God. And they cannot stand that conclusion so they want to wipe out every trace of it. God has planted eternity in their hearts, and they are doing everything they can to rip it out of their hearts.

"No, no eternity! No meaning. No purpose or design. The times are not appointed. It's all just one, giant accident of nature, and everything that happens is caused by random, meaningless, purposeless events."

But no matter how many times they tell themselves that is true, they cannot stop living as if there is meaning and purpose. And so they come up with ridiculous ideas like, "The only meaning in the universe is the meaning you give it." Talk about absurd! I am going to give meaning to the universe? The universe is a big, natural accident, and I am going to assign meaning to it? How can I do that if I am part of the accident? In fact, I am one of the tiniest and most temporary parts of it, and I am going to create some kind of meaning for it all? It is insanity. But they have to embrace that insanity because the only alternative is that there is a God who controls every aspect of my wellbeing, and who is in charge of my enjoyment, and I am answerable to Him on Judgment Day, which means I must live for His pleasure rather than for my own agenda. And they would rather embrace insanity than accept that.

A Whole New Approach

The Preacher is giving us a radically different approach to life. When things happen in your life, instead of trying to get control of it or figure it all out, fear God. Instead of saying, "I need to find a way to get a handle on all this so I can wrap my arms around this thing," say, "Forget my arms - I need to get my knees bent before the God who has His arms around it."

And I am not saying you just do nothing. If something is your responsibility, then you need to take care of it. What I am saying is this - no matter what comes into your life your first priority is to always ask, "Am I living in fear of God? God brought this into my life for the purpose of causing me to fear Him. So am I fearing Him? Is this thing making God matter more to me than anything else? Is it making me prize nearness to God more than I prize anything else? Does it make me afraid to do anything that could hinder my intimacy with God?"

What Time Is It?

What time is it in your life? What season are you in? Are you young, newly married, starting a family? Or are you planning a funeral? Whichever it is - fear God. Say, "Wow! God appointed this new season for me, am I living in fear of Him?"

Is this a season of planting for you? Are you starting some new things? Is it a time to build? Or is it a time to tear down? You are having to pull some things out by the roots so you can start over. Fear God. Stand in awe of the One who put this season on the calendar for you at such a time as this. What good is going to come from all that building and planting or all that tearing down and uprooting – what is it going to accomplish if God doesn't bless it? Fear God.

Is this a time of joy and dancing and laughing? Or are there tears and mourning and groaning? Fear God. If it is time to laugh in your life, that should make God matter to you more than anything. And if it is time to weep in your life, that should make God matter to you more than anything. If it is time to laugh, laugh - but don't make that your hope because another season is right around the corner. And if it is time to weep, then weep - but don't despair. Don't give up hope. Realize that an almighty, wise God brought about this hard time in your life right now. And remind yourself that these tears cannot hurt you, this trial cannot crush you, this hardship does not even have the power to take away your joy. But the displeasure of God could crush you to powder. Do not be afraid of the suffering - be afraid of God.

Is it a time to embrace? Fear God. Time to give up the search? Fear God. Are you tearing something apart, or working to repair something? Are you dealing with things you love or things you hate? Are you at war or at peace? Fear God.

Conclusion

We are living on a bridge between two realities. On the one hand we are stuck in time - subject to all the futility of this cursed world. But at the same time we have eternity in our hearts, and we long for understanding and meaning. So what should we do? How do we deal with the dual realities of living in this cursed, futile world and at the same time having an insatiable thirst for eternity? You get by in the cursed, futile world by trusting God with what is not revealed and just enjoying life as it comes. And you satisfy your craving for the eternal by living in fear of God.

Benediction: 1 Peter 1:15 just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

James 1:25 Questions

- 1) What time (season) is it in your life right now?
- 2) What is it about this season that makes it hard for you to fear God (what makes other things besides God seem like they matter most)?

- 3) Which comes easier to you - fearing God's displeasure and discipline, or fearing the loss of closeness with Him?
- 4) Does your fear of God tend to push you away from God or toward Him?