

MAKING ROOM FOR Life

MAKING ROOM FOR LIFE: TRADING CHAOTIC LIFESTYLES FOR CONNECTED RELATIONSHIPS

“THE HOW-TO’S”

This is the fourth lesson in a four-part series entitled *Making Room for Life*. The first lesson in the series identified a problem we all face, “crowded loneliness.” God created us for community, but our contemporary lifestyle precludes us from experiencing it fully. In effect we have traded what is more valuable for what is less valuable, our birthright for a mess of pottage.

The second lesson identified the solution to this problem, and we discovered that it's not more of the same. The pursuit of the “good life” blessed by our materialistic culture, and its attendant accumulation of more and more stuff, something we tirelessly fund by working more and more hours, is part of the problem, not its solution. The life we long for cannot be bought with money, nor can it be found in the things money can buy; we have to restructure our relationships and our time to discover it.

The third lesson identified two obstacles that stand in our way, the bad habits we've developed that prevent us from enjoying the simple life of community and the current myths about how we're raising our children. Having community is better than being alone, but “the American way of life is choking connectivity to others right out of our lives,” so we have to overcome bad habits and myths about raising children to have it.

This week's lesson is about “The How-To’s.” It's one thing to say, “Make room for life.” It's quite another to explain how to do it. The “making room for life” vision holds the promise of a great life, and it can really happen; it's not just wishful thinking. This lesson will help you learn how. Moreover, you will learn from The Teacher that “there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God” (Ecc. 3:12, 13; cf. 2:24, 25).

Your Initial Reaction

Having come this far in the *Making Room for Life* series, what have you found most interesting, helpful, encouraging or discouraging?



1

Look Closely – observe what you are reading.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

[1] *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:*

[2] *a time to be born 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 scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,*

[6] *a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,*

[7] *a time to tear and a time to mend, 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 toil?*

[10] *I have seen the burden God has laid on men.*

[11] *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

[12] *I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.*

[13] *That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God.*

[14] *I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.*

[15] *Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.*

• Reading to gain an impression – record your thoughts. (3rd Grade – Adult)

• Reading again to see the details (5th Grade – Adult)

- Draw a line from the word “time” to the word “season” and from the word “everything” to the words “every activity” in v. 1.
- Underline the contrasting words in vv. 2-8.
- Highlight the rhetorical question in v. 9.
- Box the important word “toil” in vv. 9 and 13.
- Circle the key words “beautiful” and “eternity” in v. 11.
- Put parentheses around the two imperatives “be happy” and “do good” in v. 12.
- Draw a line to the margin from v. 12 and there write, “cf. 2:24-25.”
- Draw a line from the words “do good” in v. 12 to the words “find satisfaction” in v. 13.
- Put a check mark over the words “so that” indicating *purpose* in v. 14.



2

Think Carefully – interpret what you have read.

• Recognizing the message of the passage (5th Grade – Adult)

This week’s passage, Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, belongs to a larger section (3:1 - 4:3) in which Solomon argues that man’s *raison d’etre*, reason for being, is neither toil nor labor. In the memorable poetic portion found in verses 2-8, he makes specific the thesis that he introduced in verse 1; “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” “God has made everything beautiful (i.e., “appropriate”) in its time,” he reiterates in verse 11. Put differently, we laugh, and we cry, and God has included a time for each in his overall plan. We love when the time comes to love, and we hate when the time comes to hate. “Whatever may be our skill and initiative, our real masters seem to be these inexorable seasons: not only those of the calendar, but that tide of events which moves us now to one kind of action which seems fitting, now to another which put it all into reverse. Obviously we have little say in the situations which move us to weep or laugh, mourn or dance; but our more deliberate acts, too, may be time-conditioned more than we suppose. ‘Who would have imagined’, we sometimes say, ‘that the day would come when I should find myself doing such-and-such, and seeing it as my duty!’ So the peace-loving nation prepares for war; or the shepherd takes the knife to the creature he has earlier nursed back to health. The collector disperses his hoard; friends part in bitter conflict; the need to speak out follows the need to be silent. Nothing that we do, it seems, is free from this relativity and this pressure – almost dictation – from outside” (Derek Kidner, *A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance*, 38). Our deliberate willful acts are conditioned by the times made by the Creator and our activities can do nothing to alter them.

In the prose portion found in verses 9-15, Solomon indicates that God has not only “made everything beautiful in its time,” he has also “set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (v. 11). As human beings we long to comprehend the eternal significance of our lives, yet we cannot fathom our role in God’s overall plan. “Unlike the animals, immersed in time, we long to see them (the “times” of our lives) in their full context, for we know something of eternity: enough at least to compare the fleeting with the ‘forever’. We are like the desperately nearsighted, inching their way along some great tapestry or fresco in the attempt to take it in. We see enough to recognize something of its quality, but the grand design escapes us, for we can never stand back far enough to view it as its Creator does, whole and entire, from the beginning to the end” (Kidner, 39). So how should we respond? Should we despair? Absolutely not! Instead we should be happy and enjoy ourselves. We should eat, drink, and find satisfaction in all the things we do – this is the gift of God (vv. 12 and 13).

The Point of this Lesson

**God has made a fitting time for everything,
but we cannot comprehend the lasting significance of the times of our lives
because we cannot fathom our role in his overall plan,
so the best we can do is make room for life
and find satisfaction in the things we do.**

• Digging deeper into its meaning (5th Grade – Adult)

- v. 1 **time, season** “For everything there is an appointed time, an appropriate time for every activity on earth” (The NET Bible).
- v. 1 **under heaven** i.e., “on earth” or “in the world.”
- v. 2 **born, die** *Merism*, a figure of speech that appears repeatedly in these verses, suggests totality. A time to be born and a time to die = a time for all the activities of life from birth to death. “Though the exact meaning of some of these ‘activities’ (in vv. 2-8) is uncertain, Solomon intended to affirm that all a person’s activities, both constructive and destructive, and all his responses to people, objects, and events happen in their times” (Donald R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 983).
- v. 5 **scatter, gather** One of the more obscure expression in vv. 2-8. It may refer to scattering stones from an old building and gathering stones for a new building, or it may refer to scattering stones to render a field unproductive and gathering stones to render it cultivable.
- v. 9 **toil** Solomon returns to the same question he asked in 1:3, “What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?” The question amounts to a negative assertion. We gain no lasting advantage, no ultimate profit from all the things we do on earth (“labor” or “toil” in 3:9 means more than “job”).
- v. 10 **burden** or “task” (NASB, NKJV).
- v. 11 **beautiful** or “appropriate.” The same word is translated “proper” in 5:18. “God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time” (The NET Bible).
- v. 11 **eternity** “A sense of past and future” (NRSV; cf. NEB). As human beings we long to comprehend the eternal significance of our lives, yet we cannot fathom our role in God’s overall plan.
- v. 12 **do good** Not in an ethical sense. The Hebrew words are better translated “enjoy themselves” (NRSV). They mean the same thing as the words “see good” translated “find satisfaction” (NIV) or “take pleasure in” (NRSV) in the following verse. “I’ve decided that there’s nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That’s it – eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It’s God’s gift” (*The Message*).

• Answering Interpretive Questions - For older learners (5th Grade – Adult)

1. The Teacher said, “There is a time for everything.” For example, when the time to weep comes, presumably we weep. When the time to laugh comes we laugh. Likewise, when it’s time to love, we love, and so it goes with everything. Do you think Solomon was a “What will be will be, it’s not up to me” fatalist? Explain.

2. How would you answer the rhetorical question he asked in verse 9?

3. “I have seen the burden (“task” NASB, NKJV) God has laid on men,” Solomon said. Describe the burden or task that Solomon saw.

4. Since we cannot fathom the overall plan of God, we cannot discern the eternal significance of our lives. So all we can do, according to verse 11 is be happy and enjoy ourselves. (See note on v. 11 **do good**). What makes this more than a desperate last resort?

5. How does God intend for us to respond to his immutable, inscrutable plan?

6. According to Randy, “work is one of the top predators of community; it preys on those precious few hours in the evening when we can be with a circle of family and friends” (*Making Room for Life*, 112). In other words, making room for life entails getting work done at work. What would you tell someone who wanted to stop bringing work home to do in the evening? If you’ve read chapter 9 of *Making Room for Life*, pick what you think is the most helpful productivity principle.

7. Comment on the importance and place of sharing a meal together with a circle of family or friends to the experience of community. (See chapter 10).

8. According to the contractual theory, people agree to be in a small group based on affinity and invitation. According to the communitarian theory, people give themselves to others around them (proximity) even if there is diversity. In your opinion, which one is most likely to result in authentic community? Explain. (See chapter 11.)

9. When it comes to dealing with homework and sports, are you looking for modest change, substantial change, or radical change? What are you going to do to affect the change you’re looking for? (See chapter 12.)

10. When it comes to dealing with the pressures of work, are you looking for modest change, substantial change, or radical change? What are you going to do to affect the change you’re looking for? (See chapter 13.)

3 Respond wisely – apply what you have read. (5th Grade – Adult)

• How might Christ followers respond to the message of this passage?

1. Do what it takes to avoid bringing work home to do in the evening this week.
2. Have a meal at the dinner table together with family or friends at least one time this week.
3. Decide whether you want modest change, substantial change, or radical change regarding children’s sports and homework and do what you need to do to affect that change.
4. Decide whether you want modest change, substantial change, or radical change regarding dealing with the pressures at work and do what you need to do to affect that change.
5. Relate the message of this passage to your life. How might you live differently tomorrow based on the point of this lesson?

4 Gather together – discuss what you have read.

• For older learners (5th Grade – Adult)

1. Read together this week’s passage from Step 1 or your Bible.
2. Read “Recognizing the message of the passage” along with the point of the lesson in Step 2.
3. Discuss your individual responses in Step 3.



• For families

In this series, you will find one family night activity each week. Depending on the age of your children, you will pick and choose from the ideas below.

Pray

Pray for opportunities as a family to share a meal with one another and bring church home to your neighborhood. May the “life busters” of homework, sports and work not rob you of a rich life in community.

Act

Complete the “Community-Building Exercise” below. This is also found at the end of chapter 10. “Have each group [or family] share the convivium...” Follow the outline for the evening presented in chapter 10. Here is a brief outline.

- Prepare the food.
- Set the table.
- Say a prayer.
- Converse. Go around the table and each person tell about his/her day.
- Journal, play a game or musical instrument, listen to music, take a walk, read a book, work on a hobby or dance. The list goes on. Simply choose a relaxing activity to end your day.

Complete the “Community-Building Exercise” below. This is also found at the end of chapter 11.

- “Do a simple compassion project together as a group (examples: visit your local nursing home, serve dinner at the local mission or shelter, do some house projects for a widow in your neighborhood or church).”

Discuss

- While you are having your convivium, have everyone share their thoughts concerning this new schedule for the evening – things they like and reservations they have.
- After you have completed your compassion project, talk about the experience over dinner. How did you help another person, and in the process help yourself?

• Suggestions for Small Groups

1. Discuss selected questions at the end of chapters 9-13 of *Making Room for Life*.
2. Individuals discuss the productivity principle they need to implement most.
3. Plan a “convivium” together.
4. Identify and discuss the four principles of authentic community found on pages 145-47 of *Making Room for Life*.
5. Solve someone’s sports, homework, or pressures-at-work problem.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than thirty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married thirty-five years and have one teenage son, Zach.

Karla Hagan (B.S. in Education from Baylor University, M.A. in Educational Administration, University of North Texas.) Karla has worked as a teacher, curriculum coordinator, writer and children's pastor. She spent 6 years as a high school English teacher. During this time, she also developed and coordinated the Language Arts curriculum for Fairhill School and wrote curriculum for Student Life ministries and Group Publishing. She then spent 2 years as Associate Pastor to Children at Bent Tree Bible Fellowship in Carrollton before accepting her current position. Her husband, Ron, and children, Maya, Ada, and Carson make up her wonderful family.