

The Meaning of Life:

WISDOM FROM ECCLESIASTES

The Meaning of Relationship | Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell | September 25

Open in Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Ecclesiastes 4:1-12

Again I saw all the oppressions that are practised under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive; but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from one person's envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Fools fold their hands

and consume their own flesh.

Better is a handful with quiet

than two handfuls with toil,

and a chasing after wind.

Again, I saw vanity under the sun: the case of solitary individuals, without sons or brothers; yet there is no end to all their toil, and their eyes are never satisfied with riches. 'For whom am I toiling', they ask, 'and depriving myself of pleasure?' This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

1. When was the last time you felt lonely? When was the last time you felt a sense of belonging? What was it about these seasons in life that stood out for you?
2. What are the different ways you experience relationships or community in your life? How are they different? How are they similar?
3. What is the quality of relationship Ecclesiastes is calling us to in this passage?

Respond

What commitment do you want to make or action do you want to take after listening to the message and reflecting with your group?

Pray

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.

The Meaning of Life:

WISDOM FROM ECCLESIASTES

The Meaning of Success | Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell | September 18

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Listen, Converse, Imagine

Ecclesiastes 5:1-12, 18-20

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil. Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few. For dreams come with many cares, and a fool's voice with many words.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfil it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands? With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.

If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and right, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are

yet higher ones over them. But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a ploughed field.

The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.

When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

Sweet is the sleep of labourers, whether they eat little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep.

This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God. For they will scarcely brood over the days of their lives, because God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts.

Mark 10:17-27

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good?

No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not

defraud; Honour your father and mother.”’ He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have

wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’

1. How does the world define “success”? How does our faith tradition define “success”? How do you define “success”?
2. Read Mark 10:17-27. How does this story about the Rich Young Ruler parallel this passage from Ecclesiastes? How do they differ?

Respond

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Pray

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God’s grace to flow over each concern.

The Meaning of Life:

WISDOM FROM ECCLESIASTES

The Meaning of Time | Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell | September 11

Open in Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11, 3:1-15

The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

What do people gain from all the toil
at which they toil under the sun?

A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains for ever.

The sun rises and the sun goes down,
and hurries to the place where it rises.

The wind blows to the south,
and goes round to the north;
round and round goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.

All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

to the place where the streams flow,
there they continue to flow.

All things are wearisome;
more than one can express;

the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
or the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.

Is there a thing of which it is said,
'See, this is new'?

It has already been,
in the ages before us.

The people of long ago are not remembered,
nor will there be any remembrance
of people yet to come
by those who come after them.

a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

1. How would you describe your relationship with time?
2. Charlene referenced James K. A. Smith's idea of "spiritual timekeeping". How does this passage from Ecclesiastes inform your understanding of "spiritual timekeeping"?
3. What are ways God is calling you to be more faithful with the time you have been given? What ideas/burdens might you need to let go of? What ideas/blessings could you embrace?

Respond

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Pray

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Community Group Covenant - Fall 2022

As we begin this fall community group experience, we do so with the desire to listen to and deepen our life with God and one another. To create a safe and brave space to nurture this growth, we hold the following values as essential to our life together in this season:

PARTICIPATION | ENGAGING WITH OTHERS

We agree to be mutual stewards of the life of our group, prioritizing our weekly gatherings and inviting every group members' participation, as they feel comfortable. We will be aware of group participation dynamics. If I am someone who tends to be a listener in group settings, I will consider leaning in to share my insights, perspectives, or questions. If I am someone who tends to talk a lot, I will consider practicing moderation to create space and time for others.

CURIOSITY | YES AND

We agree to respect and be open to engaging others' perspectives, even when we disagree, through a posture of curiosity. An open heart and mind expressed through the language of "Yes And" allows us to be "both/and" rather than "either/or". Our goal is to learn with and from each other, remaining inclusive and compassionate toward everything.

ATTENTIVE LISTENING | TO ONE ANOTHER, AND TO GOD

We agree to respect and demonstrate loving care for one another by practicing attentive listening, paying full attention to the one speaking, without interruption, and refraining from talking over others and giving advice. Brief moments of silence are honored as space to think before speaking.

CARE | "OOPS" AND "OUCH"

We agree, in all of our conversations, to trust that everyone is doing their best. We assume positive intent in others while also acknowledging potentially negative impact. Anyone can say "ouch" if hurt or offended to stop the process from continuing and explore what's happening and why. Anyone can say "oops" to acknowledge their assumptions and/or to respond to another's "ouch."

CONFIDENTIALITY | CREATING BRAVE, SAFE SPACE

We commit to hold in confidence the personal stories, concerns, and reflections, and requests for prayer shared in our community. Our bond of trust is essential to creating space for God's good work in each of us to take place.

NORMS

We agree to meet on _____ (day of week) from _____ (am/pm) to _____ (am/pm) for six weeks, beginning September ____ and concluding November ____ .

We agree to discuss how our group can serve during the fall

- Praying for our Mission Partners (see page 10)
- Other opportunities provided on Serving in Community (see page 9)

We agree to revisit our group covenant mid-way through our six weeks together to assess how we are doing.