

# lesson one

MARCH 30–APRIL 5

## *The Rhythms of* **Life**

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*“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven” (Eccles. 3:1, NKJV).*



Life has different phases, such as birth, growth, fall, and death. Just as a plant starts as a planted seed, grows, and dies, humans go through similar rhythms of life.

Josh. 24:15;  
Eph. 4:2;  
James 5:16

## Introduction

# *Who's With You When It Matters Most?*

I live in a part of the world that experiences four seasons. Yet often two months into the spring by the calendar, the residents of New Jersey may find themselves still waiting for the warm winds of spring to waft in and the lingering frost of winter to fade away. As the seasons cycle from spring to summer to autumn and then winter, so it is with life. Life has its cycle as well. We go through times of happiness and joy, and unfortunately times of worry and sorrow.

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### **What do we do when we face life's winter with no telltale signs of revitalization?**

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Like the seasons, we are sometimes in one phase of life that lasts longer than we want, and we long for happier days. But all hope is not lost! Because of God and His everlasting Word, we always have hope. Although winter may linger on, we may have hope that the warm weather will come. But what do we do when we face life's winter with no telltale signs of revitalization?

God in His infinite wisdom and immeasurable love has made it so that we do not face these times alone; thankfully, we have a family to go through the different cycles of life with.

Close your eyes and think for a moment on some of the most impactful times in your life. Times when you were extremely happy; perhaps the day that you achieved a remarkable milestone. Think about some of the times that weren't so good, times of gloom and anxiety. Now think about the people that you turned to who supported and prayed for you or celebrated with you. For most of us, those individuals were family members. Whatever we may be going through, whether very high points in life or very low, God has made it such that we can face these times as a family. After first seeking God, we can look to our loved ones to help us cope with the stresses of life.

The Bible encourages us to pour out our hearts in prayer for one another (James 5:16) and to bear with one another and express love and gentleness (Eph. 4:2).

One day these cycles of life will end. Let it be our aim and prayer answered that we will meet that day at the Savior's side along with those we have traveled with through the cycles of life. Let us all, with the hope of making it to God's kingdom with all of our loved ones, live a life that boldly proclaims, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15), no matter what season of life we may face.

# Logos *As a Tale That Is Told*

Gen. 8:22; 15:15;  
Judg. 8:32; 13:24–14:2;  
Pss. 71:5; 90:10–12;  
Prov. 5:18;  
Eccles. 3:1–8;  
Jer. 9:23, 24;  
James 1:5

## **Backdrop (Genesis 1; 8:22; Eccles. 3:1–8)**

From the very first note heard and the first word spoken, the earth has continued to spin on its axis just as God promised (Gen. 8:22). As the world turns, the seasons progress in their prescribed cycles and so do the experiences of the human family. The ebb and flow of life was rightly summed up by King Solomon as seasons: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccles. 3:1). Everything happens in God’s own time, but of course, we have a part to play in the many choices we are called to make throughout our life’s cycles.

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**Individual choices have a great deal to do with  
the outcome of each person’s story.**

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## **The Theme (Gen. 21:8)**

None of us can accurately say that we are who or where we are today all by ourselves. Each of us has been impacted, whether positively or negatively, by individuals who helped to form the fabric of our lives. The growth of a family is peppered with causes for celebration (cf. Gen. 21:8). It also has periods of tension and chaos, all of which help to foster growth and determine the direction each family member will take in life.

In an interesting way, the relationships we create within our families continue to play out throughout our lives, and the ultimate relationship we can create with our Maker colors our decisions. The family is a force to be reckoned with, and the Bible is replete with examples of the power families wield in our world for good or ill. Individual choices have a great deal to do with the outcome of each person’s story, but the powerful influence a family has on the make-up of the next generation is clear.

## **Character Development (Judg. 13:24–14:2)**

One very interesting study of character development is found in the life of Samson. The last two verses of chapter thirteen and the two that begin chapter fourteen of the book of Judges give a very concise summary of the account of his life. But reading just those verses skips the many lessons to be learned from the events surrounding his conception and those that led to his demise.

Samson’s birth, like a handful of others in Bible history, was foretold. The heavenly messenger who brought both glad tidings and careful instruction

to Samson's parents also instilled in them a deep reverential fear. We can surmise that they kept on the straight and narrow since Samson physically reaped the promised benefit of their strict obedience.

Clearly, however, quite a lot happened between Samson's birth and his desiring a wife. His choices for a life partner are quite telling of the principles he held dear and the relationship he had with the God of his fathers. Even when his parents tried to dissuade him from his first choice for a companion, the youth insisted that his wants be met. In pursuit of what he considered happiness, much calamity and chaos ensued; and though the full saga may not have had to read the way it does, God's plan to deliver Israel from their conquerors was still accomplished.

***Denouement (Gen. 15:15; Judg. 8:32; Pss. 71:5; 90:10–12; Prov. 5:18; Jer. 9:23, 24; James 1:5)***

To most millennials that I know, dying at a good old age seems a bit far off. The pursuit of present joy or perceived happiness appears to be the agenda of each day, and the conclusion of our short lives is a matter little thought of. The wise counsel of Scripture, however, implores us to pause long enough to consider the conclusion of the matter. In Jeremiah 9:23, 24 we see that real joy and true happiness should flow from our relationship with our heavenly Father. We may exult in strength, wisdom, and riches, but these are only for a limited time and will soon pass away. The only attainment that will last both in this life and the life to come is the bond that we form with God.

If we make the Lord our hope and trust from our youth, we will not be disappointed in the end. Every promise He has written is ours for the taking: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you" (Jer. 29:11, 12). "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

"We spend our years as a tale that is told" indeed, but that tale can have a positive ripple effect, a contagious thread of great adventures and a happy ending if we "apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:9, 12). No matter what direction we choose to go, the story of our lives will be read and have an influence on others. Let us determine to live lives that can be counted blessed and retold with rejoicing.

**REACT**

1. What do you consider to be a full life or a life well lived?
2. How can we keep God as our focus while we go through the many seasons of life?

# Testimony

## *A Time to Be Born, a Time to Die*

Eccles. 3:2

I recently attended the particularly sad funeral service of a family member, and it caused me to contemplate the meaning of life. I asked myself this question: “If we all end up dying, what, then, is the purpose of living?”

It is human nature to make attempts to control our circumstances. We spend many waking hours planning the way our lives should go. Yet no one knows when death will knock at life’s door, although we are not oblivious to the fact that death is inevitable. Nonetheless, there are seasons in our lives that are appointed by God. Before we were born, God had established a time for us to be born, and it is He who determines when we will leave the earth.

### **So what are we to do with our short time on earth, one may ask?**

From time immemorial God knew us, even before He formed each of us in our mother’s womb and set us apart for His appointed purpose at a particular time (Jer. 1:5). So what are we to do with our short time on earth, one may ask?

“The members of God’s church are to be zealous of good works, separating from worldly ambition and walking in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good. With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Saviour’s love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour, for the influence that attends the practical carrying out of the divine commission is irresistible.”<sup>1</sup>

“God’s purpose for the children growing up beside our hearths is wider, deeper, higher, than our restricted vision has comprehended.”<sup>2</sup> God has a wonderful plan for our lives, and although our days are numbered, He promises that His plan will give us hope, a future, and an expected end (Jer. 29:11). God’s wonderful plan for our life is that we continually surrender the sinful desires of our flesh and reflect His image. That we “walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15, 16, ESV). Once we are living fulfilled lives, we can go out into this world to do what God has called us to do—to tell others of His great love and His soon coming as King of kings.

### **REACT**

1. How would you describe the season of life you are in now?
2. How has God already revealed His plan for you during this time?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 109, 110.

2. Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 262.

Ps. 90:10;  
Eccles. 3:2;  
Isa. 61:3

## Evidence *Seasons' Cycle*

Our lives are very short. The average human life spans 70 years, and the Word says, "If by reason of strength they are eighty years" (Ps. 90:10, NKJV). The seasons of the earth provide a salvific picture of life. In winter the soil is hardened. Bats, bears, skunks, snakes, and even bees hibernate, and trees lose their foliage while their roots are preserved beneath the soil.

Winter is the darkest season as nights are longer and days become shorter. In springtime, animals awake from their sleep or return from migration to warmer climates, most times with newborns. Dormant vegetation springs forth in a magnificent array of colors. Summer leads to longer days and shorter nights. Autumn is the preparation for winter as nights become longer again. Vegetation then falls to the earth as signs of vibrant life fade away. The earth is bare and despondent. And the cycle begins again.

### **At the time appointed, the promise came to pass.**

This is the cycle of life and death. Solomon chronicled it perfectly in Ecclesiastes 3:2, where it says to everything there is a "time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot" (NIV). God promises life from death and "beauty from ashes" in Isaiah 61:3 for all those who trust and believe in His promise of salvation. But for those who reject God's promise of salvation, Malachi 4:3 says they will be ashes under the soles of the feet of the righteous.

The story of Sarah and Abraham shows that God has the preeminence over death, life, and time. Sarah and Abraham had been childless until God visited them in the fields of Mamre, at which time God promised them a son. Sarah, who was 90 years old, was barren and past childbearing age. Yet God's promise proved true because our times and lives are in His hands whether we live or die.

Like the trees in winter that are made alive again in spring, God preserved the life He had planted in Sarah so that His salvific promise made to Abraham would come to pass. God's purposes come to pass through the promises He makes. Nothing is too hard for God. At the time appointed, the promise came to pass. When we hold to the promises of God we, like Sarah and Abraham, have the surety of knowing that there is nothing to fear. We have peace when our love and confidence are placed in the Word of God (Ps. 71:5).

### **REACT**

1. What are some biblical promises you can hold to for hope and confidence in Christ?
2. How does nature reveal God's salvation plan?

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## How-to *Leaving the Nest*

Ps. 71:5;  
Eccles. 3:2;  
Acts 9:1–22

So you've successfully modeled your family after God's guidelines, but it's time for yet another change. Your children are now ready to leave your home. Are they ready to leave and face the world on their own?

Many guardians fear letting their children go into the world, but the truth of the matter is that they also, at one point, had to leave their home and journey into the world. To grow as Christians, we must go through trials and build faith in God. God allows us to be separated for a reason. God has a plan for each and every one of us, even for our youth (Ps. 71:5). Our mission may be in our hometown or it could be across the world, but it all leads to one goal, which is spreading the gospel of our Lord.

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Leaving the comfort of home could be quite worrisome, but it is a necessary change in life. When writing about family, Ellen G. White said parents have the power of “the molding of [their] children’s characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life.”<sup>1</sup> It is the duty of the parents to build a family that is fit for the eyes of God.

This is not to say that we or our youth will not make mistakes as we live in this fallen world. Even Saul, who later went on to become an apostle, was once a persecutor of Christians. After seeing the truth of the Lord, Saul, who was also called Paul, set out to tell of God’s Word (Acts 9:1–22). As humans we are not perfect and will probably get things wrong on our first try like Saul; but with Jesus in our hearts, we can do great things. Our homes should be like nests of love, forgiveness, and nurturing; the same way that God’s heart is for us.

### **REACT**

1. When is the right time to let children make choices on their own?
2. How do you know whether you’re being called to minister?
3. Why does God allow our loved ones who are raised in the church to be derailed by the world?

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1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 231.

James 1:19, 20

## Opinion

# *Can You Hear Me?*

God is capable of every emotion we experience since we were made in His image. When Jesus walked the earth, He experienced situations and emotions like those we face today. Scripture tells us that although God has the opportunity to feel anger and punish us right on the spot, He doesn't. Why?

### **We see the evidence of God's love for us every day in the way He always listens to us.**

Because He is "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). He hears not just the words coming from our mouths but also what our hearts say.

Listening does not solely encompass what we physically hear. There are many ways to listen to a person, especially when a person feels as though he or she cannot speak. When we allow ourselves to yield to God's power, we will be able to hear as He hears the concerns of the people around us so that we may support and lift one another up. Listening creates a deeper sense of understanding for us because by doing so we are presented with the opportunity to constantly affirm our faith.

We can boldly say we belong to Christ without having to utter a single word. It is important to note that being "swift to listen" precedes both "slow to speak" and "slow to wrath." Listening can be one of the most difficult things for us to do because in doing so, we are essentially humbling ourselves to the opinion or the experience of another person, regardless of how we may actually feel or emotionally react to it. We are putting whatever pride we have aside. This experience is crucial in our walk with God because we are allowing ourselves to see the world and people the way Jesus did when He walked and talked with us. It isn't easy, but it isn't impossible either. This assurance can and should be something that influences the rhythm of our daily lives.

We see the evidence of God's love for us every day in the way He always listens to us. God wants us to reveal His character as His servants by following the same precepts. Through listening we are loving those around us by letting them know that we care for them. The very act of listening allows us to be in tune with others, especially when God knows they want to draw nearer to Him. If we aren't able to listen to a fellow sinner, how can we ever expect to be able to fully listen to God?

### **REACT**

While listening, are you thinking of a response, or are you actually considering what the other party is saying?

# Exploration

## *The Purpose of Seasons*

Eccles. 3:1

### CONCLUDE

Life is temporal, having seasons, stages, and chapters. To each of these time periods, there is one or several truths that must be and only can be learned during that time. It is God's purpose that we experience each of these seasons, from the fresh newness of spring and the glorious warmth of summer to the fading beauty of autumn and silent splendor of winter. As in nature, so in our lives, let us see "every purpose under the heaven" and live our time in fulfilling ways as artfully and gracefully as the Lord intended.

### CONSIDER

- Mapping out the different stages of life (childhood, adolescence, twenties, young adult, etc.) and figuring out what important truth one is to learn during each time period. Find its parallel and support in Scripture.
- Imagining yourself in your senior years. What do you look like? What values will have changed? What will have stayed the same? What will your family look like? Why?
- Journaling to reflect on the earlier stages of life and marking high points that need to be remembered and low points that could teach deeper lessons.
- Creating a montage of how your nuclear family has transitioned from stage to stage and visually communicating how has God led through this history.
- Writing a song that reminisces on the past but garners courage and hope in God's leading for the future.
- Planting a garden with various plants that all blossom or give forth fruit in different seasons.
- Sitting down with someone and practicing a listening test. Listen to your partner talk without interrupting for five minutes and give intermittent nonverbal acknowledgments of listening. Switch afterward, and then discuss pros and cons.

### CONNECT

Exodus 4; Ecclesiastes 3; John 3; Titus 2.