

To Everything There Is A Season

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Various Speakers

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Pastor Paul. Church, I'm really excited and humbled. Go ahead, Lyle, you can go sit with dad. Make sure he stays awake today, okay?

Today you're going to hear from two people from two different backgrounds and two different stories and the prime example is this, this is the first Bible I remember receiving and it was in 2005. Let that sink in. I was 23. I had fantastic parents. I grew up in a very moral home. I knew right from wrong. I got my tail whipped more times than I can count. My parents did the best that they could but they did not know the importance of being raised in a Bible-believing home. They just didn't know. Both of my parents have since come to know Jesus, have since come to be baptized scripturally, but I didn't have the luxury that all of you first grade kiddos have and all of you parents have and, church, you have to invest in the next generation. The word of God tells us to go to all the nations and make disciples, and the thought that has just been burning inside of me is am I doing everything in my power to equip the kids at FBCO to be world-changers? Am I expectant that God is going to start working on them to use them when they turn 18, 19, and just go to places where people have never heard the Gospel?

I'm a father, I have four children, and raising kids in a Bible home is hard. I'm not going to stand up here and act like I am perfect. If you've ever seen my children, they are just like all other kids. They make mistakes, we point them back to the cross. They screw up, we show them how to forgive. If they do something really bad, we wear them out. That's just our home. I'm not telling you how to raise your kids but I'm telling you, church, you have an opportunity like no other.

I've been at FBO 10 ½ months. It's one of the greatest churches I've ever been in. I didn't want to come here because it was so big, I thought there's no way that a church this size could be relational. Y'all a relational church. You love so well and so hard. But I want you guys to understand that even though these are first-graders and, yes, we're off in the kid's wing, you can have a huge impact in their life.

The word of God says, "Train up a child." If you've ever been in sports or band or anything that took practice, training is hard. Firstborn children, like myself, struggle with this because when things don't come natural or easy, we want to give up. Being a

Christian is not easy, amen? Being a Christian and sharing the Gospel is only going to get harder and these first-graders desperately need this church to do three things. As I worked on this sermon and as I prepared, I don't get a chance very often to come and just share my heart with you as a church but I want you to understand you have a pivotal and vital role in the raising of these children.

Forty-seven first-graders today are being recognized and given a Bible. Why? I've been challenged here recently why do we do what we do? So when first-grade Bible presentation came around, I asked the big question, "Why?" I asked it in staff meeting. I asked it to our team. I asked my family. Nobody knew. A couple people made a great guess, and if you know why, fantastic, but if you don't, let me share it with you. The average age where children learn how to read is somewhere between kindergarten and first-grade. So what better time than now to give them a good solid Bible that, yes, they may not be able to comprehend, they may not understand everything that they're reading, but they can start putting God's word in their head and in their heart so when they grow they know to always look back to the God that created them.

But, church, there's three things that I implore you to begin doing for these kids. The first thing is you can pray as a church. We created a really cool program that has the list of kids' names and if you want more kids' names that are in our kid's ministry, we've got almost 1,000 kids in our database that need prayer. You can pray for them specifically. You can pray for their spouses. You can pray for their careers. You can pray for their parents. You can pray for their siblings. But most importantly, pray that they would never leave the path that God has for them, that their eyes would be opened to go and share the Gospel in whatever realm that they do. As a church, sometimes we sit around and think, "Are we doing that?" I don't care if you're 95 or 5 years old, if you're not doing what God wants you to do, you're probably very very miserable.

The second thing you can do is encourage. Parenting today is harder than it was 20 years ago and I'm not saying that because I'm a parent now and I think it's the end of the world. It's tough. I mean, I've got five women in my house. That alone is worth praying every day for me. I mean, come on, church! But the world is throwing so much trash and so much garbage at them that they need when they come to this church, this beautiful body, not the building but this beautiful body, that when you see kids running in the hall, your first instinct isn't, "Stop running!" It's, "Hey, I'm glad you're here. Slow down just a little bit." We have an opportunity every time you see a child to speak life. The church is designed to edify and to equip kids, adults, and each other, and we can do this through an encouragement. I believe that kids sometimes need a swift kick in the rear. I have no doubt about that. I'm a product of that. But you as a church can encourage these kids to follow the God that loves them, to follow the God that created them, and to do everything in their power to glorify and make his name known.

You can do that, church. You can encourage these kids. You can encourage the parents. If your kiddos are out of the house, you have an opportunity to walk alongside because every parent sitting in here, I guarantee you we've been in a place where we thought, "Man, nobody has ever gone through this." And then somebody walked behind us and

said, "It'll be okay. I've been right where you are." Parent, these kids need to see people serving, these kids need to see people praising.

This community is amazing and then look back and say, "You better behave at church." We've all been there but do you know what's the beautiful thing about that is God just gave us an opportunity to come back and say, "You know what? I'm so sorry. Would you forgive me?" You're modeling forgiveness, you're modeling grace, you're modeling what the church is all about, and the reason I say all of that is to say that, look, people looked at me and thought, "That kid's going down the wrong path." Some of you in here have probably said that about kids in this church and I understand that kids can be rough, but God can do great things through children and I want you to understand something, when I opened this Bible, I found it this morning and it was on my shelf, 23 years old, the reason I am where I am is because there was a church or churches praying for me, and there were people encouraging me along the way.

Now I can honestly say I'm not really sure what a good church model looked like because I didn't go to church a whole lot. We did occasionally but the first two, prayer and encouragement, people never gave up. It says, Paul, or your secret prayer partners, people were praying for my marriage, people were praying for what God would do despite all the things that I had done in my life. And so, church, I wanted to challenge you this morning before Jeff comes up and talks to you parents about seasons in life to never quit praying for these children. Never quit encouraging these children. Now encouragement sometimes is a little bit of a rebuke, a little bit of, "Hey, you can't do that," but that's still encouragement.

And lastly, church, keep modeling what these kids need to see, a church that's on mission for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Jeff. I cam from completely somewhat different backgrounds. We joke about our comparative size but there is a different background. The first Bible I ever received is over in my office, it's a little yellow New Testament that's got my teeth-marks on it because I used it as a chew toy in church when I was a baby. But today I thought it would be fitting to bring this Bible, this old, red, hard-backed Bible that was given to me when I was in first-grade like many of these young people. I had the opposite story. I was, I had a drug problem, I was drug to church every time they were open, and so today I thought it would be fitting to hear God's word challenge us from the Bible that I received on the day that we give to these young people.

So hopefully you do have a Bible with you. We're going to be in the book of Ecclesiastes. It's one of those hard words to say and to pronounce but it's right in the middle of your Bible. We're going to be in chapter 3 but as you're turning to Ecclesiastes 3, today we're going to talk about not only the importance of this day and these kids and their parents' life but also the fact of the seasons of all of our lives, and today as you heard, they're receiving a Bible, number 1, because they need one, but number 2, because this is the age and the stage which they will begin to read, they will be challenged to read, they will be graded on their reading. For the next years of their life, reading will be integral to their

studies but isn't it interesting that as soon as the formality of school is over in our lives, how oftentimes we cease to read.

I've got some statistics that I want to show you this morning. These are somewhat frightening to me. These are statistics regarding people and their propensity or lack thereof to read. For those of you this morning whether here in person or online, that your formal education ended with high school, nothing wrong with that but that's when it ended, do you realize that 33% of you have never read another book again? Never read another book. For those of you who have what we call a "college education," whatever level that is, 42% of you have never read another book. Do you find it interesting the more we read in school, the less we're likely to read when we get out? And what frightens me is that 57% of all books that are actually "read" are not read to completion. So those of you who actually say, "Reading is important to me," don't even finish the books that we start.

It's the last two statistics that I find almost scary. Seventy percent of American families, 70% of us, have not been to a "bookstore" in five years. Now I know what some of y'all are thinking, "I've got Amazon." You know, they sell more than books on Amazon and are you actually purchasing the books? Eighty percent, 80% of American families, let me make it simple, four out of five of us have not read or purchased a book in the last year. We have become a culture and a society that no longer believes in learning throughout life. It doesn't matter what our educational level is, at some point we decide, "I know what I know and I'm good."

But today we turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. A man by the name of Solomon, who we know is the wisest man to ever walk the earth, if you've read chapter 2 this week in your Bible reading plan, allow me to summarize it: been there, done that, and I got all the t-shirts. He said, "I had all the resources to buy anything I wanted to buy. I had all the education one could attain. I had all the resources, I had all the relationships, I had everything." And here's how he concludes it, "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity." Lest you get depressed today, chapter 12 he says, "Here's the sum of it all, love the Lord and do his commandments." A man who had experienced everything, seen everything, learned everything said, "If you somehow experience it all apart from who the Lord is, you've missed it all."

Today in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, one of the most famous passages of Scripture in the Bible, not because it's contained in the Bible but because it was a billboard top 100 song about 40 years ago by The Birds, "To everything there is a season." Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 3 it says,

1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time

to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Now there are 14 series of statements listed here in Ecclesiastes 3 for 28 respective "seasons of life" that you and I walk through, and right now these first-graders are entering a season of life, these parents are in a season of life, grandparents are in a season of life, and the thing I want you to understand first are the facts about the seasons of life.

Notice what it says in verse 1, "To every thing there is a season." The agricultural world experiences seasons. The animal kingdom experiences seasons. We as humanity experience seasons. And if you drilled down deep, even though there's 28 that are listed here, you would probably agree there are kind of some subpoints under there. When there's a time to sew there's a lot of factors that get involved when amending things that have been torn, and so the fact is that we all go through seasons. Here's what I want you to hear: "to every purpose under heaven." That's what the word of God says. It says that whatever season you're walking through right now is orchestrated, ordained by God himself.

Now let me go ahead and jump to the conclusion. Some of y'all are thinking, "I don't like this season. There's nothing I like about what I'm walking through right now. How could this be the purpose of God for my life?" I want you to notice what we just read. There's a time to be born, there's a time to die. There's a time to plant, there's a time to be plucked up that which is planted. You see, the fact is we all go through seasons and according to God's word, about half of them would be positive, half of them would be negative, but here's the frustration: it doesn't matter what season you're in, it's always frustrating, isn't it? It's always frustrating. We have this problem as a humanity of always thinking the grass is greener on the other side, do we not? We always believe that if I were in a different season than this, things would be better. Those who are young want to be old. Those that are old that want to be young. I mean, think about it. In fact, allow me to illustrate how this works out. I'm just going to walk through some of the seasons of life and I want you to understand how every one of those seasons to somebody is a very discouraging time, and to others it may be a cherished memory of thought.

Some of you here today, you're single. You're not married and you're frustrated about it. In this season of life, you're lonely and you've let the Lord know and everybody else know how you feel about things, and you're frustrated and you think, "If I were only married things would be so much better." Did y'all hear the underlying chuckle there? Because there's a bunch of married folks in here, you're frustrated, aren't you? Isn't it funny single people want to be married, married people think back when they were single. You see, the frustration about seasons is we always think, "If I went to a different season, things would be better."

There are some of you here today, you've prayed until you can't pray anymore that God would give you kids and you're broken-hearted and you're frustrated and you say, "If God

would only allow us the privilege of what they're talking about today in our own home." And there's some of you who have children in your home that all you talk about is the day when you didn't. You see, it's frustrating struggling to have kids and it's frustrating having children.

There's some of you, there's more month than there is money. You're frustrated. You can't seem to make it in the career, you can't seem to make that what you desire and you say, "If I only had more, how much better life would be." Some of the most miserable people I know are stinking wealthy. Why? Because they spend so much time trying to make sure others don't get the money they got. Isn't that funny, that when it comes to the seasons of life, it doesn't matter what season you're in, you always think a different season would make everything okay.

So what happens? We transition from one season to the next, whatever that season is, and we discover the frustration that every single season is difficult. But yet what did it just tell us? To every purpose under heaven. Let's talk about the fruit of the seasons of life. We're all familiar with fruit. Those of you who, like myself, try to avoid it at all costs but nonetheless we know that it's good for us, it doesn't matter what your favorite fruit may be, we all understand that in an agricultural perspective it takes a lot of straining and painstaking activities for you to eat that apple. There's a seed that has to be buried, there is a tree that has to grow, it has to weather the storms, it has to go through the winter and the summer and the spring and the fall, in east Alabama that can be in 48 hours. I mean, it's go to do all of that. Years down the road there will be an apple. You see, that's the fruit of the season of life. It doesn't matter what you're walking through, it doesn't matter what you're dealing with, the fruit of this season typically won't be seen until years down the road.

You and I are walking through a collective season, it's known as a pandemic. The experts are telling us we haven't done this in 100 years, since the year 1918. We're walking around differently than we've ever walked, we're interacting differently than we've ever interacted, and I've yet to meet a single person who says, "I wish this would go on forever." In fact, some of y'all were done with it six months ago. Everybody, everybody that I've met is ready for the next season. Let me ask you a very hard question: what will the fruit of your pandemic be? Six months of sheer frustration and anger? Or time that you had that you didn't expect to have that you actually spent with the Lord? It's a tough question to ask, isn't it, because when we're walking through the seasons of life, here's the difficulty, the fruit. The fruit of the seasons is rare because rarely do we trust God during the difficult season we're walking through. We pray, "God, get me out of this season," versus, "God, bear fruit in the midst of this season."

You know, you go back to Ecclesiastes 3 and as I mentioned, there could probably be a lot of subpoints that are mentioned. There's a time to live, there's a time to die. There's a time to get, there's a time to lose. A time to keep, and a time to cast away. I want to challenge you today go back, reread chapter 3, read it as many times as you want, you find for me a season for the word of God. Find it. There's no one. You say, "Why?" Because it supersedes all seasons. And I think the struggle that we need to address today

which is a part of the fruit problem is it doesn't matter what season we're walking through, how difficult it may be, it is the word of God that will take us through these seasons no matter what that season may be.

Let me challenge you today whether you're in first-grade getting a Bible, whether you're one of these parents, whether you're one of us who's passed this "season of life," we've all got a season, we're all walking through something, we're all dealing with something right now and so the question is no matter what the season is, I know it's tough, it's not fun and you wish it would pass, but here's the question: is the word of God critical and vital and important to your season right now? Or do you spend all your time just praying, "God, get me out of it"? The Lord may be saying, "I'd really like to bear fruit in the midst of it."

You know, today is a day where we present Bibles. Pastor Paul mentioned a letter that was in his Bible, what I'm about to quote for you is not in this particular one but I've placed it in many Bibles that I've owned. This is not a phrase that's original to me. I don't know who coined it but it's been plagiarized for hundreds of years. Maybe you've heard of it, maybe it's worthy of putting in your own Bible: this book will keep me from sin but sin will keep me from this book. Now I'm going to make it real real here. If you're going through a season of life right now and you're struggling with the Lord, if you're struggling with Scripture, if you're struggling making that a reality in your life, you have to ask yourself that vital question: is there a struggle, is there a sin that is keeping you from that book? It may be anger. It may be frustration. It may be whatever it may be. This book will keep you from sin but sin will keep you from this book. It doesn't matter what season that you're walking through, it doesn't matter what struggle that you're dealing with, there is nothing that you could be walking through now that is not addressed in these pages.

Pastor Paul and I come from two completely different stories, different backgrounds. I grew up, I was in Sunday school every Sunday before and after I could read. He never went to a service until he was in his mid-twenties. But you know, it doesn't matter which one of us you're more like, we both had the same problem and they both required the same answer. You see, as a seven year old and a 23 year old, we both discovered from the truth of God's word that we had a sin problem, and we both discovered that the only answer to our sin problem was Jesus Christ. Can you imagine if we'd let our sin keep us from this book? We would have never known the answer. We would have never known the truth and we wouldn't have the stories that we do today. Don't let the struggle and the sin of life keep you from the truth of God's word. It's in those days you need it even more.