

# Ecclesiastes 3:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice,  
and to do good in his life.

## Analysis

**I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life** (יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם־לִשְׁמוֹן וְלַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב בְּחַיּוֹן) The phrase 'no good in them' refers to the times and activities listed in 3:1-8—they contain no intrinsic, ultimate good 'under the sun.' The only good is **to rejoice** (לִשְׁמוֹן, lismo'ach) and **to do good** (לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב, la'asot tov) during life.

This is Ecclesiastes' first major positive prescription after chapters of critique. The Hebrew 'samo'ach' (שָׂמֵחַ) means to rejoice, be glad—receiving present moments with gratitude rather than postponing joy until some future achievement. 'Doing good' (asot tov) means acting rightly and benevolently within your appointed time. These aren't self-generated pleasures but gifts received from God (v. 13). The verse reorients from seeking permanent profit or ultimate meaning in earthly activities to finding joy and doing good in the present. Paul later echoes this: 'rejoice in the Lord always' (Philippians 4:4), not in circumstances but in God who gives each day.

## Historical Context

Ancient cultures often deferred happiness—Egyptian funerary texts looked toward the afterlife, Mesopotamian epics lamented mortality's curse, Greek philosophy sometimes denigrated bodily pleasures as inferior to intellectual contemplation. Ecclesiastes offers a more balanced Hebrew wisdom: since God has appointed

times for all activities (3:1-8), and we cannot change His works (3:14), the wise response is rejoicing in present moments and doing good while opportunity exists. This isn't hedonism (pleasure-seeking as ultimate meaning) but grateful reception of God's gifts within time's constraints. Jesus taught similar wisdom: don't be anxious about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34), but do good while it is day (John 9:4).

## Related Passages

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**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. What future achievement or circumstance are you waiting for before allowing yourself to rejoice, and how does this verse challenge that deferral?
2. How can you 'do good' in today's appointed activities rather than postponing kindness and righteousness until conditions seem more favorable?

## Interlinear Text

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לְשֵׁם וּמְלֹאת יְהָוָה אֶת־בָּרְאָתִי  
I know H3588 H369 good H0 H3588 H518 in them but for a man to rejoice H8055

וְלֹא־לְעֵשׂ וְתַּעֲשֵׂה בְּחַיָּיו טְבָרָא  
and to do good in his life H6213 H2896 H2416

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 37:3** (Good): Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

**Ecclesiastes 3:22** (Parallel theme): Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

**1 Timothy 6:18** (Good): That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

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