

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 (יָדָעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם לְשִׂמּוֹחַ וּלַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב בְּחַיָּיו, yada'ti ki ein tov bam ki im-lismo'ach vela'asot tov b'chayav). 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** (לְשִׂמּוֹחַ, 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' (סָמַח) 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

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

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

אֲנִי	כִּי	יָדַעְתִּי	אֵין	טוֹב	בָּם	כִּי	אִם	לְשֹׂמְרוֹן
I know	H3588	H369	good	H0	H3588	H518	in them but for a man to rejoice	
H3045			H2896				H8055	

וְלַעֲשׂוֹת	טוֹב	בְּחַיָּו:
and to do	good	in his life
H6213	H2896	H2416

Additional Cross-References

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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