

# Ecclesiastes 3:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

## Analysis

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This enigmatic verse pairs physical actions with emotional/relational ones. 'A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together' likely refers to agricultural activity—clearing fields for planting or building stone walls, though some interpret it as ancient warfare (2 Kings 3:19, 25). The second pair—'a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing'—addresses physical and emotional intimacy. The Hebrew 'chabaq' (חָבַק, embrace) can denote affection, marital intimacy, or supportive comfort. Wisdom recognizes that both closeness and distance have appropriate seasons: clinging perpetually prevents necessary separation, while constant distance prevents needed intimacy. This applies to marriage (1 Corinthians 7:5), friendships, and even our relationship with earthly possessions (holding loosely what God may call us to release). The verse teaches discernment in relationships and endeavors—knowing when to build up and when to clear away, when to draw near and when to step back.

## Historical Context

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In ancient agrarian Palestine, gathering and casting away stones were constant activities. Farmers cleared rocky fields for cultivation by casting stones to field edges or into piles. Builders gathered stones for construction. During warfare, conquering armies would ruin enemy land by casting stones onto fields (2 Kings 3:19, 25), while rebuilding required gathering stones. The embrace imagery resonates with ancient Near Eastern customs: greeting with embraces, mourning

by embracing the bereaved, and avoiding certain embraces during ritual purity requirements (Leviticus 15). The New Testament applies relational wisdom similarly: Jesus sent disciples out two-by-two (companionship) but also withdrew alone for prayer (solitude). Paul both worked closely with ministry partners and separated from them when necessary (Acts 15:36-41). Christian community requires both togetherness and appropriate boundaries.

## Related Passages

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. What 'stones' in your life—projects, relationships, habits—might God be calling you to 'cast away' rather than continue gathering?
2. How do you discern the proper times for relational closeness versus healthy distance in your key relationships?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיַּעַן	לְהַשְׁלִיךְ	אֲבָנֵי יָם	וַיַּעַן	כֵּן וְסָ	אֲבָנֵי יָם	וַיַּעַן
A time	to cast away	stones	A time	to gather	stones	A time
H6256	H7993	H68	H6256	H3664	H68	H6256
מִמְּבָקִי:	וַיַּעַן	לִרְחֹק	מִמְּבָקִי:			
from embracing	A time	to refrain	from embracing			
H2263	H6256	H7368	H2263			

## Additional Cross-References

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**2 Kings 3:25** (Parallel theme): And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells

of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it.

**Joel 2:16** (Parallel theme): Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

**Joshua 10:27** (Parallel theme): And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain until this very day.