

Ecclesiastes 3:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

Analysis

This verse presents antitheses of acquisition and release: 'a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.' The Hebrew 'baqash' (בָּקַשׁ, get/seek) and 'abad' (אָבַד, lose) describe the rhythm of gain and loss that marks human existence. Similarly, 'shamar' (שָׁמַר, keep/guard) and 'shalakh' (שָׁלַח, cast away/throw) address retention versus release. Wisdom recognizes that seasons of accumulation must alternate with seasons of letting go. Perpetual acquiring without discernment leads to hoarding; indiscriminate disposal leads to waste. The verse teaches stewardship—holding possessions, relationships, and opportunities loosely enough to release them when God's timing requires, yet faithfully enough to steward them well during seasons of keeping. This anticipates Jesus's teaching about treasures: earthly wealth must be held with open hands, ready to release for kingdom purposes (Matthew 6:19-21; 19:21).

Historical Context

Ancient agrarian and mercantile cultures experienced rhythms of acquisition and loss—harvest and famine, profit and loss, building wealth and losing it to war or drought. Joseph's administration in Egypt modeled wise stewardship: gathering during abundance, distributing during scarcity (Genesis 41). Job experienced both: 'The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away' (Job 1:21). Early Christians practiced radical redistribution, selling possessions to meet community needs (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). The Reformation recovered biblical perspective on vocation and possessions: earthly goods are divine trusts to be stewarded

faithfully, not ultimate treasures to be hoarded. Puritan theology emphasized holding possessions with 'weaned affections'—grateful for God's gifts but willing to release them at His command.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What possessions, relationships, or opportunities might God be calling you to 'cast away' or release in this season?
2. How do you cultivate the wisdom to discern when to acquire and keep versus when to lose and cast away?

Interlinear Text

לְפָשָׁלִים: וְעַת לְשִׁמְרֹד וְעַת לְבַקֵּשׁ
A time **to get** **A time** **to lose** **A time** **to keep** **A time** **to cast away**
H6256 H1245 H6256 H6 H6256 H8104 H6256 H7993

Additional Cross-References

Acts 27:19 (Parallel theme): And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

Acts 27:38 (Parallel theme): And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

Psalms 112:9 (Parallel theme): He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 (Parallel theme): Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

Matthew 19:29 (Parallel theme): And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

2 Kings 5:26 (Parallel theme): And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?

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