

Three Visions of Living

Below you will find three distinct views of life and living the first is a poem from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow entitled “A Psalm of Life”. The second is the first chapter of *Ecclesiastes*, and the third is a monologue delivered by Macbeth following the death of his wife in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

Read all three and then respond as honestly as your heart allows to the following. If you feel so motivated, share these observations with a partner.

- A. Which of the three views runs closest to your own experience at this point in time?

- B. Which line or couple of lines from each of the works most captures a truth for you--one you can wholeheartedly agree with or just as energetically disagree with?

- C. Which of the three speakers is most in need of comfort in your view? Why would that be the case?

- D. Wadsworth’s poem begins with a one line epigraph (*a phrase, quotation, or poem that is set at the beginning of a document, monograph or section thereof. The epigraph may serve as a preface to the work; as a summary; as a counter-example; or as a link from the work to a wider literary canon, with the purpose of either inviting comparison or enlisting a conventional context*).

Who do you think it is referring to and why do you think that might be relevant to the message Longfellow is seeking to convey?

- E. Do you think Macbeth would agree more with the words of wisdom from Longfellow’s persona or from Solomon in *Ecclesiastes*? What causes you to choose as you have?

- F. In your view, at this point in your life, is regret a natural human reaction to living? Is there any way to avoid the encounter of regret?

A Psalm of Life

BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

What The Heart Of The Young Man Said To The Psalmist.

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,— act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.



Ecclesiastes 1

King James Version (KJV)

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever.

5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Speech: “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow”

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

(from Macbeth, spoken by Macbeth)

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.