

# Ecclesiastes 11 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

- Ecclesiastes 11:1
- Ecclesiastes 11:2
- Ecclesiastes 11:3
- Ecclesiastes 11:4
- Ecclesiastes 11:5
- Ecclesiastes 11:6
- Ecclesiastes 11:7
- Ecclesiastes 11:8
- Ecclesiastes 11:9
- Ecclesiastes 11:10

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES					
The Search for Significance					
The Quest for Contentment					
The Pursuit of Purpose					
Exploration			Exhortation		
All is Vanity	Vanity of Doing	Vanity of Having	Vanity of Being	Using Life Well	Source of True Living
Eccl 1:1-18	Eccl 2:1-26	Eccl 3:1-6:12	Eccl 7:1-9:18	Eccl 10:1-11:10	Eccl 12:1-14
Declaration of Vanity	Demonstration of Vanity		Deliverance from Vanity		
Subject	Sermons		Summary		
Fickleness of Life					
Versus					
Fear of the Lord					
Place:					
"Under the Sun"					
Decades of Searching					
(in the days of King Solomon)					
circa 936BC					
King Solomon					
Author					

Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.

- KJV Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.
- NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days.
- NET Ecclesiastes 11:1 Send your grain overseas, for after many days you will get a return.
- BGT Ecclesiastes 11:1 π στειλον τ ν ρτον σου π πρ σωπον το δατος τι ν πλ θει τ ν μερ ν ε ρ σεις α τ ν
- LXE Ecclesiastes 11:1 Send forth thy bread upon the face of the water: for thou shalt find it after many days.
- CSB Ecclesiastes 11:1 Send your bread on the surface of the waters, for after many days you may find it.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:1 Send your grain across the seas, and in time, profits will flow back to you.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:1 Send forth thy bread on the face of the waters, For in the multitude of the days thou dost find it.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread on the water, eventually you will recover it.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:1 Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters; after a long time you may find it again.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:1 Throw your bread on the surface of the water, because you will find it again after many days.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:1 Put out your bread on the face of the waters; for after a long time it will come back to you again.

■ **Cast:**

"Vain are the favours done to vicious men;  
Not vainer 'tis to sow the foaming deep.  
The deep no pleasant harvest shall afford,  
Nor will the wicked ever make return."

"To befriend the wicked is like sowing in the sea." These,  
indeed, invert this precept; nor is it extraordinary that they should;  
"The one, frail human power alone produced,  
The other, God."

■ **bread:** De 15:7-11 Pr 11:24,25 22:9 Isa 32:8

■ **waters:** Isa 32:20

■ **for:** Ec 11:6 De 15:10 Ps 41:1,2 126:5,6 Pr 11:18 19:17 Mt 10:13,42 25:40 Lu 14:14 2Co 9:6 Ga 6:8-10 Heb 6:10

**Related Passages:**

Proverbs 19:17 One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

Galatians 6:9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

2 Corinthians 9:6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Proverbs 11:24 There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.

Isaiah 32:20 How blessed will you be, you who sow beside all waters, Who let out freely the ox and the donkey.

Cast your bread upon the waters

**LET GO  
AND RECEIVE**

[William Barrick](#) - Sowing in the Morning, Sowing in the Evening. In conclusion, the Preacher determines to fear God, obey God, and enjoy life (Eccl 9:1–12:14) Ecclesiastes begins with a declaration that all is futile, enigmatic, or ephemeral ("Vanity of vanities! All

is vanity," Eccl 1:2). Solomon focuses on the apparent lack of human advantage in life's labors "under the sun" (Ec 1:3). Indeed, he characterizes life on earth as endless cycle of sunrises and sunsets (Eccl 1:5). Now, at the end of the book, he looks "**beyond his gloomy vistas to see God.**" (McComiskey, borrow [Ecclesiastes](#)) Solomon realizes that life's certainties (like death) and life's uncertainties (like accidents and disasters) cannot be predicted (cf. Pr 27:1). However, a person can prepare for both sets of circumstances and enjoy God's marvelous gift of life "under the sun." How should someone live in the light of Solomon's extended discourse? **Kidner** offers a concise, but appropriate summary of this section of the book: **'Be bold! Be joyful! Be godly!'** (The three referring respectively to Ec 11:1–6; Ec 11:7–10; and Ec 12:1–8. [Kidner, A Time to Mourn](#).) Thus, Solomon carries on from the advice of Eccl 10, **"Be wise!"** Such instructions or exhortations characterize the last major section of the book (Eccl 11:1–12:8), proclaiming **a call to decision and obedience.** (Borrow Eaton, [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Cast** ([shalach](#); Lxx - [apostello](#) in [aorist imperative](#)) **your bread** ([lechem](#); Lxx - [artos](#)) **on the surface of the waters, for** (term of explanation) **you will find it after many days.** The interpretation of this verse is not easy and there is a considerable divergence among the commentaries!

The classic interpretation, supported by Jewish and Christian commentators sees this as referring to almsgiving. Thus **Bread** refers to goods or resources, **Waters** refers people in need or uncertain circumstances. **Find it after many days** refers to the fact that God will bless your faithfulness.

A second interpretation is that this is a commercial venture metaphor which refers to ancient shipping/trade of sending grain or goods overseas. You **cast** your product into the unpredictable world of commerce (See [support for this interpretation below](#)). You trust that eventual profit will return after much time. This fits the economic themes of Ecclesiastes 10–11 and the context of risk in work.

A third interpretation is a call to bold faith in uncertainty. The idea is to take action despite uncertainty. Don't wait for the perfect conditions (Ec 11:4) Be faithful and open-handed, even when outcomes seem unsure

**Cast your bread** suggests releasing your resources, not hoarding them and as alluded to above could be a call to generosity or wise investment. The picture of casting something on water seems risky because there is no control, no guarantee of return. This evokes imagery of merchants sending ships to sea, farmers sowing seed in flood-prone fields, or generosity given without certainty of reciprocation

**ESV Study Bible** ([borrow](#)) - To **cast**... bread upon the waters is a metaphor without any contemporary parallels, so interpreters are uncertain about its meaning. Three suggestions are most common: (1) It refers to maritime commerce. (2) It refers to taking steps to spread out one's financial resources in multiple directions. (3) In older Jewish and Christian interpretation, it was taken to refer to giving to the poor, in which case finding it again represents others being kind in return.

**Wycliffe Bible Commentary** has a fourth interpretation - There is no certain explanation of this proverb. Traditionally, it has been seen as an exhortation to liberality or charity, which one is to cast (lit., send forth -- [shalach](#); Lxx - [apostello](#)) before others without any immediate realization of gain, but which will return someday to reward its giver (cf. Lk 16:9). But perhaps the verse is to be read, "Cast your bread upon the waters (strange though this may seem), yet you may find it after many days." Read thus, **it refers to the uncertainty of this life, in which even an apparently unwise action may yield reward.** (Borrow [Wycliffe Bible Commentary](#))

[Ray Pritchard](#) has a similar interpretation - In Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, Solomon, who has looked at all the problems of the world, now challenges his readers to grab hold of life and take a few chances. Disaster is still just around the corner, but since you can't know how or when or even if it will come, your best course is to "cast your bread upon the waters"; that is, be diligent in your labors so that you may profit from them later.

**John MacArthur** - Take a calculated and wise step forward in life, like a farmer who throws his seed on the wet or marshy ground and waits for it to grow (cf. Isa 32:20). (See [The MacArthur Bible](#)) (**ED**: This view is probably one of the least likely.)

**Henry Morris** has a more "spiritual application" for his interpretation of **bread upon the waters**. The Hebrew word for "**bread**" could also be used for the "grain" from which bread is made. The metaphor is that of spreading spiritual seed far and wide, trusting eventually to find its fruit in redeemed lives.

**Daniel Akin** - Some commentators see this casting of bread more literally (Keddie, 143–44). Others see it as metaphorical. In either case, the bottom line is that taking calculated risks can be a valuable thing. (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary - Ecclesiastes](#))

**William MacDonald** - In any case, the thought is that a widespread and wholesale distribution of what is good will result in a generous return in the time of harvest. This verse is true of the gospel. We may not see immediate results as we share the bread of life, but the eventual harvest is sure. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Bob Utley** - There are scholars who think the mentioning of "waters" is a reference to marine commerce. Therefore, this verse refers to shrewd investments in sea trade (see NASB Study Bible)....it does illustrate the difficulty one faces in moderns trying to understand ANE idioms, imagery, and wisdom literature.

**NET NOTE** - Heb "your bread." The term **לֶחֶם** (lekhem) is traditionally rendered "bread" (KJV, NAB, RSV, NRSV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS). However, Ec 11:1–2 seems to deal with exporting goods overseas (D. R. Glenn, [Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament - Page 1002](#)). It is better to take **לֶחֶם** ("bread") as a metonymy of product, standing for the grain and wheat from which bread is produced (e.g., Gen 41:54–55; 47:13, 15, 17, 19; 49:20; Num 15:19; 2 Kgs 18:32; Isa 28:28; 30:23; 36:17; 55:10; Jer 5:17; Ezek 48:18; Job 28:5; Ps 104:14; Prov 28:3); see HALOT 526 s.v. 1; BDB 537 s.v. 1.b. It is taken this way by several translations: "grain" (NEB) and "goods" (Moffatt). Qoheleth encouraged the export of grain products overseas in international trade.

**NET NOTE** - Heb "upon the surface of the waters." This is traditionally viewed as extolling generosity from which a reward will be reaped. On the other hand, some scholars suggest that the imagery deals with commercial business through maritime trade. M. Jastrow took this verse as advice to take risks in business by trusting one's goods or ships that will after many days return with a profit ([A. Cohen, The Five Megilloth](#) [SoBB], 181). Sea trade was risky in the ancient Near East, but it brought big returns to its investors (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:26–28; 10:22; Ps 107:23); see D. R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," [Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament - Page 1002](#). The verse is rendered thus: "Send your grain across the seas, and in time you will get a return" (NEB); or "Trust your goods far and wide at sea, till you get a good return after a while" (Moffatt). (**ED**: NOTICE HOW THESE TRANSLATIONS ARE IN EFFECT INTERPRETATIONS WHICH SHOWS HOW ESSENTIALLY EVERY TRANSLATION IS TO SOME DEGREE AN INTERPRETATION. PROBABLY THE MOST TRUE TO THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE IS YOUNG'S LITERAL TRANSLATION, BUT IT IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST BECAUSE IT RELIES ON THE LESS ACCURATE TEXTUS RECEPTUS.)

**Charles Ryrie** feels this is "A metaphorical expression taken from the grain trade of a seaport town, illustrating the successful prospects of a bold business venture." (Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#))

**You will find it after many days** Though the return is not immediate, Solomon encourages trust, promising that willingness to obey and cast your bread will bear fruit in due time. Specifically what kind of fruit is not absolutely clear.

**William Barrick** - **What a Person Does Not Know** (Eccl 11:1–6) Repeatedly Solomon has urged his readers to pursue the opportunities God gives "under the sun." Now, in Eccl 11:1, he addresses the matter of exercising some faith in making an investment that entails risk. The opportunity involves either almsgiving (the traditional view) (Another view that has few adherents interprets the "bread" as a figure for seed that a farmer sows by casting it on soggy or wet ground; Jamieson, A Commentary) or commercial pursuits involving ocean-going ships. (Glenn, [Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament - Page 1002](#); borrow Garrett, [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, 338](#); Longman III, The Book of Ecclesiastes, 256; Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 337; Ryken, Ecclesiastes, 255.) Both of these involve the use of profits gained from one's labors. **If verse 1 deals with almsgiving, then Eccl 11:2 speaks of a distribution of gifts** (Ryken, Ecclesiastes, 254–55, associates the word "portion" here with its use in Neh 8:10. NASU's translation "Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight" is itself misleading, because the Hebrew reads literally, "Give a portion to seven and even to eight" In addition, Deut 18:8 uses "portion" with regard to food.) to seven or even eight needy people, multiplying the odds that some are going to do exceedingly well with that which they have been given. Adherents to this view appeal to an Arab proverb ("Do good, throw your bread on the waters, and one day you will be rewarded") (Longman, Ecclesiastes,) and Egyptian parallels ("Do a good deed and throw it in the water; when it dries you will find it") (Brown, Ecclesiastes) for support. Texts like Proverbs 19:17 ("One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed") lend further support to this approach involving a principle of ultimate compensation for generosity. **Kaiser**, taking the almsgiving viewpoint, rephrases Eccl 11:2, "'Be liberal and generous to as many as you can and then some,' . . . So, make as many friends as you can, for you never know when you yourself may need assistance." (Borrow [Kaiser, Ecclesiastes](#)) In the New Testament a similar truth appears in Luke 16:9 ("make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings").

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**Cast** (send, send away) ([07971](#)) **shalach** means to send, to send forth, to send away, to let go, to put, to expel (cf Ge 3:23). The first use in Ge 3:22 describes Adam as he stretched out his hand to take of the forbidden fruit. The second use in Ge 3:23 describes God's punishment - "God sent him out (shalach) from the Garden." In Ge 8:7 Noah "sent out a raven" then "a dove" (Ge 8:8, 10, 12). In Ge 18:16 Abraham sent the visitors (one of which was the LORD!) on their way, thus sending off in a friendly sense. Of the angels who "reached out (shalach) their hands and brought Lot into the house." The LORD...sent (shalach) us (the angels) to destroy" Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 19:13). In Ge 19:29 "when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." Of Hagar and Ishmael "sent...away" into the wilderness of Beersheba (Ge 21:14). In Ge 22:10 "Abraham stretched out his hand" as he prepared to sacrifice Isaac. God told him "do not stretch out your hand against the lad." (Ge 22:12) We could continue working through the verses which gives us a good sense of what this verb shalach means. In Malachi 3:1 God says He will send "My messenger" (Elijah) (cf Mal 4:5). In Malachi 2:16 God says "I hate divorce" and the word in

Hebrew is shalach. Shalach is used to mean - Send fire (Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, Amos 2:2,5), a plague (Amos 4:10) or a famine (Amos 8:11).

**NET NOTE** - The verb שָׁלַח (shalakh, "to send; to cast") refers to the action of sending something to someone (e.g., Neh 8:12; HALOT 1995 s.v. שָׁלַח). The term is traditionally rendered here as "cast" (KJV, NAB, RES, ASV, NASB, NIV); however, some render it "send" (NJPS, NRSV, NEB). LXX uses ἀποστείλον (aposteilon, "send").

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **BREAD UPON THE WATERS** Ecclesiastes 11:1—2

Several years ago I met Jack, a salesman who had changed careers when he was thirty-seven. I asked if it wasn't risky to leave his teaching position for the uncertain world of sales, especially since he had a wife and a young daughter to consider.

"Yes, it was risky," Jack said, "but I did it anyway."

Then he recalled the words his father once told him: "Son, I'm sixty-two now. I've been making decisions all my life. What percent of those decisions do you suppose were good decisions?" Jack figured maybe 40 to 45 percent of his father's decisions were good ones. "Son, that's high. I'm lucky if even 33 percent of my decisions turn out right.

"I'm old enough now that if I wanted to," his father added, "I could just stop making decisions. But if I stopped, that percentage would never change. It would stay at 33 percent until I die.

"Son, you can stop making decisions right now if you want to. If you do, you'll never get above where you are right now. But if you keep on making decisions— even when you're scared—you've got a chance to raise that average. And remember, you normally make better decisions as you get older because you have more experience in life."

That story illustrates a great principle. In Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, Solomon, who has looked at all the problems of the world, now challenges his readers to grab hold of life and take a few chances. Disaster is still just around the corner, but since you can't know how or when or even if it will come, your best course is to "cast your bread upon the waters"; that is, be diligent in your labors so that you may profit from them later.

Nothing has changed in Solomon's overall philosophy: He believes life itself is fleeting and frustrating. But as he begins to wrap up his journey toward reality, his tone seems to change. He's more upbeat, more positive, more encouraging of aggressive action.

Where there is no risk, there is no reward. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7 NASB). But if you never sow the seed, you never reap the harvest. In that case, you are like the man who hid his talent in the ground (Matthew 25:14-30).

All of us go through life making decisions every day. You can take no chances and stay right where you are. Or you can take a few chances and, like Jack's father, maybe raise your average. The choice is up to you.

Lord God, increase my courage so that I may take advantage of every legitimate opportunity that comes my way Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- In what areas of your life have you been afraid to move forward for fear of failure? What steps of faith could you take in the next week?
- How would your life be different if you began to confront your fears?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 56:11; Isaiah 43:1-2; and 2 Timothy 1:7.

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**Bob Utley** - There are several commands in this chapter:

1. "cast," Eccl. 11:1, BDB 1018; KB 1511, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
2. "divide," Eccl. 11:2, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. "sow," Eccl. 11:6, BDB 281, KB 282, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. "be idle" (lit. "rest"), Eccl. 11:6, BDB 628, KB 679, *Hiphil* [JUSSIVE](#)
5. "let him rejoice," Eccl. 11:8, BDB 970, KB 1333, *Qal* IMPERFECT but used in a [JUSSIVE](#) sense
6. "let him remember," Eccl. 11:8, BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* IMPERFECT but used in a [JUSSIVE](#) sense
7. "rejoice," v. 9, BDB 970, KB 1333, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
8. "let your heart be pleasant" (lit. "do good"), Eccl. 11:9, BDB 405, KB 408, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a [JUSSIVE](#) sense

9. "follow" (lit. "walk"), Eccl. 11:9, BDB 229, KB 246, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
10. "know," Eccl. 11:9, BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
11. "remove," Eccl. 11:10, BDB 693, KB 747, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
12. "put away," Eccl. 11:10, BDB 716, KB 778, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
13. "remember," 12:1, BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**Ecclesiastes 11:2** **Divide** your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:2 Divide your merchandise among seven or even eight investments, for you do not know what calamity may happen on earth.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:2 δ ς μερ δα το ς πτ κα γε το ς κτ τι ο γιν σκει τ σται πονηρ ν π τ ν γ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil there shall be upon the earth.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you don't know what disaster may happen on earth.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:2 But divide your investments among many places, for you do not know what risks might lie ahead.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a portion to seven, and even to eight, For thou knowest not what evil is on the earth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:2 Offer a share to seven or to eight people, you can never tell what disaster may occur.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:2 Divide your means seven ways, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what evil may happen on earth.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:2 Make seven or eight portions; you know not what misfortune may come upon the earth.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:2 Divide what you have into seven parts, or even into eight, because you don't know what disaster may happen on earth.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a part to seven or even to eight, because you have no knowledge of the evil which will be on the earth.

- **portion:** Ne 8:10 Es 9:19,22 Ps 112:9 Lu 6:30-35 1Ti 6:18,19
- **seven:** Job 5:19 Pr 6:16 Mic 5:5 Mt 18:22 Lu 17:4
- **for:** Da 4:27 Ac 11:28-30 Ga 6:1 Eph 5:16 Heb 13:3

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 19:17 One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down,



shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

1 Timothy 6:18-19 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

## PREPARING FOR THE UNKNOWN

**Divide** (command) **your portion** ([cheleg](#)) **to seven, or even to eight** - NET is very interpretative = "Divide your merchandise among seven or even eight **investments** (See NET NOTE below)" Be generous and intentional in sharing or investing widely—don't put everything in one place. This could mean: Diversify your giving (help many people), or diversify your investments (spread your risk), or be active in doing good in many ways.

*Don't put all your eggs  
in one basket.*

**Donald Glenn** - "In view of the possibility of disaster, a person should make prudent investments in numerous ventures rather than put all his 'eggs in one basket' (e.g., Gen 32:7–8 for a practical example of this advice)." The **NEB** accurately reflects this interpretation of Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, "*Send your grain across the seas, and in time you will get a return. Divide your merchandise among seven ventures, eight maybe, since you do not know what disasters may occur on earth.*" (See [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 287](#))

**Philip Ryken** - Rather than simply taking our chances, we will plan for an uncertain and possibly unfortunate future. If we are wise, we will invest widely. Hopefully, if one investment does poorly it will be counterbalanced by another source of revenue that is doing somewhat better....(ED: APPLYING THIS SPIRITUALLY) It is about having the holy boldness to do seven (or even eight) things to spread the gospel and then waiting for God's ship to come in. Some of the things that we attempt may fail (or at least seem to fail at the time)—some of the ministries we start, for example, or the churches we plant, or the efforts we make to share the good news of the cross and the empty tomb. But we should never stop investing with the gospel in as many places as we can. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))

I like **William MacDonald's** comment - Giving **a serving to seven**, even **to eight** suggests two things—unrestrained generosity or diversifying of business enterprises. If the first is meant, the idea is that we should show uncalculating kindness while we can, because a time of calamity and misfortune may come when this will not be possible. Most people save for a rainy day; this verse counsels to adopt a spirit of unrestricted liberality because of the uncertainties of life. Or the thought may be: [Don't put all your eggs in one basket](#). Invest in several interests so that if one fails, you will still be able to carry on with the others. This is known as *diversification*. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**David Hubbard** - "**Seven or eight**" is a Hebrew numerical formula called X, X + 1. It occurs frequently in Proverbs (Pr 6:16, 30:21, 29) and in the first two chapters of Amos. Here it is not to be taken literally but means "plenty and more than plenty," "the widest possible diversification within the guidelines of prudence...." Seven means "plenty," and eight means, "Go a bit beyond that." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**NET NOTE** - The phrase "**seven or eight**" is a graded numerical saying depicting an indefinite plurality: "The collocation of a numeral with the next above it is a rhetorical device employed in numerical sayings to express a number, which need not, or cannot, be more exactly specified. It must be gathered from the context whether such formulae are intended to denote only an insignificant number (e.g., Is 17:6 "two" or at the most "three") or a considerable number (e.g., Mi 5:4). Sometimes, however, this juxtaposition serves to express merely an indefinite total, without the collateral idea of intensifying the lower by means of the higher number" (GKC 437 §134.s). Examples: "one" or "two" (Deut 32:30; Jer 3:14; Job 33:14; 40:5; Ps 62:12); "two" or "three" (2 Kgs 9:32; Isa 17:6; Hos 6:2; Amos 4:8; Sir 23:16; 26:28; 50:25); "three" or "four" (Jer 36:23; Amos 1:3–11; Prov 21:19; 30:15, 18; Sir 26:5); "four" or "five" (Isa 17:6); "six" or "seven" (Job 5:19; Prov 6:16); "seven" or "eight" (Mic 5:4; Eccl 11:2). **The word "investments" is not in the Hebrew text;** it is added here for clarity. This line is traditionally understood as an exhortation to be generous to a multitude of people (KJV, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NJPS); however, it is better taken as shrewd advice to not commit all one's possessions to a single venture ([A. Cohen, The Five Megilloth](#) [SoBB], 181). D. R. Glenn ("Ecclesiastes," [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 287](#)) writes: "In view of the possibility of disaster, a person should make prudent investments in numerous ventures rather than put all his 'eggs in one basket' (e.g., Gen 32:7–8 for a practical example of this advice)." Several translations reflect this: "Divide your merchandise among seven ventures, eight maybe" (NEB); "Take shares in several ventures" (Moffatt).

**For** (term of explanation) **you do not know what misfortune** (raah - evil, misery, distress; Lxx - [poneros](#) - active evil) **may occur**

**on the earth** - In simple terms Solomon speaks of uncertainty of future events or circumstances under the sun. Since calamity can strike unexpectedly, spread your efforts, resources, and kindness wisely and broadly. You can't predict the future—but you can prepare for it. Solomon isn't encouraging fear but wise foresight. You don't know what will happen—so act wisely now.

**William Barrick** NASU's translation "*Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight*" is itself misleading, because the Hebrew reads literally, "*Give a portion to seven and even to eight*" In addition, Deut 18:8 uses "portion" with regard to food.) to seven or even eight needy people, multiplying the odds that some are going to do exceedingly well with that which they have been given.

Borrow **Wycliffe Bible Commentary** - Here is another emphasis on the uncertainty of life's outcomes even when wisdom is used. Translate, "Give a portion to seven, or even to eight (that is, be wise in your investments); yet you do not know what evil may happen on earth."

**Donald Glenn** points out that "To emphasize that man is ignorant of the future Solomon said, "You do not know" three times (Ecc 11:2, 5-6); he also said, "You cannot understand" (v. 5). However, he counseled that ignorance of the future should lead not to inactivity or despair, but to diligent labor. (See [Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament - Page 1002](#))

**ESV Study Bible (Borrow)** - Rather than speculating about such uncertainties (see note on vv. 1-6), it is financially more prudent to explore multiple avenues for making one's living and investing one's resources (vv. 2, 6), which could involve giving a "portion" or "compensation" to several different areas (seven, or even to eight), because such diversification gives protection against unforeseen disaster in one or two of the areas.

**William Barrick** - If, however, Ec 11:1 refers to investment by means of commercial shipping, then Ec 11:2 refers to the diversification of shipments and/or investments into seven or eight consignments, so that at least some ships survive the journeys and return with their holds filled. "**Cast**" (Eccl 11:1) actually provides a misleading translation that promotes the traditional viewpoint. However, the imperative more closely approximates "**Send**" or "**Let loose**"—more befitting a commercial enterprise for which ships are sent out to sea for years at a time before returning to their home port. Additional argumentation for the maritime understanding of these two verses includes the Solomonic history which bears witness to the ships of Solomon's commercial fleet (1 Kgs 9:26–28; 10:22). Also, Pr 31:14 makes mention of both "ships" and "bread." As for the later Arabic proverb, it "may have been influenced by the early 'charitable' interpretation of verse 1."<sup>10</sup> None of the Egyptian references parallels closely the use of "bread," making them weak attestation to almsgiving in Ecclesiastes. The "**seven, or even to eight**" is the same " $x + (x + 1)$ " formula found elsewhere in the Old Testament (including Eccl 4:6, 12).<sup>11</sup> This form of reference indicates that there are more potential entities that match the description than just the seven or even the eight—in other words, an indefinite number. However, in some situations the formula expresses the fullness of a condition or, here, an enterprise.<sup>12</sup> Solomon does not mean by his words that commercial enterprise or almsgiving are "just a roll of the dice, gamble and nothing more. He is certain that the covenant people can count on eventual success, because God will guarantee it."<sup>13</sup> That which God grants, however, requires both faith<sup>14</sup> and patience. Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 appears to illustrate the same truth. The parable condemns the man who fails to invest the one talent that his master had given him. He did not want to take any risks, so he lost all potential gain. In the end, his master took away even the gift he had received. Paralyzed with uncertainty, fear, and doubt, he lost the gift due to its disuse. The variety of interpretations and translations do not destroy the foundational truths of the text. For example, whether an interpreter settles on the charitable, agricultural, or commercial interpretation of Eccl 11:1–2, the concepts of investment, risk, and faith remain and the exhortation to action rather than paralysis still rises inexorably from the text. Eccl 11:2 concludes with "for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth." Three more times, Solomon highlights human ignorance (twice in Eccl 11: 5 and once in Eccl 11:6). The statement serves as the key to the entire passage. Knowing our ignorance forms the basis for a realistic outlook that depends upon a sovereign, omniscient God.

**Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves on the earth, and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, the tree will lie wherever it falls.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:3 ἡ πληρωθῶσιν τὸ νύφη εἰς τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἡ πύξινος ὕλη ὅπου ἂν πεσῇ, ἐκεῖ ἔσται  
βορρ τ π ο πεσεται τ ξ λον κε σται



LXE Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds be filled with rain, they pour it out upon the earth: and if a tree fall southward, or if it fall northward, in the place where the tree shall fall, there it shall be.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full, they will pour out rain on the earth; whether a tree falls to the south or the north, the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth, and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:3 If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:3 When clouds are heavy, the rains come down. Whether a tree falls north or south, it stays where it falls.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the thick clouds are full of rain, On the earth they empty themselves; And if a tree doth fall in the south or to the north, The place where the tree falleth, there it is.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:3 When clouds are full of rain, they will shed it on the earth. If a tree falls, whether south or north, where it falls, there it will lie.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:3 When clouds are full, they empty rain on the earth; whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:3 When the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, wherever it falls, there shall it lie.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they will let it pour down on the earth. If a tree falls north or south, the tree will remain where it fell.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they send it down on the earth; and if a tree comes down to the south, or the north, in whatever place it comes down, there it will be.

- the clouds: 1Ki 18:45 Ps 65:9-13 Isa 55:10,11 1Jn 3:17
- if the tree: Mt 3:10 Lu 13:7 16:22-26

## QUE SERA, SERA

**If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies** Whatever will happen, will happen is the idea. As we would say in Spanish [Que sera, sera](#). Since you can't control everything, act wisely while you can—especially before it's too late (cf. v.4–6).

[William Barrick](#) - Continuing the discussion of risk, Eccl 11:3 reveals that no one has control over when the rain falls (even though it will inevitably come) or where a tree might fall (which is entirely random).

**Michael Eaton** - The sudden fall of the tree thus contrasts with the gathering storm-clouds, which can be watched with apprehension. The two points involved, therefore, seem to be: Mankind cannot control the difficulties of life, (i) even when he anticipates them, and (ii) because often there are totally unexpected events (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** - Nobody can predict the weather, let alone control it, and the farmer is at the mercy of nature. Verse 3 contrasts the clouds with the tree. Clouds are always changing. They come and go, and the farmer hopes they will spill their precious water on his fields. Trees are somewhat permanent. They stand in the same place, unless a storm topples them; and then they lie there and rot. The past [the tree] cannot be changed, but the present [the clouds] is available to us, and we must seize each opportunity. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**David Hubbard** - The processes of creation go on without your worry, and you could not change them if you tried. So keep your eye on those processes and get on with your work, Ecclesiastes urged. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Walter Kaiser** - A third illustration is found in Ecc 11:3, which also urges us to continued activity even though we are ignorant of the circumstances connected with our exertions. Full clouds will empty themselves on the earth even though some of the water seems

to be wasted, falling on lakes, oceans, and uninhabited deserts. But some of the rain will be directly beneficial. Likewise, trees blown over in storms will fall on one man's property or another's. But someone will get the use of the firewood, so rejoice. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Philip Ryken** - the Preacher pictures a farmer standing out in his field. The clouds are heavy with rain—part of a familiar cycle in nature. Nearby a tree has fallen to the ground, possibly as the result of a storm. There is nothing the farmer can do about either the rain or the tree; these natural and seemingly random events are far outside his personal control. The one thing that the farmer can control is when he will sow his seed and harvest his crops. But this particular farmer is just standing there—watching the wind and the clouds (Ec 11:4), but not farming his field. The implication is that he is trying to guess when he can safely cast his seed or harvest his grain. Although there is “a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted” (Ecclesiastes 3:2), apparently this man is not sure what time it is! (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))

**William MacDonald** (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#)) - Verse 3 carries on the thought of the previous one, especially with regard to the unknown evil which may happen on earth. It suggests that there is a certain inevitability and finality about the calamities of life. Just as surely as rain-laden clouds empty themselves upon the earth, so surely do troubles and trials come to the sons of men. And once a tree is felled, it remains a fallen monarch. Its destiny is sealed. A wider application of the verse is given in the poem:

As a tree falls, so must it lie,  
As a man lives, so must he die,  
As a man dies, so must he be,  
All through the years of eternity.  
—John Ray

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **BOLDNESS: TAKING ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY** Ecclesiastes 11:3-4

Do you think Solomon was a pessimist? Certainly some of his earlier comments about the calamities of life might be taken that way. He knows full well that the "best laid plans of mice and men" often go astray. Things don't always work out right—they sometimes don't work out at all. Blades grow dull, snakes bite people, walls collapse, the wicked triumph over the righteous, and death comes to all of us sooner or later, sometimes when we least expect it.

This is life as we experience it. What are you going to do? Shrug your shoulders and give up? Stay in bed? Pout about the frowning face of providence?

Consider the dark clouds that mean a storm is advancing over the horizon. The same storm that washes away coastal homes also brings needed rain to the farmer's crops. If the uncertainty of life makes you stay curled up under the covers, you've missed Solomon's point. While it's true that you may be wiped out tomorrow, it's also true that you may strike oil. You'll never know unless you dig another well. But one thing is sure—if you don't dig, you'll never find oil. If you don't plant, you'll never reap the harvest.

Perhaps you've heard the old proverb, "A watched pot never boils." You've got to run some risks to get ahead in the world. Some plans will fail, some crops won't grow, some sales calls won't pan out—so what? Others will succeed, you'll have more watermelons than you know what to do with, and you'll bag the largest order in the history of your company.

The biblical view comes down to this: Since God alone knows the future, we ought to make our plans, use our brains, study the situation, take all factors into consideration, seek wise counsel, do the best we can, and then leave the results to God. Don't be reckless—that's the path of certain ruin; but don't sit on your hands either. Pay your money, take your chances, sleep like a baby, and let God take care of the future.

Lord Jesus, when I am tempted to look at my circumstances and despair, help me to remember that You calmed the storms before and You can do it again. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- How well do you handle failure? What lessons have you learned from your past mistakes?
- Are you gun-shy about the future? If so, what needs to change in your own heart before you can be bold again?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 48:14; Mark 4:35-41; and 2 Corinthians 9:8.

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:4 He who watches the wind will not sow, and he who observes the clouds will not reap.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:4 τηρ ν νεμον ο σπερε κα βλ πων ν τα ς νεφ λαις ο θερ σει

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:4 He that observes the wind sows not; and he that looks at the clouds will not reap.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:4 One who watches the wind will not sow, and the one who looks at the clouds will not reap.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:4 He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:4 Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:4 Whoso is observing the wind soweth not, And whoso is looking on the thick clouds reapeth not.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:4 Keep watching the wind and you will never sow, keep staring at the clouds and you will never reap.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:4 Whoever observes the wind will not sow; and whoever regards the clouds will not reap.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:4 He who observes the wind will not sow; and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:4 One who pays heed to the wind will not sow, and one who watches the clouds will never reap.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:4 Whoever watches the wind will never plant. Whoever looks at the clouds will never harvest.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:4 He who is watching the wind will not get the seed planted, and he who is looking at the clouds will not get in the grain.

- Pr 3:27 20:4 22:13

Staring at the wind, not sowing

## THE PARALYSIS OF OVER ANALYSIS!

**He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap** NLT - "Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest." This proverbial statement seems straightforward and it speaks of literal sowing and reaping. It is a warning against being too cautious, waiting for perfect conditions to sow. Since there is always wind and clouds, to wait for no wind, you will never plant.

[David Guzik](#) The farmer who is overly analytical about the wind or the clouds will never plant his fields, and thus he will not reap. The Preacher gently pushes us away from an overly analytical approach to life.

**Michael Eaton** - The Preacher warns next against procrastination, still using an agricultural illustration: faced with erratic wind and weather, the farmer is not to wait interminably for a more propitious occasion to sow his seed. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**F B Meyer** - "If we are always waiting for favouring conditions, we shall resemble the farmer who is ever looking out for perfect weather, and lets the whole autumn pass without one handful of grain reaching the furrows."

**C H Spurgeon** - "If we keep on observing circumstances, instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of disobedience. God bids me sow: I do not sow, because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap: I do not reap, because there is a black

cloud there, and before I can house the harvest, some of it may be spoiled. I may say what I like; but I am guilty of disobedience.” (from sermon [Sowing in the Wind: Reaping under Clouds](#) - Guzik pointed out that in this sermon Spurgeon described "other ways that this attitude sins against God and man. To observe circumstances instead of trusting God shows unbelief, rebellion, foolish fear, and idleness.)

**Temper Longman III** says this verse "refers to farmers who would watch for the wind to cease and put off planting for fear that the wind would blow away the seed that they were sowing, just as the rains would ruin the harvests (Ec 11:4b). Thus, this verse looks at both ends of the agricultural cycle....Farmers who try to control their circumstances will never get anywhere. Perfect weather never comes; as a result, they do not get a harvest. The implicit message is not to let our inability to control circumstances paralyze our actions. The farmer who does this may very well starve to death. (See [Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Page 323](#))

*'Lack of complete knowledge  
is no excuse for inactivity'*

-- E. Jones

**NET NOTE** - This proverb criticizes those who are overly cautious. The farmer who waits for the most opportune moment to plant when there is no wind to blow away the seed, and to reap when there is no rain to ruin a ripe harvest, will never do anything but sit around waiting for the right moment.

**Charles Swindoll** - The natural occurrences described by Solomon in these verses (Ec 11:3-4) are both inevitable and unpredictable. We have no control over the rain—whether it will be a light mist or a violent storm. We have no way of determining when a tree may fall; we can only hope it doesn't fall on us! Because these events are unpredictable and in God's hands alone, we shouldn't base our plans on the "what ifs" of life....If we let fear of the unknown future dictate our everyday activities, we'd just stay inside and hide all day and get nothing done at all! Similarly, people spend a lot of time observing the obvious, talking about the inevitable, and worrying about both. What profit is there in living one's life this way? None. The implication of Ecclesiastes 11:3–4 is that we should be pursuing life with faith rather than watching it pass by in fear. We should be working on things God has given us the ability to affect rather than worrying about those things over which we have no control. Are there activities you've been avoiding due to fear of unknown results? Are there things you would like to try but you're intimidated by the "mights" and "what ifs"? If so, what is the worst that could happen if you stepped out in faith and did that activity with boldness? ([Living on the Ragged Edge](#))

**Philip Ryken** - The farmer in chapter 11 also refuses to work, but he is a different kind of fool. He keeps watching and waiting, but never sowing or reaping. Why not? Because rather than getting on with his work, he keeps hoping for better conditions....(RYKEN APPLIES THIS TO OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES) Rather than watching the wind and the clouds, imagining all the difficulties and waiting for better circumstances, we should try and do what we can with whatever God has given us in life. Pursue the dream you believe that God has given for your calling in life. Get involved in ministry. Show mercy to someone in need. Start a friendship with a neighbor, and pray that God will use that relationship to lead your neighbor to Christ. Do not hold back because of fear, but step out by faith—not faith that your own efforts will succeed, necessarily, but faith that God will take what you offer and use it in some way for his glory. But whatever you do, do not use the sovereignty of God or the uncertain difficulties of life as an excuse for not doing anything at all. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))

**Derek Kidner** - The thought of verses 3 and 4 brings together again the things we can do nothing about and those that call for firm decision and action. The two examples given here—the clouds which follow their own laws and times, not ours, and the fallen tree which has consulted no-one's convenience—may start us thinking of may-be's and might-have-beens; but our business is to grapple with what actually is, and what lies within reach. Few great enterprises have waited for ideal conditions; no more should we. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

*The man who waits for certainty  
will wait forever.*

-- William MacDonald

**William Barrick** - Whenever an individual waits for perfect conditions before either sowing or reaping (Eccl 11:4), failure and loss may very well follow. Over-hesitancy in making decisions involving risk can result in the best time passing by during inactivity. The paralysis of inaction results in lost opportunities. In the New Testament a similar agricultural metaphor makes its appearance in Paul's description of the respective tasks of mankind and God in the spread of the gospel: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (1 Cor 3:6; cp. Prov 10:22).

**Step Out Before It's Clear**” Are you waiting until: You're less tired. Finances improve. You're sure everything will work. Solomon says: stop waiting. The one who keeps watching the wind never plants. Faith doesn't wait for everything to make sense—it moves forward in trust. Obedience is rarely convenient. Fruitfulness is never guaranteed. But wisdom acts in hope, not fear. Sow the seed. Trust the Lord. Excessive caution leads to fruitlessness. Stop delaying a good work because the timing isn't perfect. You won't

always feel ready—but you must still sow.

*Paralysis from over-analysis  
may forfeit God's blessing*

**Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind, or how the bones form in the womb of a pregnant woman, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:5 ν ο ς ο κ σ π ι ν γ ι ν σ κ ω ν τ ς δ ς τ ο π ν ε μ α τ ο ς ς σ τ ν γ α σ τ ρ τ ς κ υ ο φ ο ρ ο σ η ς ο τ ω ς ο γ ν σ τ π ο ι μ α τ α τ ο θ ε ο σ α π ο ι σ ε ι σ ν τ π ν τ α

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:5 Among whom none knows what is the way of the wind: as the bones are hid in the womb of a pregnant woman, so thou shalt not know the works of God, even all things whatsoever he shall do.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you don't know the path of the wind, or how bones develop in the womb of a pregnant woman, so you don't know the work of God who makes everything.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:5 As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:5 As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you cannot understand the path of the wind or the mystery of a tiny baby growing in its mother's womb, so you cannot understand the activity of God, who does all things.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, How -- bones in the womb of the full one, So thou knowest not the work of God who maketh the whole.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:5 You do not understand how the wind blows, or how the embryo grows in a woman's womb: no more can you understand the work of God, the Creator of all.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:5 As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you know not how the breath of life fashions the human frame in the mother's womb, So you know not the work of God which he is accomplishing in the universe.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you don't know how the breath of life enters the limbs of a child within its mother's womb, you also don't understand how God, who made everything, works.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:5 As you have no knowledge of the way of the wind, or of the growth of the bones in the body of her who is with child, even so you have no knowledge of the works of God who has made all.

- **know:** John 3:8
- **nor:** Ps 139:14,15
- **so:** Ec 7:24 8:17 Job 5:9 26:5-14 36:24-33 37:23 38:4-41 39:1-41:34 Ps 40:5 92:5 104:24 Isa 40:28 Ro 11:33

#### Related Passages:

John 3:8+ “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but **do not know** where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Psalms 139:13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

Job 10:8-12 'Your hands fashioned and made me altogether, And would You destroy me? 9 'Remember now, that You have made me as clay; And would You turn me into dust again? 10 'Did You not pour me out like milk And curdle me like cheese; 11 Clothe me with skin and flesh, And knit me together with bones and sinews? 12 'You have granted me life and lovingkindness; And Your care has preserved my spirit.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

## WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW, TRUST THE CREATOR

Verses 1–4 encourage action and generosity despite uncertainty. Verse 5 continues that theme by reminding us: You don't need to understand everything to act in faith. Solomon presents two mysteries—the wind (or spirit) and the womb—as parallels to the mysterious work of God.

**Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant** ([04392](#)) **male**) **woman** - **ESV** = "As you do not know the way the **spirit** comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child" **NRSV** = "Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb." **You do not know** (5x/4v Eccl 11:2 Eccl 11:5 Eccl 11:6 Eccl 11:9) again is Solomon reminding us of the limitations of our human knowledge, even as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:8+. The word for **wind** is [ruah/ruach](#) which is also translated "spirit" so that some interpret Solomon as linking the "spirit" with the "bones" of the infant as reflected in the ESV translation. You don't understand how a baby is knit together in the womb (cf. Psalm 139:13)—yet it happens under God's creative power.

Solomon confronts our natural desire to understand everything before acting. He says: "You don't understand creation—and yet it's happening." "You don't understand God's providence—but He is still working." This leads to a principle: You don't need full understanding to walk in obedience.

**Michael Eaton** - Thus at this point in his closing appeal the Preacher simply insists on a fact: certain aspects of God's working on earth defy explanation. The mystery which shrouds our very origin underlies the whole of reality." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Duane Garrett** feels that "Verse 5 should be translated, "*Just as you do not know how the breath of life enters the fetus in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the work of God, who does all.*" In context this means that since you cannot know that all will go well, do not demand assurance of success before you begin any enterprise. Just as in pregnancy a couple can only trust God that all will turn out well, even so in business enterprises one can only leave the outcome to God. Pregnancy is the supreme example of a human endeavor, the results of which are out of human control (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**NET NOTE** on **wind** - Heb "**what is the way of the wind**" Some take these words with what follows: "how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman." There is debate whether הַדֶּרֶךְ מֵהָרוּחַ (mah-derekh haruakh) refers to the wind ("the path of the wind") or the human spirit of a child in the mother's womb ("how the spirit comes"). The LXX understood it as the wind: "the way of the wind" ( ὁ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος, hē hodos tou pneumatōs); however, the Targum and Vulgate take it as the human spirit. The English versions are divided: (1) spirit: "the way of the spirit" (KJV, YLT, Douay); "the breath of life" (NAB); "how a pregnant woman comes to have ... a living spirit in her womb" (NEB); "how the lifebreath passes into the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman" (NJPS); "how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child" (RSV); "how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb" (NRSV); and (2) wind: "the way of the wind" (ASV, RSV margin); "the path of the wind" (NASB, NIV); and "how the wind blows" (MLB, Moffatt).

**NET NOTE** on **pregnant** is literally "the one who is full." - The feminine adjective מְלֵאָה (méle'ah, from מָלָא, male', "full") is used as a substantive referring to a pregnant woman whose womb is filled with her infant (HALOT 584 s.v. 2 מְלֵאָה; BDB 571 s.v. מְלֵאָה). This term is used in reference to a pregnant woman in later Hebrew (HALOT 584 s.v. מְלֵאָה). The LXX understood the term in this sense: κυοφορούσα (kuophorousēs, "pregnant woman").



**So you do not know the activity of God Who makes all things** - "The work of God" would include His creation as well as His sustaining of everything created. Little wonder that creation is such a mystery to the finite human mind who then attempts to distort the truth about God with the lie of evolution! This is chasing after the wind! Is not this passage another way of describing God's transcendence which means He is above, beyond, and independent from His creation, emphasizing His infinite greatness, majesty, and "otherness." This truth reminds me of Moses' words in Dt 29:29a+ "The secret things belong to the LORD our God." The only things we can know about the work of God is what He has condescended to reveal to us.

**David Guzik** on **So you do not know** - In the same way we don't know the hidden things, we also do not know the works of God in any comprehensive way. The Preacher brings us to a place of humility and submission to God and His works that again pushes us out of the previously entrenched under the sun premise.

**Bob Utley** - **so you do not know the activity of God**" This has been a common theme (cf. Eccl. 1:13; 3:10,11; 8:17). God and His works and ways cannot be completely known by fallen mankind, but we can trust Him because of what we do know! **God Who makes all things** - This is an idiom for the entire creation (cf. Ps. 103:19; 119:91; Jer. 10:16). NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 730, lists several other phrases that are used to designate the entire creation: (1) heaven and earth (e.g., Gen. 1:1; Ps. 115:15; 121:2; Prov. 3:19-20, (2) "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (e.g., Ps. 24:1-2; 50:12; 89:11; Jer. 51:48; 1 Cor. 10:26); (3) "in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (e.g., Exod. 20:4; Ps. 135:6)

**William MacDonald** (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#)) Since we don't know everything, we have to muddle along with what knowledge we do have. We don't understand the movements of **the wind** or **how the bones** are formed **in the womb** of an expectant mother. Neither do we understand all that **God** does or why He does it.

**William Barrick** - Natural phenomena within God's control remain mysterious to mankind (Eccl 11:5). The wind's path cannot always be charted (cf. John 3:8) (**ED: HOW MANY TIMES HAS THE WEATHER FORECAST MISSED THE MARK!**) and the bones of a fetus can form in unexpected ways inside the womb (cf. Ps 139:13-16). ([See Seow below](#)) Both are basically invisible and outside the control of mankind (cp. Eccl 8:8). (Cp phrase "striving after wind" in Eccl 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9.) God, as the Maker of all things, produces the wind's patterns as well as the bones for the unborn infant. The very fact that He is in control demonstrates that He governs all things and people are not in control. Mankind's ignorance of the work of God (cp. Eccl 8:17) forms an ongoing theme in the final chapters of Ecclesiastes.

With a few changes in the Hebrew text, "wind" can be translated as "spirit" or "life-breath," resulting in the elimination of the figure involving wind and making the illustration just the entrance of the life-breath into the fetus; BORROW [C. L. Seow, Ecclesiastes, Anchor Bible 18C 336-37](#). Cp. NRSV: "*Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb.*"

**"Trust the God You Cannot Trace"** You don't understand: How the Spirit moves. How prayers work, How God redeems suffering. But you know He works, because He has proven faithful in creation and salvation. Solomon isn't telling you to figure it all out—he's urging you to act in faith anyway. The womb forms bones. The wind carries seed. And God is sovereign over both. Much of God's work is hidden, yet trustworthy. Understanding is not required for obedience. Obey now—don't wait until you have all the answers. Faith means sowing even when outcomes are uncertain. Trust God even when you don't understand His ways.

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **GET BUSY...NOW!** Ecclesiastes 11:5-6

Life is uncertain. So what? Solomon argues in favor of bold action precisely because you don't know what might happen tomorrow. Get up early, he says, and stay up late. Don't veg in front of the TV. Take every opportunity God gives you and make the best of it.

This practical advice reminds me of a friend who could do it all—sing, teach, lead music; he was a whiz at construction and knew how to fix cars, plus he had attended seminary. One day I asked him about his future. Did he want to be a pastor or teacher or enter some other vocation? Did he hope to get married? He answered that he had run into one of his old seminary professors recently and asked him for some advice. "You're suffering from the curse of too many options," the professor told him.

That's the problem of people who feel like they have too many choices and therefore don't know which way to go. The professor had been raised on a farm and when he graduated from high school, he could have either stayed on the farm or gone to college. So he went to college. When he graduated, he could have either gone back to the farm or to seminary. So he went to seminary. When he graduated, he had no choices, so he went to graduate school. His only job offer came from the seminary he attended, so he took it and remains on the faculty to this day.

"Most people dream of having more options, but I have been blessed by having almost none at all," the professor said. "At each stage of my life, I generally have had only one choice to make, so I made it and kept moving ahead." Solomon would heartily agree with that philosophy\*

Would you like to know the "secret" to knowing God's will? If there is a "secret" to be found, it is in doing today what you already know to be God's will. Just get up, get out of bed, take a shower, put on your clothes, eat breakfast, and do what has to be done. As you do God's will today, you will discover God's will for tomorrow.

The moral of the story: Don't worry about your options. Serve the Lord today and tomorrow will take care of itself.

Father, save me from the folly of idle speculation about tomorrow when I should be busy doing my job today.  
Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- What project, dream, idea, or initiative have you been postponing? When do you plan to get started?
- What's the first step you need to take? So what are you waiting for?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Joshua 6:1-5; Psalm 139:13-16; and 1 Corinthians 15:58.

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**David Jeremiah** - The world is a mystery and life but a vapor, Solomon tells us; but hard work, wise living, and joyful countenance are not. They are the best chance for those who would make the most of earth on their way to heaven. Life is uncertain—embrace it with joy.

More than two hundred years ago, the Connecticut House of Representatives was in session on a bright, sunny springtime day. Suddenly, the sky grew dark and ominous shadows flooded across the chamber. The representatives grew alarmed as they looked out the windows in puzzlement. This was an age that lacked the science to foretell solar eclipses. No one could have expected or understood the sudden blanket of darkness. A clamor arose among the representatives. Adjourn! Let us hurry from this House to get our own houses in order! was the consensus. Some legislators believed the second coming of Christ was surely at hand. But the Speaker of the House, a devout believer himself, rose to speak. He gently acknowledged that the House was upset by the darkness and that some were afraid. "But the Day of the Lord is either approaching or it is not," he said. "If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. And if the Lord is returning, I, for one, choose to be found doing my duty. I therefore ask that candles be brought."<sup>3</sup> (Borrow David Jeremiah's [Searching for heaven on Earth : how to find what really matters in life](#))

**Ecclesiastes 11:6 Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:6 Sow your seed in the morning, and do not stop working until the evening; for you do not know which activity will succeed— whether this one or that one, or whether both will prosper equally.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:6 ν πρω σπερον τ σπρμα σου κα ες σπραν μ φτω χερ σου τι ο γινσκες πο ον στοιχει το το το κα ντ δο π τ α τ γαθ

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening let not thine hand be slack: for thou knowest not what sort shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether both shall be good alike.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hand rest, because you don't know which will succeed, whether one or the other, or if both of them will be equally good.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:6 Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:6 Plant your seed in the morning and keep busy all afternoon, for you don't know if profit will come from one activity or another-- or maybe both.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow thy seed, And at even withdraw not thy hand, For thou knowest not

which is right, this or that, Or whether both of them alike are good.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning, sow your seed, until evening, do not cease from labour, for of any two things you do not know which will succeed, or which of the two is the better.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening let not your hand be idle: For you know not which of the two will be successful, or whether both alike will turn out well.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:6 Plant your seed in the morning, and don't let your hands rest until evening. You don't know whether this field or that field will be profitable or whether both of them will turn out equally well.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning put your seed into the earth, and till the evening let not your hand be at rest; because you are not certain which will do well, this or that -- or if the two will be equally good.

- **sow:** Ec 9:10 Isa 55:10 Ho 10:12 Mk 4:26-29 Joh 4:36-38 2Co 9:6 2Ti 4:2
- **know:** Ec 9:1 Hag 1:6-11 2:17-19 Zec 8:11,12 Ac 11:20,21 1Co 3:5-7 2Co 9:10,11

### Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 9:6 (SPIRITUAL SOWING AND REAPING) Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Galatians 6:9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Psalms 126:6 He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

## OPPORTUNITY MAY ONLY KNOCK ONCE!

**Sow** ([speiro](#) - [aorist imperative](#) = "Just Do It!" "Don't Procrastinate!") **your seed in the morning and do not be idle** (jussive ~ command) **in the evening** - Solomon's commands remind me of the Latin phrase "Carpe Diem," Seize the Day (See related discussion - Redeem the Time). Don't stop sowing. Don't grow passive. Keep doing good—because God may bless any or all of it.

[David Guzik](#) Using agricultural images, the Preacher tells us to do work of all kinds—the work one would do in the morning, and the work one would do in the evening. (ED: OR ALL DAY LONG).

**For** (term of explanation) - Solomon explains why we must "Carpe Diem" and why we must seize the time we have to sow.

**NET NOTE** - **do not be idle** - Heb "do not let your hand rest." The Hebrew phrase "do not let your hand rest" is an idiom that means "do not stop working" or "do not be idle" (e.g., Eccl 7:18); cf. BDB 628 s.v. נָחַץ B.1. Several English versions capture the sense of the idiom well: "do not stop working" (NEB); "do not be idle" (MLB); "let not your hand be idle" (NAB); "let not your hands be idle" (NIV); "stay not your hand" (Moffatt). The term "hand" is a synecdoche of part (i.e., do not let your hand rest) for the whole person (i.e., do not allow yourself to stop working).

**You do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good**We cannot predict the future success of our sowing, but that uncertainty should not prevent one from sowing! **Do not know** is repeated 5x/4v in Ecclesiastes 11 (Eccl 11:2 Eccl 11:5 Eccl 11:6 Eccl 11:9) emphasizing the limits of what we can know, for there are things that wisdom can not tell. As much as wisdom drawn from observation can help learn important things, there were other things that wisdom cannot tell us.

*God may bless both your early and late efforts  
—you don't know, so keep at it.*

[David Guzik](#) We should give ourselves to all kinds of work, because we do not know the results. We know less of the future than we think we do; this shakes the previously assured under the sun premise.

**Bob Utley** on "succeed" - This Hebrew VERB (BDB 506, KB 503, Qal IMPERFECT) is found only here and in Eccl. 10:10 (*Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT). The NOUN is found only in Ecclesiastes as well (cf. Eccl. 2:21; 4:4; 5:10), meaning "skill," "success," or "profit." Success is uncertain. It may come (i.e., Eccl. 11:7-8) and it may not (i.e., Eccl. 11:8b). When it does, act (i.e., share).

**NET NOTE** - The terms "morning" (בֹּקֶר, boqer) and "evening" (עֶרֶב, 'erev) form a merism (a figure of speech using two polar extremes to include everything in between) that connotes "from morning until evening." The point is not that the farmer should plant at two times in the day (morning and evening), but that he should plant all day long (from morning until evening). This merism is reflected in several translations: "in the morning ... until evening" (NEB, Moffatt).

**Warren Wiersbe** says that "God has a time and a purpose for everything (Ec 3:1–11), and we must live by faith in His Word. Therefore, use each day wisely (Ec 11:6). Get up early and sow your seed, and work hard until evening. Do the job at hand and "redeem the time" (Eph. 5:15–17), trusting God to bless at least some of the tasks you have accomplished. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

*The duty is ours.*

*The results are God's.*

-- Walter Kaiser

**Charles Swindoll** - Sow in the morning and don't be idle in the evening (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

In his workbook on Ecclesiastes Swindoll adds that "Solomon's final piece of counsel in Ecclesiastes 11:5–6 states this fact: there's no way we can know the work of God, who alone controls all things. If we wait for perfect knowledge before we launch a new project or attempt a challenging task, we'll stand frozen by ignorance as the world passes us by. Solomon rightly urged us to throw out the desire for certainty and be content with God's wisdom and a good dose of faith in His sovereignty. We simply don't know which earthly activities or investments will bring an abundant return, or which ones will be set aside by God's better plan. So let's just dig in and leave the results to God! ([Workbook](#))

**William Barrick** - Opportunity knocks only at certain times. If the conditions are good enough for sowing seed in the field, the farmer must remain active and pursue his occupation (Eccl 11:6). He cannot know whether the sowing should be in the morning or the evening, but the day gives the opportunity. The text expresses the continuous labor that a wise person must expend in order to see the harvest. God alone gives the field's increase, the enterprise's profits, or the labor's success, but wise people must labor in order to see such results (cf. Eccl 9:10). Tidball summarizes Eccl 11:3–5 under three headings: "Don't be paralyzed by inevitability" (Eccl 11:3), "Don't be paralyzed by speculation" (Eccl 11:4), and "Don't be paralyzed by ignorance" (Eccl 11:5).<sup>17</sup> Again, New Testament texts reflect the same instruction via a similar metaphor: "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6) and "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal 6:9).

Tomorrow, Lord, is Thine  
Lodged in Thy sovereign hand;  
And if its sun arise and shine,  
It shines by Thy command.

The present moment flies,  
And bears our life away;  
O make Thy servants truly wise,  
That they may live today.

--Philip Doddridge

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**"God May Bless Both"** You don't know which seed will grow—maybe: That conversation, That prayer, That late-night act of obedience. But God does. He may cause fruit from your early energy—or your evening perseverance. Your job is not to forecast fruit—it's to sow faithfully. God may bless efforts you didn't expect—sow broadly. Fruit often comes from where you didn't plan it (SEE ILLUSTRATION)! Don't "retire" from serving God—stay faithful in later seasons. View each day as another chance to sow something for eternity (Ps 90:12).

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**ILLUSTRATION** - One of my favorite examples of God's surprising harvest is the conversion of Luke Short at the tender age of 103. Short was sitting under a hedge in Virginia when he happened to remember a sermon he had once heard preached by the famous Puritan John Flavel. As he recalled the sermon, Short asked God to forgive his sins right then and there, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He lived for three more years, and when he died, the following words were inscribed on his tombstone:

*"Here lies a babe in grace, aged three years, who died according to nature, aged 106". But here is the remarkable part of the story: the sermon that old Mr. Short remembered had been preached eighty-five years earlier, back in England! Nearly a century had passed between Flavel's sermon and Short's conversion, between the sowing and the reaping. (John Flavel, The Mystery of Providence) - (Philip Ryken - [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))*

## **Ecclesiastes 11:7 The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:7 Truly the light is sweet, And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;

NET Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for a person to see the sun.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:7 κα γλυκ τ φ ς κα γαθ ν το ς φθαλμο ς το βλ πειν σ ν τ ν λιον

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:7 Moreover the light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasing for the eyes to see the sun.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet; how pleasant to see a new day dawning.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:7 Sweet also is the light, And good for the eyes to see the sun.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:7 How sweet light is, how delightful it is to see the sun!

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet! and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:7 Light is sweet, and it is good for one's eyes to see the sun.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:7 Truly the light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.

- the light: Job 33:28,30 Ps 56:13 Pr 15:30 29:13
- a pleasant: Ec 7:11 Ps 84:11 Mt 5:45

### **Related Passages:**

Psalms 36:9 For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

Psalms 56:13 For You have delivered my soul from death, Indeed my feet from stumbling, So that I may walk before God In the light of the living.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

Ecclesiastes 6:5 "It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.

Job 3:16 "Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be, As infants that never saw light.

## **THE GOODNESS OF BEING ALIVE**

**The light is pleasant** (sweet), **and it is good for the eyes to see the sun**- To experience **light** (life, consciousness, vitality) is a good and pleasant thing. To see the sun signifies to be alive. This passage seems simple reminding us that life is good, it is a gift to be alive and each morning to see the light of the sun. In short, this verse is like a sunrise before the shadow, reminding us to cherish the season we're in.

**THOUGHT** - I go to the beach often and my favorite sight occurs about 6AM as I look over into the eastern aspect of the ocean and I begin to see the first rays of the sun reminding me once again of the faithfulness of

God and of the truth He has given me another day to redeem for His glory.

**William Barrick** - Rejoice in the Light (Eccl 11:7–8) Life presents wonderful opportunities that mankind must enjoy. Being “under the sun” has its limitations, but existence in the light (being able to “see the sun”; cf. Eccl 6:5; 7:11) is far more pleasant than the alternative (Eccl 11:7).

*The point is that life is “sweet”  
and should be savored like honey.*

**Keith Krell** In this first section, Solomon focuses on the importance of living our lives to the fullest before we grow too old.<sup>456</sup> In Ec 11:7 he writes, “**The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun**” In Scripture, “**light**” is often a synonym for “life”<sup>457</sup> and the word translated “**pleasant**” is often used in reference to honey.<sup>458</sup> I have always liked peanut butter and honey sandwiches and Honey Bunches of Oats cereal. I even like honey in my coffee. The point is that life is “sweet” and should be savored like honey.<sup>459</sup> Thus, **the phrase “light is pleasant/sweet” means “it’s good to be alive.”**<sup>460</sup> So feel free right now to rock your head back and say, “Ahhh.” In Ec 11:7, Solomon continues and makes use of a truism of life—that **seeing the sun typically brings delight**. We often say things like, “What a beautiful day it is!” “Don’t you just love these sunny days?”....Solomon says, “Enjoy life because there are some amazing days.” Feel free to let out a big, “YEOW?!” Or maybe a little James Brown, “I feel good.”

The term “**light**” (haor) is used figuratively (metonymy of association) in reference to “life” (e.g., Job 3:20; 33:30; Ps 56:14). By contrast, death is described as “darkness” (e.g., Job 10:21-22; 17:13; 18:18; cf. Eccl 11:8; 12:6-7).

**Pleasant - honey** - See Judges 14:14, 18; Ps 19:10; Prov 16:24; 24:13; 27:7; Ezek 3:3. The only other usages of mathoq in the OT that don’t explicitly describe honey are Eccl 5:11; 11:7; Song of Sol 2:3; and Isa 5:20 [2x].

**NET NOTE** - The term “light” (הָאוֹר, ha’or) is used figuratively (metonymy of association) in reference to “life” (e.g., Job 3:20; 33:30; Ps 56:14). By contrast, death is described as “darkness” (e.g., Eccl 11:8; 12:6–7).

**NET NOTE** - The Hebrew term מָתוֹק (matoq, “sweet”) is often used elsewhere in reference to honey. The point is that life is sweet and should be savored like honey.

**NET NOTE**- Used with the idiom “**to see the sun**” (i.e., to be alive), Qoheleth is simply saying that the experience of a life is a pleasant thing that should be savored. The idiom “**to see the sun**” (both רָאָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, ra’ah hashamesh, and חָזַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, khazah hashamesh) is an idiom meaning “**to be alive**” (e.g., Ps 58:9; Eccl 6:5; 7:11; 11:7); cf. BDB 1039 s.v. 4 שָׁחַב. The opposite idiom, “**the sun is darkened**,” refers to the onset of old age and death (Eccl 12:2).

**Derek Kidner** offers the following reminder on Ec 11:7-8 - “Candid as ever, these verses match the delight of existence with the seriousness of it. Each joy here is confronted by its opposite or its complement; there is no softening of the colours on either side. The bliss of being alive is captured in the lovely sentence which opens with the saying, **Light is sweet**... (Ec 11:7); and this youthful radiance may last, as Ec 11:8a points out, to the end. But not beyond. The author has not gone back on his insistence that, by themselves, time and all things temporal will disappoint us, who have eternity in our hearts (cf. Ecc 3:11). Their light must give way to the days of darkness and the undoing of everything under the sun; and we must face the fact or be shattered by it.” (Borrow [The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance \(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976\), 98-99.](#))

“**Don’t Waste the Light**” Solomon says: life is beautiful—not perfect, but precious. Each sunrise is a reminder of mercy (cf. Lamentations 3:23). To see the sun is to be given another day of: Repentance, Joy, Purpose, Worship, Love. What you do with the light shows whether you honor the Giver. Don’t take your daily breath and vision for granted. God wants you to enjoy—not just endure—your days. Start each day with thankfulness for life itself. Don’t waste time complaining—rejoice that you are alive.

### When Morning Gilds the Skies

--Edward Caswall

[Play this great hymn](#)

When morning gilds the skies my heart awaking cries:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Alike at work and prayer, to Jesus I repair:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

When you begin the day, O never fail to say,



May Jesus Christ be praised!  
And at your work rejoice, to sing with heart and voice,  
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Sing, suns and stars of space, sing, ye that see His face,  
Sing, Jesus Christ be praised!  
God's whole creation o'er, for aye and evermore  
Shall Jesus Christ be praised!2

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Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - GOD IS IN THE DETAILS Ecclesiastes 11:7-8

Every day above ground is a bonus." A friend said that last night and I listened carefully because he has just survived difficult surgery to replace a heart valve. Life is good and light is sweet, especially when you've dodged the proverbial bullet and gained a few extra years.

*Enjoy life, because you're going to be dead  
a lot longer than you're going to be alive*

To paraphrase Solomon in Ecclesiastes 11:7-8, "Enjoy life, because you're going to be dead a lot longer than you're going to be alive." A morbid thought, perhaps, but one that no human experience can contradict.

Here's a crucial observation as we apply this truth: About 99 percent of life is ordinary. Many of us struggle with that truth, because we secretly dream of a life of perpetual excitement and unending happiness. A man takes a new job with high hopes and big dreams, only to find that most of his days are filled with the same things he's been doing for the last five years. Or a young woman dreams of a happy married life where she can prepare beautiful dinners and take leisurely strolls with her husband. In her eyes the future seems bright and free from difficulty. But soon enough she discovers that her husband can be grouchy and unappreciative of her most creative culinary efforts. Add to that dirty diapers, a living room that needs straightening four times a day, wet snowsuits, runny noses, dirty hands, and a sink that drips twenty-four hours a day.

Life is more than fun and games. It's also cleaning the oven, paying the bills, and doing the laundry.

Let's face it. Most of our days will be spent doing the "busywork" of life. We get up, get dressed, get the kids ready, eat breakfast, go to work (or to school), see people, attend meetings, answer questions, fill out forms, type letters, make phone calls, review files, make notes, keep appointments, clear our desk, go home, unwind, eat supper, walk the dog, talk to the children, watch TV, and go to bed. Then we get up the next morning and do it again.

Such is life. A great deal of what we do every day may seem mundane and even trivial, but that's where the will of God begins for you and me. Blessed is that man who enjoys the routine, blessed is that woman who delights in the mundane, for they shall discover that God is in the details of life.

Sovereign Lord, open my eyes that I might see how blessed I really am. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Think of the three most joyful people you know. What qualities do they share in common?
- Take sixty seconds and count your blessings. Then thank God for them.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 90; Ephesians 5:15-17; and Colossians 3:17.

**Ecclesiastes 11:8** Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:8 But if a man lives many years And rejoices in them all, Yet let him remember the days of darkness, For they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:8 So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many— all that is about to come is obscure.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:8 τι καὶ ἐν τῇ πολλῇ ζῶσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐν πλείοσι αὐτοῖς ἐφρανθῆσεται καὶ μνησθῆσεται τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ σκοτους· τὰ πολλὰ σκόνται ἐν τῷ ῥυμένον ματαίᾳ τῆς

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:8 For even if a man should live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:8 Indeed, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, since they will be many. All that comes is futile.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:8 So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:8 However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:8 When people live to be very old, let them rejoice in every day of life. But let them also remember there will be many dark days. Everything still to come is meaningless.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:8 But, if man liveth many years, In all of them let him rejoice, And remember the days of darkness, For they are many! all that is coming is vanity.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:8 However many years you live, enjoy them all, but remember, the days of darkness will be many: futility awaits you at the end.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:8 Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:8 For if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:8 However many years a man may live, let him, as he enjoys them all, remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that is to come is vanity.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:8 Even though people may live for many years, they should enjoy every one of them. But they should also remember there will be many dark days. Everything that is coming is pointless.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:8 But even if a man's life is long and he has joy in all his years, let him keep in mind the dark days, because they will be great in number. Whatever may come is to no purpose.

- if a man, Ec 6:6 8:12
- rejoice: Ec 3:12,13 5:18-20 8:15
- yet: Ec 7:14 12:1-5 De 32:29 Job 10:22 14:10 15:23 18:18 Jer 13:16 Joe 2:2 Mt 22:13 Joh 12:35 Jude 1:18
- All that: Ec 2:1-11,15,17,19,21-23,26 4:8,16 5:15,16 6:11

**Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice** (jussive ~ command) **in them all** - Amen!

**Keith Krell** - In this passage, I believe Solomon says, "Live while you are dying." If you know country music, this may sound a lot like Tim McGraw's song, "Live Like You Were Dying."<sup>453</sup> The notable revisions are the words "**while**" and "**are**"—live while you are dying. By modifying this statement, I have chosen to focus on the biblical truth that all people are appointed to die.<sup>454</sup> Thus, you don't have to live like you were dying because your body is actually dying at this very moment. It is, therefore, more accurate to say you need to "live while you are dying."

**Keith Krell** Now before we get too carried away, we will see why Solomon is not a guy most people would choose to have over for Sunday lunch. He moves from "Life is sweet" to "I will ramble on about death for the rest of my time with you." In 11:8 he puts it like this: "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility." Solomon exhorts us to "rejoice" in all of the days that we are fortunate to live. Notice that three letter word "all." Even if we live to be a ripe old age, we are to rejoice in all of our years. Yep, that's right...even the seventies, eighties, and nineties. A simple way we can do this is by enjoying the ordinary nature of life. A great deal of what we do every day may seem mundane and even trivial, but that is where the will of God begins for you and me. Blessed is that man who enjoys the routine, blessed is that woman who delights in the mundane, for they shall discover that God is in the details of life.<sup>462</sup> As we age, we need to learn to be thankful just to be alive. The older we get the more thankful and content we should become. As it turns out, the golden years may really be golden after all. Recent research suggests that older Americans are not only the happiest Americans, but they are also much more socially active than expected. Although many older individuals face health problems, they are generally more content with what they have than younger Americans. The research found that the odds of being happy

increased by five percent for every ten years of age. Ilse, an 84-year-old retired nurse says, 'Contentment as far as I'm concerned comes with old age ... because you accept things the way they are. You know that nothing is perfect.' Although aging is often looked at negatively in our society, age brings many benefits, including a greater likelihood of contentment. Christians can also look at aging as bringing us one step closer to heaven and eternity with God.<sup>463</sup> With that said, it is critical for us to recognize that when it comes to years of life, it is still a matter of quality over quantity. It is better to add life to your years than to add years to your life. We need to live life fully every day. In the movie Braveheart, William Wallace (as portrayed by Mel Gibson) said, "Every man dies but not every man really lives."<sup>464</sup> This is a rather biblical assessment of life. The Bible declares that we will all die, yet many of us miss out on the abundant life that God offers us.<sup>465</sup> Don't let that happen to you. Live while you are dying.

*God's gift of life should be enjoyed,  
not just endured.*

**William Barrick** - Regardless of the number of years God might grant to any individual, "let him rejoice in them all" (Eccl 11:8a). God's gift of life should be enjoyed, not just endured. Until this point in the book, other enjoyment passages have "followed enigmatic sections. This shift to having the carpe diem section preface and structure the enigmatic section about death is significant, as is the introduction of 'remember,' which has not yet occurred in a carpe diem passage."<sup>18</sup>

**and let him remember** (jussive ~ command) **the days of darkness, for** (term of explanation) **they will be many** - While this verse is not specifically referring to believers, it does remind me of Paul's words to believers in Acts 14:22b "Through **many tribulations** we must enter the kingdom of God."

**William Barrick** - At the same time as one must rejoice, one must also **'remember the days of darkness'** (Eccl 11:8b). Since these dark days occupy a large amount of time ("**for they will be many**"), death does not seem an adequate reference—suffering, old age, and dying do fit the description, however. These days consist of times of trouble in which a person finds no delight (cp. Eccl 12:1). The trials and travails of a lifetime just serve to make the joys all the more pleasant and sweeter. Psalm 118:24 reminds the godly of the right daily attitude: This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

**Everything that is to come will be futility** (hebel; Lxx - *mataiotes*) - **Everything** cannot refer to literally everything for we know that for believers heaven will be bliss and eternal joy. The things Solomon refers to therefore are the things of this life under the sun which are all **futility** without God.

**William Barrick** - Disregard for rejoicing and remembering leads to great disappointment, because everything yet to come will pass very swiftly (Eccl 11:8c). "**Futility**" (hebel) in this setting refers to that which is brief and ephemeral. "**Everything**" must refer to the latter days of life, including the time of dying, rather than to the afterlife.

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**Futility** (vanity, idols, breath, delusion, worthless, emptiness) (01892) **hebel** means breath, vapor, vanity, emptiness, meaninglessness; idols. Hebel commonly has the figurative use of that which is evanescent and unstable. The first OT use refers to idols (Dt 32:21, cf 1 Ki 16:13, 26, Jer 8:19; Jeremiah 10:8, 15; Jer 14:22 Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9; Ps 31:6), a fitting word picture for the worthlessness of idols! **Hebel** refers to breath because of its transitory fleeting character, as in Job's figurative use "my days are but a **breath**." (Job 7:16, cf similar idea Ps 39:5, 6, 11; Ps 62:9; Ps 78:33 where hebel parallels behālā from root bāhal "to hasten": Ps 94:11; Ps 144:4) **Hebel** "generally appears in contexts where it is used as a simile emphasizing the transitory state of an object, never as descriptive of the biological function. A prime example would be "Humanity is like a breath (Ps. 144:4). Not only is breath ethereal and of short duration, but all things which breathe will die." (Gilbrant)

**HEBEL IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:7; Eccl. 5:10; Eccl. 6:2; Eccl. 6:4; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 8:14; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:8; Eccl. 11:10; Eccl. 12:8

**Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your

youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes, but know that God will judge your motives and actions.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:9 εφρα νου νεαν σκε ν νε τητ σου κα γαθυν τω σε καρδ α σου ν μ ραις νε τητ ς σου κα περιπ τει ν δο ς καρδ ας σου κα ν ρ σει φθαλμ ν σου κα γν θι τι π π σι το τοις ξει σε θε ς ν κρ σει

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart blameless, but not in the sight of thine eyes: yet know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth. And walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all of these things God will bring you to judgment.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:9 Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:9 Young people, it's wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do; take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy childhood, And let thy heart gladden thee in days of thy youth, And walk in the ways of thy heart, And in the sight of thine eyes, And know thou that for all these, Doth God bring thee into judgment.

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:9 Young man, enjoy yourself while you are young, make the most of the days of your youth, follow the prompting and desire of heart and eye, but remember, God will call you to account for everything.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, while you are young and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart, the vision of your eyes; Yet understand that as regards all this God will bring you to judgment.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:9 You young people should enjoy yourselves while you're young. You should let your hearts make you happy when you're young. Follow wherever your heart leads you and whatever your eyes see. But realize that God will make you give an account for all these things when he judges everyone.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:9 Have joy, O young man, while you are young; and let your heart be glad in the days of your strength, and go in the ways of your heart, and in the desire of your eyes; but be certain that for all these things God will be your judge.

- **Rejoice:** 1Ki 18:27 22:15 Lu 15:12,13
- **during your childhood:** Ec 12:1 1Ki 18:12 La 3:27
- **follow:** Nu 15:30 22:32 De 29:19 Job 31:7 Ps 81:12 Jer 7:24 23:17 Jer 44:16,17 Ac 14:16 Eph 2:2,3 1Pe 4:3,4
- **eyes:** Ec 2:10 Ge 3:6 6:2 Jos 7:21 2Sa 11:2-4 Mt 5:28 1Jn 2:15,16
- **know:** Ec 3:17 12:14 Ps 50:4-6 Ac 17:30,31 24:25 Ro 2:5-11 14:10 1Co 4:5 2Co 5:10 2Pe 3:7 Heb 9:27 Rev 20:12-15

**ENJOY YOUR**

## YOUR YOUNGER DAYS

**Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood.**

**Keith Krell** At this point in the context, Solomon begins to talk about the different opportunities and problems that regularly occur during the different stages of life: childhood, youth, young adult, and old age. Here Solomon writes specifically to young people and commands young men and women to rejoice during their childhood and teenage years. Now this doesn't mean party-hearty and sow your wild oats. This advice refers to the natural human instincts of young people: be with friends, enjoy life at social events, see the world, find one's vocation, and desire a family and children. Enjoy your life. Don't put tremendous pressure upon yourself when making significant decisions. Remember the words of [Ps 37:4](#): "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart." If you are delighting yourself in the Lord, His desires will naturally become your desires. This means you don't have to find God's will, you just need to find God. Or, as Augustine and Luther have said, "Love God and do whatever you please." Christians ought to have more fun than anyone, but we should be pure and blameless before our on-looking world. The reason for this is that we are responsible for our acts (cf. 12:14).<sup>467</sup> God will judge us for what we do even in our youth. The Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), once said, "Youth is such a wonderful thing. It's a shame to waste it on young people." Shaw was right. Young people are typically either driven to a fault or lazy to a fault. It is rare to find a balance in children and teens. Consequently, it is easy for young people to squander their youth and fail to rejoice during their formative years. When I was in middle school, I wanted to be in high school. When I was in high school, I wanted to be in college. When I was in college, I wanted to be in seminary. When I was a seminarian, I wanted to be an associate pastor. When I was an associate pastor, I wanted to be a senior pastor. When I was single, I wanted to be married. And so on and so forth. One of the most difficult issues in life is contentment. Young people, enjoy your life. I command you, the Bible commands you, "**REJOICE!**" Rejoice now while you can.

**And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes.**

**ESV Study Bible** ([Borrow](#)) - Proper enjoyment of life is possible only within the moral boundaries established by God, Who will evaluate all human deeds according to his righteous judgment (cf. 12:13-14).

**William Barrick** - **Again, Rejoice** (Eccl 11:9–10) Just as the Apostle Paul repeats the command to rejoice ("Rejoice, and again I say, rejoice," Phil 4:4), so King Solomon repeats the identical command (Eccl 11:8, 9).<sup>20</sup> However, the second time he addresses the command specifically to the young man. Youth passes quickly, so its opportunities for enjoying life will be few. The reader of Ecclesiastes should note that Solomon does not instruct young people to rejoice that they are young, but while they are young.<sup>21</sup> He tells the young to put in place the theological foundation for living as early as possible.<sup>22</sup> When the youth becomes a man, he enters yet another brief season of life. During his manhood, he needs to allow his heart to enjoy life's pleasantness. "Like a bubble the days of our 'youth' soon burst, so we have to clutch them while we can."<sup>23</sup>

To many readers, Solomon's instruction ("follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes") sounds hedonistic and reckless. Those who interpret the text in this fashion contrast it with Numbers 15:39. Numbers speaks of the way that the tassels with a blue cord on the fringes of the Israelites' garments will remind them to obey the Lord's commandments rather than their own lusts. Ignoring the context of one or both passages provides the only means by which the two can be confused or made to be contradictory. Due to the very consistent and careful conclusions Solomon reaches throughout the book (and especially in its final chapter), Longman's characterization of the writer as "a confused, skeptical wise man who vacillates between the traditional doctrine in which he was trained and the harsh realities of life"<sup>24</sup> seems unnecessary and overly skeptical itself.

**Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things**- Solomon reminds us that we will be judged for our actions.

**William Barrick** - Solomon does not leave this instruction without qualification. In a context where "you do not know" occurs four times (Eccl 11:2, 5, 6), he now says in a positive way, "Yet know" (Eccl 11: 9c). He reminds the young man that he must keep in mind that God will judge him for all that does not meet divine approval (cp. Eccl 9:7). The Hebrew employs a definite article on both "God" and "judgment" ("the God will bring you into the judgment").<sup>25</sup> Such grammar might indicate that Solomon has a single, specific judgment in mind.<sup>26</sup> In other words, a reality exists beyond this life and that reality includes divine retribution.<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 9:27 proclaims the same basic theological truth: "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." Priority, therefore must be given to God and to His will as revealed in His Word. No one should ever make their own desires the priority. Solomon encourages innocent, God-approved enjoyment of life's gifts. Brown compares Ecclesiastes 11:9 with texts like Proverbs 2:11–14 and concludes that "the old sage, much like a typical grandparent, provides the necessary balance to the harsh admonitions of the parental voice in Proverbs. The combined effect is the formative education of youth."<sup>28</sup>

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - GOD'S WORD TO PARTY ANIMALS Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

Sheila (not her real name) became a widow several years ago. She takes pride in her appearance and has a very pleasant personality. Even a casual observer would understand that she likes and appreciates the finer things of life. The little things give it

away—her clothes, the way she carries herself, her conversation, the car she drives.

In the years since her husband's death she has never seriously dated anyone. No interest, not the right kind of men, plenty of things to keep her busy, lots of friends to spend time with. "What would I want with another man in my life?" she says, not meaning to ask a question, really, but simply stating a fact.

Not long ago she went to a wedding where some old family friends introduced her to a man from out of town. He was charming, witty, and great fun.

The next day they, along with two other couples, went for a boat ride on the river. They laughed, talked, ate fried chicken, and generally had a ball. Afterwards, it was off to a nice restaurant at the marina.

Finally, the evening was almost over. One of the couples loaned the new man their car so he could take Sheila home. When they arrived at her house, they went inside, talked a bit, and then the man asked a question.

"Can you get pregnant?" The lady was shocked but recovered in time to say no. His next question got right to the point, "Do you mind if I sleep here tonight?" This time her answer was quick, almost, she told me later, in the same tone as she speaks to her children, "Oh no, I couldn't do that." He left and has not called her since.

When telling me the story later, Sheila commented, "I could never do what he was asking. I would feel guilty the rest of my life."

There are two quick morals to this little tale. First, no one ever outgrows temptation; that Sheila was an older woman did not matter. Temptation may come in different forms, but come it will. If ever you let down your guard, in that moment Satan will find your weakness and trap you. Second, the best way to defeat temptation is to refuse to take the tiniest step in a wrong direction. Let others stutter and stammer and flirt with danger. Remember the two-letter word that starts with η and ends with ο. It can get you out of trouble and save you from enormous heartache. When temptation comes knocking at your door, just say no.

Father, help me to make wise choices today so that a guilty conscience will not keep me awake tonight. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- To what extent does the pursuit of pleasure characterize life in our society? Examples, please!
- If being a party animal doesn't really satisfy, why do so many people keep looking there? What happens when we make personal pleasure the ultimate goal of life?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 33:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:31; and Titus 2:11-14.

**Ecclesiastes 11:10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity.

NET Ecclesiastes 11:10 Banish emotional stress from your mind. and put away pain from your body; for youth and the prime of life are fleeting.

BGT Ecclesiastes 11:10 καὶ πύστησον θυμὸν τὴν καρδίαν σου καὶ παρὰ γὰρ πονηρὰν τὴν σὰρκίν σου τί νενεῖς καὶ νοιάματα τῆς

LXE Ecclesiastes 11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for youth and folly are vanity.

CSB Ecclesiastes 11:10 Remove sorrow from your heart, and put away pain from your flesh, because youth and the prime of life are fleeting.

ESV Ecclesiastes 11:10 Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:10 So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.



NLT Ecclesiastes 11:10 So refuse to worry, and keep your body healthy. But remember that youth, with a whole life before you, is meaningless.

YLT Ecclesiastes 11:10 And turn aside anger from thy heart, And cause evil to pass from thy flesh, For the childhood and the age are vanity!

NJB Ecclesiastes 11:10 Rid your heart of indignation, keep your body clear of suffering, though youth and the age of black hair are both futile.

NRS Ecclesiastes 11:10 Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

RSV Ecclesiastes 11:10 Remove vexation from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

NAB Ecclesiastes 11:10 Ward off grief from your heart and put away trouble from your presence, though the dawn of youth is fleeting.

GWN Ecclesiastes 11:10 Get rid of what troubles you or wears down your body, because childhood and youth are pointless.

BBE Ecclesiastes 11:10 So put away trouble from your heart, and sorrow from your flesh; because the early years and the best years are to no purpose.

- remove: Ec 12:1 Job 13:26 Ps 25:7 2Pe 3:11-14
- sorrow: or, anger, Ps 90:7-11
- and put: Job 20:11 2Co 7:1 2Ti 2:22
- for: Ec 1:2,14 Ps 39:5 Pr 22:15

**So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body,**

**Keith Krell** Young people, you are commanded to actively and intentionally “remove” three entities from your life: grief, anger, and pain. Practically speaking this means: As far as possible the problems that beset heart and mind are to be resisted. Quit being a worrywart. Guard yourself from being stressed out by school, sports, and relationships. There will be plenty of time to really worry when you get older. Just kidding! Worry is a sin, so avoid it at all times. Don’t develop a root of bitterness. If your parents have divorced, forgive them. If your best friend gossiped about you, let it go. Don’t bring pain upon your body through alcohol, drugs, and sex. It’s just not worth it.

**Because** (term of explanation) **childhood and the prime of life are fleeting** - The time of childhood is very brief. Enjoy it while you can. I wish someone had told me that when I was that age! Once you graduate from college then the grief and pain of life under the sun becomes all too real!

**Keith Krell** Solomon says we are to remove grief, anger, and pain because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting. The phrase “the prime of life” literally refers to “blackness” of hair as opposed to grey hair.<sup>470</sup> This has great meaning to me. Recently, I have noticed a few grey hairs in my otherwise black hair. When you have black hair, a grey hair really stands out. At first, I was like, “What is this?” I thought I had a few more years before greydom. I guess I’ve been under too much stress. Initially, it was disappointing to me. But now I find this a helpful motivation. My black hair is going to quickly turn into grey. This should not discourage me; rather it ought to remind me that my time is short. Youth is “fleeting” (hebel) just like our “breath.”<sup>471</sup> We need to enjoy life now. We need to live for Christ now. In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams plays a poetry teacher for an old, established all-boys school. On the first day of class, he takes his students downstairs to a hall filled with old photos of past classes. Some of the photographs are fifty to seventy-five years old. Most of the men in the photos have lived and died. They are nothing but worm food and daisy fertilizer. The pictures portray them in their youth and vitality, but that was in the past and now they are dead. As the boys gaze on these long-forgotten portraits of youth, they hear the words *Carpe Deum*—“Seize the Day!” Life is short. All too soon they will be nothing more than a faded photograph on a wall. So seize the day—make each day count. Live purposefully and meaningfully. Do great things while there is time for greatness. Don’t put happiness on hold. Enjoy what you have. Live while you are dying.

**ESV Study Bible** ([Borrow](#)) - Whatever woes or ailments one has, one should not dwell on them excessively.

**William Barrick** - Therefore, people must “remove grief and anger” from their hearts and “put away pain” from their bodies, because the times of their lives “are fleeting” (Eccl 11:10). Mankind must never focus on the negatives to the extent that they miss the pleasant opportunities that God gives for their enjoyment. Enjoying the good things requires the proper perspective on the bad things in life. After all, the bad is equally ephemeral. “Grief and anger” represents a single Hebrew word occurring seven times in

Ecclesiastes. In Eccl 1:18 and Eccl 2:23 it is parallel to “pain.” In Eccl 5:16 the NASU translates the word as “vexation,” in the description of eating in darkness “with great vexation, sickness and anger.” But, in 7:3 Solomon contrasts it with laughter and happiness, making it an equivalent of sadness. Occurring twice in 7:9, “anger” seems most appropriate in that context. As Ryken points out, “This is not a call to deny the very real suffering that everyone experiences. Nor is it a call to escape pain by living for pleasure. Rather, it is a call to take care of our mental and physical health.”<sup>29</sup>

Questions for study:

- What plans do you have to take some risks in order to serve God faithfully and trust Him fully?
- Over what kinds of things in your life do you feel that you have no control?
- What are the perfect conditions for which you wait before making decisions or before doing something for Christ?
- What are the pleasant things you enjoy in life “under the sun”?
- What are some of your memories regarding your “days of darkness”?
- How can young and old alike enjoy life with a balanced perspective and a sense of accountability?
- How can you “remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body”?