

Meaningful Living for Young and Old

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Text: Ecclesiastes 11-12¹

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Series: Ecclesiastes (Finding the Meaning of Life)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 11**. Is life worth living? After ten chapters, we have found out that if life is all you have it is not worth living. Why? Without God at the center, life is meaningless.

- Chapter 1: Knowledge and information cannot satisfy.
- Chapter 2:1-10: Pleasure cannot satisfy.
- Chapter 2:11-26: Work cannot satisfy.
- Chapter 3:1-15: Events are meaningless.
- Chapter 3:16-22: Injustice is meaningless.
- Chapter 4: Relationships cannot satisfy.
- Chapter 5:1-7: Christless religion cannot satisfy.
- Chapter 5:8-ch.6: Wealth & materialism do not satisfy.
- Chapter 7: Death is coming all too quickly for this meaningless life! It's too short to mean anything.
- So in chapters 8-10, Solomon has been admonishing us to live a meaningful life. Solomon concluded that it was better to follow God's wisdom than to practice man's folly. As for the certainty of death, there is no way to escape it; and it ought to motivate us to enjoy life now and make the most of the opportunities God gives us.

Now Solomon was ready for his conclusion and personal application. What he does is present *four pictures of life*. We will look at two of them tonight.

Three thousand years ago, the wisest man ever to live (outside of the Lord) wrote a book telling us how to live a meaningful life in a very meaningless world. Is money all there is? Is my job all there is? Is the answer pleasure? It falls short. Family? They fail. What's the answer. Live life for God. Solomon paints the portrait of a meaningful life in chapters 11-12. Let's listen to what he had to say.

I. Life is an **Adventure**—live by faith (11:1–6).

Be courageous! You must trust God.

When I was a child I lived in Louisiana. In the summer time we would find the biggest Cypress tree and jump into a 30ft deep creek. Sometimes we would fall distances of 70ft! I would travel to see my father in the summer times. Life to me was an adventure.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

Of course at that time, the only one I was trusting was myself, and many times, my adventures ended in disaster.

Twenty-one years ago today, I came to know Jesus Christ, and the greatest adventure of my life began. I used to use adventure simply for my own entertainment. Now I journey the adventure of faith so that I might see lives changed, and people conformed to the image of Christ!

Here in the first six verses, Solomon uses two illustrations to show how we must trust God.

- A **merchant** who sends out ships (vs. 1-2)
- And a **farmer** who plants seed everywhere (vs. 3-6).

Both must have faith. Ultimately the outcome is up to God. Let's read about it.

A. Consider the courage of a **merchant** (vs. 1-2).

Ecclesiastes 11:1, "Cast your bread upon the waters, [send out your grain upon your ships] for you will find it after many days."

Solomon himself was involved in various kinds of trade, so it was natural for him to use this illustration. It would be months before the ships would return with their precious cargo; but when they did, the merchant's faith and patience would be rewarded.

Ecclesiastes 11:2, "Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth." Solomon suggests that the merchant spread out his wealth and not put everything into one venture. After all, true faith is not presumption.

The essence is, be wise, but have the faith and courage to follow Christ and put Him first, just like the merchant takes the chance by sending his grain out in many directions. Not all will be successful, but some will. So it is with following Christ.

Application: When God calls you to "cast your bread upon the waters", He's asking you to invest in the Kingdom. Don't die with a house and a heart full of junk! Give courageously of yourself, of your time, of your resources! Rather than hoarding, we need to give of ourselves and invest and "lay up treasure in heaven". If we hoard here, it will be eaten by moths, and it will rust and could be stolen.

B. Consider the courage of a **farmer** (vs. 3-6).

1. He farms in the midst of dangerous conditions. Life is filled with unexpected disasters. Expect them, but don't let it detour you from serving God. Learn from the farmer.

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." Storms come and destroy. Trees fall and rot. You can't stop them. We all have storms that destroy and healthy trees that suddenly fall to the ground. Tragedies happen.

2. Like the farmer, we should **not be fearful**, but faithful. **Ecclesiastes 11:4**, “He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.” If you are waiting for ideal circumstances, you will never plant or harvest. You’ve got to have a steadiness in life—a predictability. The winds blow. The trees fall. But you can expect the farmer to sow in the spring and harvest in the autumn. “Knee high by the fourth of July” means that the farmer planted on time in Spring.

Application: Is your life predictable? Are you faithful in the little things? Do you follow through?

3. Like the farmer, we must **trust God** for what each day brings. **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.”

Just as nobody knows how the fetus is formed in the womb (Ps. 139:14–15), so nobody knows the works of God in His creation. God has a time and a purpose for everything (3:1–11), and we must live by faith in His Word.

Therefore, use each day wisely (v. 6). **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.”

The farmer works hard! He “redeems the time” (Eph. 5:15–17). So we need to work hard, trusting God to bless at least some of the tasks we have accomplished. Just as the merchant sends out more than one ship, so the farmer works more than one crop.

Application: Are you living by faith? Are you giving of yourself—investing yourself in people? What impact are you having on people’s lives for Christ?

II. Life is a **Gift**—enjoy it (11:7–12:8). Live it to the fullest. Be committed!

In order to do this, we must obey three instructions:

- ***Rejoice*** in the gift of life (11:7–9).
- ***Remove*** vexation from life (11:10).
- ***Remember*** God in all of life (12:1–8).

- A. **Rejoice** in the gift of life (11:7–9). What a joy it is to anticipate each new day and accept it as an amazing gift from God! I was born two and a half months premature, so I was always told to appreciate life. If you know me, I live about every moment as if it is my last. I’m almost hyper-focused on life. What a joy to have each moment!

1. Enjoy each **moment**.

Verse 7, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun”. Solomon is saying—appreciate waking up! Enjoy life. Take time to smell the roses! Solomon's explaining that life is and can be very, very, very beautiful. He's referencing those days where you wake up and everything works. Like you wake up happy. Your bum back's not hurting, your legs aren't hurting, your relationships are just working. In fact, it just feels like you've fallen into rhythm in terms of where you stand with the universe. And I think we've all had that day where the music just sounded better. Take all the light and the color of life that God has given you and enjoy it.

Illustration: I love to cut the lawn, and then just look at it. I know I've seen it a thousand times, but I love to walk around the house and just see the beauty of the trees. I love cleaning something up and looking at it. Taking in the joy of life. Just looking at my children sleeping. Savoring that first cry of the baby in the morning, because I know I can comfort him. Enjoy life. Take time to smell the roses!

2. Enjoy each **stage** of life.

Ecclesiastes 11:8-9a, “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. 9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.”

They say “you don't know what you've got until it's gone”. Take time now before the difficult days of old age come.

So while you and I have breath, while you and I have this opportunity for sweet life and the feel of the sun, let us pursue life because it will get difficult.

He's saying, “Chase life, chase Jesus, chase it to the fullness, but the truth is most of the time, you're going to get one nostril at best. And your back's going to hurt, if not now, eventually. And your knees are going to creak, if not now, eventually. But as much as you can help it, enjoy life deeply.”

3. Enjoy life, but be careful that you enjoy it in a way that pleases God.

Verse 9b, “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.”

God does give us “all things richly to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17), but it is always wrong to enjoy the pleasures of sin. We are not to put pleasures in the place of God, but use them for the glory of God.

- B. **Remove** vexation from life (11:10).

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

1. Quiet your vexed soul. The ladies Bible study is talking about how to quiet a noisy soul. There's a lot of noise and vexation in our hearts at times. Frustration, anxiety, fear, depression, jealousy, bitterness. Those are not the fruit of the Spirit! Remove this vexation from your heart.

2. Vexed souls lead to physical problems, so deal with your heart issues, and at the same time you'll be putting away pain from your body. A lot of body pain comes from the heart.
3. Do what Solomon says, or you'll waste your youth. I love this he says, "and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity." Youth and the dawn of life are vanity, because youth very rarely do what Solomon is saying. Someone once said, "Youth is wasted on the stupid". My father always referred to youth as being "young and dumb". Solomon is saying, "Don't waste your youth. Deal with your issues while you are young and you'll be able to enjoy life more.

Let's learn from the painful lessons of life while we are young. Remove while you're young, vexation from your heart. Deal with your junk and your issues now. Don't fake it. Deal with your sinful habits now. The thing about deep roots is that they never come up on the first pull. I'm not even a farmer, I just know that. Take a stab at the painful lessons of life and learn them.

C. **Remember God** in all of life (12:1–8).

Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"".

Remember God in youth because...

1. Your decisions in your youth affect your whole life. I find Solomon's wisdom striking. Solomon is an old man at this point, and he is pleading with young men and women to not forget about Jesus in this small window of your life that will affect the next thirty years.

He says, "Not now. Don't forget about your Creator now. Not now. Now when you're choosing husband and wife, not when you're choosing a job, not when you're choosing future, not when you're choosing college. Don't forget about Jesus now, because how you handle the now is going to play out in the next 20-30 years."

There's coming this day when we'll be ready for heaven—where we'll have no pleasure in living on earth. We'll just want to be with the Lord, and it won't seem to be coming quick enough for us.

2. Remember God now, because old age is coming!!
(1.) You'll lose mental vitality. **Verse 2**, "before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,

Solomon is now moving into metaphors for old age. When people get old most eventually lose their mental sharpness. The atrophy of old age and death was never the plan of God. Sin brought old age and death into the world. So let's watch this, "...before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened..."

Solomon is talking about mental vitality and mental illumination. Young people have creativity and we have memory and we have wit and we have sharp minds.

- There's coming a day when all of a sudden, we can't find our car keys ever, and we're taking this herb that's supposed to increase our memory, but we don't really remember what it was called. So, Solomon says, "When you have your mind, when it's creative and full of wit and it's sharp, let's chase after Jesus and live life deeply."

(2.) Your body falls apart. **Verse 3**, "in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed".

- Keepers of the house – your hands will begin to tremble.
- The strong men are bent – That's your legs! Your knees won't work any more!
- Grinders cease because they are few – you won't have many teeth!
- The windows are dimmed – you won't see well!

Verse 4, "and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low".

- the sound of the grinding is low —That means instead of eating corn on the cob, your going to be eating applesauce!
- one rises up at the sound of a bird —reference to how difficult it becomes to sleep, the older you get.
- all the daughters of song are brought low—you can't hear people when they sing. There are certain tones you don't get.

Verse 5, "they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—"

- terrors-what used to be fun and exciting is now terrifying. You used to think heights and fast cars, etc. were great. Now you just want to stay alive.
- Almond tree - The thing about an almond tree is it will go white and the wind will carry away the blossoms. This is a reference to hair or the lack of hair, either one.
- The grasshopper drags—we move slower.
- desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—" This is a reference to a desire for living.

Verse 6, "before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,

- "...before the silver cord is snapped..." That's a reference to the spinal column.
- "...or the golden bowl is broken..." That's your head.
- "...or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain..." That's your heart.

- “...or the wheel broken at the cistern...” That's your circulation of blood.

Verse 7, “and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.”

Life is frail! Solomon could have said, “Life is a vapor that appears for a little while and vanishes away”. But of course he describes it for us in living color.

Truly, if this life is all there is, it is vanity! All is vanity if this is it. That's not the case though. Christ is our all in all. For me to live is Christ.

So live life to its fullest. It's so short. God wants us to serve Him from our youth and not waste the good gifts He's given.

Conclusion: Live life, be committed, be courageous. Live it while you can because soon it will be gone. You won't be able to help your children. Live life for the Lord with all your might now while you can.