

Ecclesiastes 11

How Should We Live?

What is the meaning and purpose of life? That was the big question Solomon asked when he began this Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. And after examining life under the sun, without God, he concluded that life at times is not worth living. To support his conclusion he gave several reasons: the vanity of brevity of life, the injustices, the fleeting security of wealth, the unavoidable trials and sufferings of life and the certainty of death.

But then slowly Solomon began to bring God into the picture and what a difference He makes. Life is still filled with challenges but with God we can have faith and hope. Life can be enjoyed and wealth can be employed to the glory of God. Godly wisdom gives us a perspective on life that the foolish wisdom of the world does not. And even death will not forever harm those who are in the hands of God. For those of us who understand Jesus Christ's victory over the grave, we need to allow the joy of the certainty of his return and our inheritance of everlasting life, define and color each day.

In the final two chapters of this book Solomon makes three points: 1. Life is an adventure – live it by faith, 2. Life is a gift – enjoy it, and 3. Life is a stewardship – live it for the glory of God. Let's look at the first point, life is an adventure.

Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will find it after many days.
(Ecclesiastes 11:1)

This was a common expression in Solomon's time, much like our phrase "nothing ventured, nothing gained." It referred to the shipping of grain to be sold or traded in far off ports for other goods and monetary profits. The Bible tells us in 1 Kings 10 that Solomon had a fleet of ships involved in international trade.¹ But there was great risk involved here. It could be months before the ships returned with their profits, if they returned at all.

The ships could be lost in a storm or hit a reef or be attacked by pirates. The point is this: making a profit involves a risk. Life involves risk too. Therefore to get the most out of life we need to live boldly and have faith in God. Don't just sit there—do something! And as a believer expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.

¹ 1 Kings 10:22

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

In light of the risk taking of verse 1 some Bible scholars think verse 2 is telling us that as we take risks we need to be wise. In doing business or in living life don't put all your eggs in one basket, in other words diversify. That makes sense. But after working on this I think verse 2 would be better understood as referring to our being generous. Proverbs 11:24 and 25 says,

There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more;
And there is *one* who withholds more than is right,
But it *leads* to poverty.
²⁵ The generous soul will be made rich,
And he who waters will also be watered himself.

The idea here in Ecclesiastes 11:2 and also from Proverbs is give when people need help and when you are in trouble those you helped will help you. Jesus Christ said a similar thing.

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure,
pressed down, shaken together, and running over
will be put into your bosom. For with the same
measure that you use, it will be measured back to
you.
(Luke 6:38)

How should we live as believers? The answer is boldly and generously.

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.
(Ecclesiastes 11:3)

When I first read this verse I said to myself, "Well, thank you Captain Obvious." But here is the point: Life is going to happen good and bad so deal with it. Life will never give you a perfect set of circumstances. You are going to marry a sinful, fallen person. But guess what? So are you. Your dream job may come, but with a boss who is a jerk. Somewhere in your life you will be honored and somewhere along the way you will be hurt. These things are as certain as rain from dark, heavy clouds.

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

Don't just sit around always waiting for the ideal set of circumstances to live life. There are no ideal circumstances. There will always be surprises around the corner. So live life and trust God for He alone knows the future.

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.
(Ecclesiastes 11:5)

Jesus made a similar statement when speaking about the work of God's Spirit in bringing about the new birth. He said,

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.
(John 3:8)

The point is life is often unpredictable. And we cannot always figure out what God is doing in our lives or in the world. But we have to live life. We need to work and love and have children and grow old. And while living life uncertain of what is around the corner we need to trust in God who can see around the corner. In light of this the apostle Paul wrote,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:6, 7)

Life is strange. Think about this. The apostle Paul wanted to visit Rome to teach the full gospel.² But he never got to Rome in the way he expected. Paul got caught up in a riot in Jerusalem and almost lost his life. He was saved when he was arrested by Roman soldiers.³ But then he was thrown in prison for a few years. Finally, he was brought before King Agrippa, charges were filed and he was placed on a prison ship bound for Rome.

² Acts 19:21; Romans 1:9-15

³ Acts 21:30ff

Along the way the ship was caught in a fierce storm and broke apart. Then washed up on the island of Malta, Paul was bitten by a snake. Paul finally got to Rome, but he got there the hard way. How do you live in a world like this? You do your best and then follow the apostle Peter's advice.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.
(1 Peter 5:6, 7)

Some people freeze in life, because they are not sure of the future. They want God to spell it all out for them. At other times people suffer from a paralysis of analysis. God tells us in His Word what things are morally right and morally wrong. There are principles on how to live. But He doesn't tell us what job to take or what city to live in or who to marry. So what should we do? How should we live? Pray, seek good counsel, but then act.

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.
(Ecclesiastes 11:6)

In the words of Ephesians 5:16, redeem the time. Life is an adventure of faith. Invest in it. Do your work and be generous. Even in tough times, trust in God that what you do today will pay off tomorrow. Psalm 126 declares,

Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
⁶ He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves *with him*.
(Psalm 126:5, 6)

Live life now. Do the work God calls you to do—even in tears.⁴ And do it now, you're not getting any younger. Here now is Solomon's next conclusion. Life is a gift, enjoy it.

Truly the light is sweet,
And *it* is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;

⁴ Hebrews 6:10, 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.
(Ecclesiastes 11:7, 8)

Solomon says that despite all of life's uncertainties, life is still sweet. It certainly beats the alternative! What a joy it is when you accept each new day as a gift from God. Live life to the best of your abilities. Days of darkness are coming; you're growing older and life is short.

Sure, one day your feet will hurt when you walk, and your back will ache and you'll lose your hair. So do now what you can, when you can, as often as you can. Build for the future of others. As they say plant a tree even though you will never see it fully grown. Live a godly life for others to follow. There are young people coming up fast trying to figure life out. Leave them a map by how you live. Finally, life is a stewardship from God.

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.
(Ecclesiastes 11:9)

What does verse 9 mean? You always need to understand a verse not only where it is written, but in its context as well. And this includes not only its immediate context, but also the full context of Scripture. The Word of God here does not mean go get drunk and party hardy—do what you want. It doesn't mean to be immoral. Earlier in Ecclesiastes we've already seen that a life of just fun and frolic is empty. And we've seen the benefits of holiness and fearing God and having wisdom.

In the verse we are being told to follow our dreams when we are young. You may win and you may fail, but you will never know unless you try. You will have times of trial and times of success. Don't let the success make you think you are self-sufficient. And don't let your failures make you bitter. ALL of life is a test.

God tests us; I truly believe this, not to see if he can bless us today. No, he tests our hearts to see what kind of responsibility Jesus Christ can give us in his coming kingdom. Is your heart set on loving God or just on that new car or

phone, or house or retirement account? Live life, buy those fancy shoes, start that career. But love God above all things for God will bring everything you do and say and the reason why you did it and said it into that great day of judgment.

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

The precious years of life go by quickly. Don't waste your life. Will you have successes in life? Yes. Will you have sorrows in life? Yes. In life, whether rain or shine follow the advice of Proverbs 3:5, 6,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

How should we live? Life is an adventure – live it by faith. Life is a gift – enjoy it. Life is a stewardship – live it for the glory of God. There will be more on this last point next Sunday.