

# ***Ecclesiastes***

## **Chapter 11**

*Cast Your Bread upon the Waters*

**Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. 2 Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. 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. 4 He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. 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. 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. 7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 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. 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. 10 Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.**

Solomon is nearing the end of his presentation. With a series of colorful proverbs he now calls on us to work diligently and then to leave the results to God. (PBC)

**11:1** *Cast your bread upon the waters.* Be adventurous, like those who accept the risks and reap the benefits of seaborne trade. Do not always play it safe (see Pr 11:24). (CSB)

Do not be overly cautious due to arbitrary and unexpected outcomes in this life. This passage describes sending ships to sea with trade goods and waiting to realize a profit. V 2 encourages helping those in need, which realizes a greater profit. (TLSB)

The Hebrew word for “cast” is “send.” He is probably alluding to merchant ships sent out with bread, that is, goods for trade. King Solomon himself “had a fleet of trading ships ... Once every three years it returned carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons” (1 Kings 10:22). From the Red Sea port of Ezion Geber (1 Kings 9:26) his ships sailed to Arabia and possibly on to faraway India. (PBC)

Just as it took faith that the fleet would eventually return with its cargo, so we need faith that the good we send out into the world will finally return a cargo of blessings. Just as the wind and waves carried the fleet out of sight and out of mind, we should do good and forget about it. Then, perhaps years later, when we least expect it, the good comes back. (PBC)

The best provision that we can make for the future is, not to hoard up our property and withhold it from the needy, but to give liberally to all; for “he that hath pity upon the poor, lends unto the Lord; and he that which he hath given will he pay him again. (CB)

**11:2** *Give a portion to seven.* Be generous while you have plenty; unforeseen disasters may make you dependent on the generosity of others. (CSB)

Second encouragement to be generous, not keeping track of how many people you help. Be generous while you have the means to do so. (TLSB)

This expression describes a sort of generosity that isn't concerned about exact numbers. We are not help others simply to build up a record of ourselves. More important than keeping track of how many people we've helped is that our giving be motivated by love. (PBC)

**11:3–6** *clouds ... tree ... wind ... seed.* Do not toy with maybes and might-have-beens. Start where you can, and recognize how limited your role (or knowledge) is. (CSB)

**11:3** *if the clouds are full* – We can go about our lives and not worry about what may or may not happen. (PBC)

After death there is no room for conversion. (CB)

**11:4** *who observes the wind* – Such undue caution is not the mark of bold faith in God's control of the future. "Let us not become weary in doing good.," says Paul, "for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:10). In every aspect of life, but especially in doing the Lord's work, confident and persistent action is the proper approach. (PBC)

There will always be some uncertainty about whether the time is right. Therefore, the planting, plowing, or reaping will be put off to a better time. (TLSB)

**11:5** *wind.* cf. Jn 3:8 ("wind" and "spirit" are the same word in the original in both verses). (CSB)

Jesus combines both the pictures of the wind and the baby when He describes God's way of bringing people to faith: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sounds but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). A Christian may share his faith with an unbeliever and meet with nothing but rejection and apparent failure. Meanwhile the Spirit of God is invisibly at work through the word planted in the unbeliever. Perhaps after many years that person is born into God's family of faith. (PBC)

When we meet with so many mysteries in nature, we should not be offended with mysteries in God's providence and the work of redemption. (CB)

*do not know the work of God* – Scientific understanding of how conception occurs may reduce the impact of this comparison. Yet conception and life remain mysteries: how does God make us something radically different from an animal? (TLSB)

**11:6** *withhold not your hand* – The Teacher's final illustration in this section lends itself to similar applications. In whatever we attempt we should do our best and leave the results to God. Rather than staking everything on one venture, Solomon advises us to make use of numerous opportunities. Whenever and however possible, we should plant the seeds of God's word. Only God knows where and when results will come from the effort. (PBC)

Plant the seed and reap the harvest. Don't be paralyzed by indecision. (TLSB)

We should keep diligently at work in God's service, disregarding present inconveniences and unfavorable appearances. The duty is ours; the reward God will give when and in what measure he pleases. (CB)

**11:7–10** Live life to the fullest. (CSB)

**11:7** *light is sweet* – Work hard. Leave the results to God. And then enjoy life. Approached in this way, life under the sun can be sweet. Enjoy the days of sunshine and happiness. Try to find enjoyment in life as long as you live. (PBC)

Light and seeing the sun are here emblems of life. (CB)

**11:8, 10** *vanity*. Warns against letting the wonderful gifts mentioned in vv. 7–10 dazzle and detract us. Verse 9 sets us on the true course. (CSB)

Solomon underscores the troubled and fleeting nature of life on earth. (PBC)

**11:8** *days of darkness* – When Solomon speaks in this way, he is not an embittered old man. He is simply telling it like it is. He is expressing the realism which runs through the entire Bible. Five centuries before Solomon’s time, Moses said in a similar vein, “The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). (PBC)

The light of life comes to an end in death. Looking at those who have gone before us, hundreds or thousands of years ago, we see that it may also be a long time between when the light goes out in our life and when we see the new light of the resurrection. Enjoy life; make something of it while you can, and not after it’s gone. (TLSB)

**11:9** *days of your youth* – Generally youth is a time of energy, freshness, love for life and a sense of adventure. Like spring flowers, youth joys all too often wither beneath the weaknesses and problems of aging. It is clear he is not telling young people to follow the lusts and evil desires of their eyes and hearts. Solomon is talking about God-pleasing pursuits of youth – things like pursuing an education, traveling, going out with friends, getting married, laughing, playing games and just having a good time. (PBC)

Pursue life as you perceive it and understand it. Yet know that you will make mistakes and face judgment. We are accountable before God for all we do. *youth*. The Hbr is not very distinct here, encompassing ages from small children to unmarried adults. The Israelites saw this time as a transition to the important stage of life: adulthood, when one was most productive and had full social standing. (TLSB)

Luther’s thoughts on this passage are worth sharing at length. Luther said, Above all, young people should avoid sadness and loneliness. Joy is a necessary for youth as food and drink, for the body is invigorated by a happy spirit. Education should not begin with the body but with the spirit, so that this is not overlooked: for when the spirit has been properly instructed, it is easy to govern the body. Therefore one must be indulgent with youth, and must let them be happy and do everything with a happy spirit. Yet one must see to it that they are not corrupted by the desires of the flesh. For carousals, drinking-bouts, and love affairs are not the happiness of the heart of which he is speaking here, for they instead make the spirit sad. (PBC)

A deep sense of God’s presence, and habitual reverence for His authority, are the great security to the young against the pursuit of sinful pleasure. They who fear God and make Him their portion, will enjoy all that this world is capable of giving, and be prepared for the higher enjoyments of eternity. (CB)

*judgment.* The prospect of divine praise or blame makes every detail of life significant rather than meaningless. To know this gives direction to our heart and discrimination to our eyes. The stage is set for ch. 12. (CSB)

**11:10** *remove anxiety* – An awareness of God’s judgment helps you in this regard and allows you to cast off the troubles of your body. The person who tries to live according to God’s Word enjoys freedoms and pleasures which can never be found in sinful indulgence. (PBC)

Elsewhere, the Preacher discusses what vexes, angers, or frustrates us (1:18; 2:23; 5:16; 7:3, 9). We are urged here to avoid frustration over the vain things of this life. Ephr: “[However,] for your sins you should be constant in sadness [i.e., repentant]” (*NPNF* 2 13:334). (TLSB)

**Chapter 11** We don’t know what may come, and we will never know everything we may want to. We take advantage of our opportunities, especially those to help others. We understand, as we conduct our lives, that God has the final say. His Word to us in Christ is joy, light, and peace. He daily does us good and has prepared a joyous future for us in Christ. • Lord, Your promises abide for us. Teach us to face life cheerfully and fearlessly as we place all things in Your hands. Amen. (TLSB)