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“Chasing After The Wind”

How Should We Then Live?

ECCLESIASTES 11:1-10

Introduction

1. Is life worth living? This is the question which Solomon has been asking throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.
2. Initially, after investigating “life under the sun,” as he calls it, Solomon concluded “No, life is *not* worth living!”
3. Solomon gave four reasons as to why this is true:

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- a. Life is monotonous (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

“That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.”
(Ecclesiastes 1:9, NASB95)

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- b. Wisdom is meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:18)
 - 1) “Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.” (Ecclesiastes 1:18, NASB95)
 - 2) It doesn’t explain all the questions of life.

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- c. Wealth is futile.
 - 1) There is never enough to satisfy.

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 5:10, NASB95)

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2) We can't take it with us when we die.

“As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand.” (Ecclesiastes 5:15, NASB95)

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d. Death is certain (Ecclesiastes 2:16).

“For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!” (Ecclesiastes 2:16, NASB95)

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4. But then Solomon went back and revisited his arguments, this time, with God at the center of life, he found that . . .

a. Life is not monotonous, but filled by God with challenging situations, each with its own time and purpose (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NASB95)

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b. Following God's wisdom provides direction in life (Ecclesiastes 10:2).

“A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.” (Ecclesiastes 10:2, NASB95)

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c. Wealth can be enjoyed and used to the glory of God (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

“Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 5:19, NASB95)

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- d. Though we cannot escape death, God encourages us to enjoy the life we presently live and make the most of the opportunities He gives us (Ecclesiastes 5:18).

“Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.” (Ecclesiastes 5:18, NASB95)

6. In these last two chapters (11-12) as Solomon draws his experiment to a close, he looks at how we should live, in light of all that he has said.

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I. Practical Advice Concerning Our Activities

A. DON’T PUT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET (VV. 1-2)

1. In verse 5, Solomon will point out that just as you and I are ignorant of the “path of the wind” and the formation of a baby in its mother’s womb (something which we cannot see), so we are ignorant of God’s providential dealings in human affairs (cf. 3:11; 8:17).

“He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NASB95)

“and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, “I

know,” he cannot discover.” (Ecclesiastes 8:17, NASB95)

2. Four times in these first six verses, Solomon will say, “you do not know” (vv. 2, 5(2), 6).
3. However, in spite of our ignorance of the future, Solomon advises us to take the initiative and trust God for the outcome.
4. To illustrate this point, Solomon utilizes two activities:
 - a. A merchant sending out his ships (vv. 1-2).
 - b. A farmer sowing his seed (vv. 3-6).
5. In both illustrations, Solomon teaches us that taking calculated risks can be a valuable thing.

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6. One commentator (Warren Wiersbe) has paraphrased verse 1, “Cast your bread on the surface of the waters” as, “send out your grain in ships.”
7. 1 Kings 10:22, tells us that Solomon was engaged in a business venture with Hiram, the king of Tyre.
 - a. Every three years, they had a fleet of ships which returned with gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.
 - b. We might call this a long term investment.
8. In verse 2, he advises us not to put all of our wealth into one venture — “divide your portion to seven, or even to eight” — because we do not know what misfortune may befall us.
9. It was very likely that during the three year turn around, one or more of their ships might hit a reef, be lost in a storm or even attacked by pirates and the cargo be lost.
10. Thus, the success of their venture was more likely with a greater number of ships being sent out.
11. Jesus applied this same principle in two of the parables He taught:

- a. The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23)
 - 1) The sower did not restrict his seed to only one part of his field.
 - 2) The result was that he had returns of 30, 60, and in some cases, 100 percent on his investment.
- b. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
 - 1) The master entrusted his wealth to three of his servants.
 - 2) Two of the servants each had 100 percent returns on their investments while the third servant made no money for his master.

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B. BE CONSTANTLY DILIGENT (VV. 3-6)

1. In these verses, Solomon's focus turns to the illustration of the farmer.
2. He begins by setting forth a principle:

“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.” (Ecclesiastes 11:3, NASB95)
3. Just as the acts of God — the falling of “rain” and the uprooting of a “tree” — are beyond one's control, so also is the future.

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3. That being said, if we wait for just the right moment . . .
 - a. to “plant” (a time when there is no “wind” to blow away the seed) or
 - b. to “reap” (a time when there is no rain in the “clouds” to threaten the ripened harvest). . . we would end up doing nothing.
3. Instead, we should “sow” our “seed” all day long — “sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening” — because we do not know which sowing will “succeed” or “whether both of them alike will be good” (v. 6).

4. Through these two illustrations, Solomon urges us toward consistent, diligent effort and prudent, diversified investment of our energies and resources, realizing, all the while, that everything is in God's control.

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C. MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES (VV. 7-8)

1. Many of us who grew up around farms have heard this expression.
2. It means to make the most of a favorable situation while it lasts.
3. In verse 7, Solomon writes, "The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun" (Ecclesiastes 11:7, NASB95).
4. There is an old Irish blessing which hangs in my office, part of which says, "May the sun shine warm upon your face."
5. We savor those cool days when the sun shines warm upon our faces.
6. Here, Solomon encourages us to enjoy life as long as we live, and to be grateful to God for the joyous moments we experience while here on earth.
7. In verse 8, he adds, "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all . . ." (Ecclesiastes 11:8a).
8. He then adds a note of caution: "and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility." (Ecclesiastes 11:8b).
9. I have heard many of you voice that sentiment, though in slightly different words — "Growing old isn't fun."
10. Solomon will address this aspect of life more in depth in 12:2-5.
 - His point here is that the wise person rejoices in the present while realizing there will be those days in the autumn of our lives which will be difficult and uncertain.

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D. DON'T WASTE THE PRECIOUS YEARS OF YOUR YOUTH (VV. 9-10).

1. Youth is a time of health, vitality and opportunity.

2. Sadly, there are those young people who waste their lives personal indulgence.
3. Such was the case of the prodigal son once he received his portion of the inheritance from his father (Luke 15:13b).
“. . . he squandered his wealth in wild living” (Luke 15:13b, NIV84).
4. It was George Bernard Shaw who once remarked, “The trouble with youth is that it is wasted on the young.”
5. Solomon exhorts those of you who are young not to waste those precious years of your lives.
6. Those of us who are older know that there are special pleasures which belong to youth which can never be experienced in quite the same way as we grow older.
7. Because of this, Solomon encourages those who are young to “follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes” (v. 9).
8. They should do whatever their heart desires, but they should do so while tempering those desires with an awareness that God will one day judge.

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9. The term ‘walk’ (‘follow,’ NASB) is used in the Bible to denote the manner of one’s life— we are commanded to walk . . .
 - a. **In God’s ways** (Deuteronomy 5:33; Psalm 1:1)

“You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess.”
(Deuteronomy 5:33, NASB95)

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!”

(Psalm 1:1, NASB95)

b. With integrity (Psalm 15:2)

“He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.” (Psalm 15:2, NASB95)

c. In righteousness (Proverbs 8:20a)

[Wisdom speaking] “I walk in the way of righteousness . . .” (Proverbs 8:20a, NASB95)

d. In understanding (Proverbs 9:6)

[Wisdom’s plea] “Forsake your folly and live, and proceed in the way of understanding.” (Proverbs 9:6, NASB95)

e. In obedience (2 John 6a)

“And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.” (2 John 6a, NASB95)

f. In the light (1 John 1:7)

“but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7, NASB95)

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10. In this last verse of chapter 11, Solomon issues one final caution:

“So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.” (Ecclesiastes 11:10, NASB95)

“Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 11:10, NKJV)

a. The precious years of our youth go by quickly, and Solomon advises us not to waste our opportunities to prepare for the future.

b. He wants us to know that “the best way to have a happy adult life and a contented old age is to get a good start early in life and avoid the things which will bring trouble later on.” (Warren Wiersbe, pp. 130-

131).

- c. "Young people who take care of their minds and bodies, who avoid the destructive sins of the flesh, and who build good habits of health and holiness, have a better chance for happy adult years than those who "sow their wild oats" and pray for a crop failure." (Warren Wiersbe, p. 131).

Conclusion

1. There are so many things about the life which you and I presently live that are uncertain.
2. We have two options:
 - a. Live our lives in constant fear and inactivity.
 - b. Live our lives to the fullest, taking advantage of every opportunity which God affords us, always trusting Him for the outcome.
3. I want to encourage each of you to live your life to the fullest, rejoicing in all that you receive from God's bountiful provision.

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4. I know I have used this passage from Solomon a number of times in this study, but allow me to utilize it once more:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight"

(Proverbs 3:5-6, NASB95)

5. Are you willing to do that tonight? If so, I am confident that you will never regret it.