

Don't Wait to Live
Ecclesiastes 11:1-10
Rev. Brian Bill
November 9-10, 2024

Have you ever wondered why Election Day in the U.S. falls on a Tuesday in November? It's actually due to the needs of 19th-century farmers. In 1845, Congress set the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November as Election Day. At that time, most Americans were farmers who often had to travel long distances to vote, making a weekday necessary.

Tuesday was ideal, as Sundays were reserved for church, and Wednesdays were market days. November was chosen because it was after the harvest but before harsh weather set in.

Imagine that, back then Sundays were reserved for church!

Our country has changed a lot, hasn't it? We've gone from peaceful agrarian lives to fast-paced lives filled with anxiety. We've gone from being church-ed to being largely unchurched or dechurched. Some are just done with church and others identify themselves as "none" when asked about their religious affiliation.

As we've been walking through Ecclesiastes, we've been working at understanding Solomon's world so we can apply God's Word to our world today. This chapter is filled with observations about the common things of agrarian life – *bread, water, disasters, clouds, rain, trees, wind, sowing, reaping, pregnancy, morning, evening, light, darkness, and youthfulness.*

Ray Ortlund writes, "*As Solomon moves toward his conclusion, his pace quickens, and his tone becomes urgent. Life is to be lived to the fullest – cheerfully, reverently, deliberately! The wise refuse to settle for a grim existence; they come alive to the radiant goodness of God daily surrounding them, but they also reckon solemnly with death and eternity.*"

Last weekend we looked at some common sayings which have their source in Scripture. Today, we'll see some additional axioms that have their source in Ecclesiastes 11, showing again how relevant God's revelation is.

- *Nothing ventured, nothing gained.*
- *When opportunity knocks, answer the door.*

- *Prepare for the worst but work for the best.*
- *Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.*
- *Don't put all your eggs into one basket.*

Let's read Ecclesiastes 11: ***“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.”***

Notice the phrase ***“you know not”*** in verse 2 and the phrase ***“you do not know”*** used three times in verses 5-6. Solomon is saying life is uncertain and situations are often unexplainable. Here's our main idea: *Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.*

1. Do what you can with what you have. Listen again to verse 1: ***“Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.”*** The word ***“cast”*** means, *“to let loose”* or *“send forth.”* The word ***“find”*** has the idea of *“attaining.”* It's difficult to know what exactly Solomon has in mind here. It's unlikely he is referring to throwing slices of bread into a pond, much like we might do when we feed ducks. This was a common proverb of the day which referred to something that looked like a wasteful expenditure. Someone put into words what many of us are thinking, *“Why would I throw my bread into water? If I did find it after many days, I don't think I'd want it anymore.”*

Here are some possible interpretations.

- **Sow seed on the water.** One ancient planting practice was to throw seed on flooded waters in the hopes that when the water receded, the seeds would germinate and produce crops. Isaiah 32:20 says, ***“Happy are those who sow beside all waters.”*** This is a possibility because ***“bread”*** can refer to grain or seeds.
- **Overseas trading.** Merchants made money by putting their merchandise on boats ***“on the water”*** to be shipped to foreign ports. This was a risky endeavor but also came with the promise of reward, as we see in the phrase, ***“for you will find it after many days.”*** The NIV reflects this meaning: ***“Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.”*** Merchants often wouldn’t hear anything for months because they couldn’t track the shipments on their phones or receive automatic delivery updates from FedEx. According to 1 Kings 5:10-11, Solomon sent wheat and oil to Tyre and in exchange, received timber to build the temple.
- **Joyful generosity.** The word ***“bread”*** can also refer to what has value because it gives sustenance. The idea is we’re to share what we have with others by giving what has been given to us. The CEV translation reflects this understanding: ***“Be generous, and someday you will be rewarded.”*** Jesus said it like this in Luke 6:38: ***“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”***

Whatever the exact interpretation is, the application is the same: be bold and act, even if there’s some uncertainty because when we sow acts of kindness, we will reap a reward, either here or in Heaven. Do something that might appear risky now for a reward which cannot be seen. Don’t let what you don’t know keep you from doing what you do know.

Verse 2 urges us to diversify our giving: ***“Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.”*** Seven is the number of perfection and eight refers to superabundance, of going above and beyond. The idea is to give with unrestrained generosity, uncalculating kindness, and unrestricted liberality as 1 Timothy 6:18 says: ***“...be generous and ready to share.”***

Since we don’t know what’s coming tomorrow, our investing and our giving should be diversified. Instead of putting all our eggs in one basket, it’s prudent to manage God’s money in a way that benefits as many as possible. For Beth and I,

our first place to give with joy is Edgewood, using the tithe as our minimum benchmark. We also support mission organizations and missionaries **“across the waters”** to the unreached, and we look for ways to be spontaneous in our giving as the Lord leads us. It’s interesting the word **“disaster”** is found in verse 2. Thanks again for how generous you’ve been in providing funds for those who were devastated by Hurricane Helene.

At our recent Strategic Planning meeting with the deacon and pastoral teams, we all agreed that one of Edgewood’s core values is joyful generosity. Another value is taking the gospel to the nations. Ultimately, the main metric for a church is not so much our seating capacity, but our sending capacity.

Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.

2. Accept what you can’t control. Solomon uses a couple powerful illustrations in verse 3 to help us see how some things just happen: **“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.”** When we look to the skies and see dark clouds, we know it’s about to rain. If there’s too much rain, damage is done. When it’s extremely windy, trees topple to the ground.

Something happened to me in the middle of preparing for the sermon this week. After spending many hours typing a draft of the manuscript, I inadvertently spilled some water on my laptop, and it has not come back to me **“after many days.”** I panicked because I thought I had lost everything. The keyboard and monitor are fried, but thanks to Dave Bennett, our trusty Tech Director, he was able to save the hard drive and get me set up on another computer so I could finish the sermon. This brought back painful memories from 12 years ago when I spilled a cup of coffee on my computer, causing all the sermons I had prepared for my Edgewood candidating weekend to disappear. Back then, I had to completely start over and didn’t think I would ever be called to be one of your pastors after preaching such lame messages.

I could have continued to beat myself up for not being more careful, but I would still have a dead computer. I needed to accept what I could not control and trust God (and Dave) to bring good out of it.

Let’s go back to the text which talks about a tree falling where it falls. Our two Hurricane Relief teams cut up many trees which had landed on cars and driveways

in North Carolina and also ministered to countless people, providing practical help to the hurting.

Let's hear from an individual who served on our second team.

Operation Relief Interview.

Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.

3. Sow the seed of the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 urges us not to wait for everything to be just right before we evangelize: ***“He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.”***

This passage makes me think of how much attention I give to the wind and the clouds before I go on a bike ride. It's getting too cold now, but when it was warmer, I'd try to go on a bike ride on Saturday mornings. The first thing I'd do after waking up would be to check the forecast and look outside to see how hard the wind was blowing. After being awake for an hour or so, I'd look outside again and check the temperature. Many times, my obsessive behavior ended up paralyzing me and I would end up riding our stationary bike in the basement.

A farmer who focuses too much on the forecast, will delay planting and hesitate to bring in the harvest. Solomon is saying that over-analysis can lead to paralysis. This is illustrated in Proverbs 22:13: ***“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets.’”*** One pastor urges us to stop waiting for the perfect job, the perfect spouse, or the perfect church because they don't exist. While waiting for the perfect, you may miss out on what is good and right for you.

I appreciate the words of Charles Spurgeon from a sermon called, “Sowing in the Wind, Reaping Under Clouds.”

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. I have not done what I was bidden to do. I have made an excuse out of the weather; but I have been disobedient...to observe circumstances instead of trusting God shows unbelief, rebellion, foolish fear, and idleness.

Fear and a lack of faith can also keep us from sharing the gospel with people. When we wait until the conditions are just right, or for a time when we don't feel awkward or uncomfortable, we'll experience paralysis by analysis, forgetting that we're called to preach the word in season and out of season.

Solomon switches metaphors in verse 5 to help us see God's ways are mysterious: ***"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."*** This is yet another verse in the Bible that celebrates the sanctity of life in the womb. God miraculously, mysteriously, and majestically creates life by bringing together spirit and bones in the womb of a woman. Psalm 139:14 says we should be moved to worship as we consider God's creative work in the womb: ***"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, my soul knows it very well."***

The word ***"bones"*** is the word for *embryo* and reminds us of Psalm 139:15: ***"My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth."*** Don't miss how the word ***"child"*** is used to describe God's work in the womb. Listen to Luke 1:41, 44: ***"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the BABY leaped in her womb...For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the BABY in my womb leaped for joy."*** Here's an ultrasound image of a preborn baby in the first trimester of life.

Just as we don't fully understand how God creates life in the womb, we don't always understand His work in the world. But that shouldn't keep us from sowing the seed of the gospel as we trust the Holy Spirit to bring new life to someone. Jesus said it like this in John 3:8: ***"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."***

We're to share at all times, with everyone we meet, using various methods because we simply don't know who God is going to save as stated in verse 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."*** We're to work hard and to work with hope. This is reinforced in Ecclesiastes 9:10: ***"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might."*** Our job is to go with the gospel and God's job is to take the seed we sow and plant it in hearts that have prepared Him room.

Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.

4. Rejoice even when things are dark. Check out verses 7-8: ***“Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 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.”***

When things are going right, there seems to be a lot of light but when things are dismal, the days feel dark. Speaking of seeing something pleasant, did you see the full rainbow on Tuesday? I love this picture showing Pregnancy Resources framed by this multi-colored display of God’s covenant promises.

We’re to rejoice in our years even if they bring tears as we learned in Ecclesiastes 7:14: ***“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other...”*** We’ve been urged to be joyful in our study from Ecclesiastes. Here are three verses I’m trying to keep in mind as I journey toward joy.

- 3:12: ***“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful...”***
- 5:20: ***“For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”***
- 8:15: ***“And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful...”***

We can be joyful even knowing ***“the days of darkness will be many.”*** The word ***“darkness”*** means, ***“uncertainty, confusion, and disorder.”***

Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.

5. Say yes to God when you’re young. Verses 9-10 speak of the brevity of life and how quickly time passes: ***“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. Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”***

I love that Edgewood is an intergenerational church. Solomon addresses youth and young adults in these verses and in chapter 12, he’ll give a very descriptive explanation of the aging process. Here’s the message for those who are younger.

- **Rejoice in your youth.** Start living now and finding joy in your place in life.
- **Serve others.** The word “*cheer*” has the idea of doing good. You are made on purpose for His purposes. You are not the future of the church; you ARE the church right now.
- **Live in light of future judgment.** We see this in 12:14, the last verse of the book: “*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*”
- **Remove vexation from your heart.** Turn away from resentment because you don’t think things are fair. Stop living as if you’re entitled to an easy life.
- **Make wise choices while you’re young.** As someone has said, we get old too soon and smart too late. I’m told there used to be a sign along an Alaskan highway which said: “*Choose your rut carefully. You’ll be in it for the next 200 miles.*”
- **Your life will end sooner than you think.** You are not ready to live until you are ready to die. Psalm 39:4 says, “*O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!*”

Some time ago, I read a post called, “How to Ruin Your Life in Your Twenties” by Jonathan Pokluda. I’ve referenced it before but it’s so good I want to share a summary again.

No one ever plans to ruin his life. Nobody makes failure a goal...kids don’t dream about growing up to be an alcoholic; students don’t go to class to learn how to be bankrupt; brides and grooms don’t go to the altar expecting their marriage to fail. But ruined lives do happen – far too often. And they happen because of the choices we make. Many of our most influential choices take place when we are relatively young – old enough to be making important decisions, but young enough for those decisions to have disastrous consequences.

Right now, you are in the process of becoming what you will be one day. You are preparing either to be a great spouse, parent, employee, and friend, or to be the opposite of that. Everything you do now will lead you down one of those paths.

If you want to ruin your life when you’re young, do these seven things.

1. Do whatever you want.
2. Live outside your means.

3. Feed an addiction.
4. Run with fools.
5. Believe this life is all about you.
6. Live for immediate gratification.
7. Avoid accountability.

Who do you want to be when you grow up? You will be that person much sooner than you think. What are you doing today to become that man or woman tomorrow?

Summary

Here's what we were challenged with today.

1. Do what you can with what you have.
2. Accept what you can't control.
3. Sow the seed of the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit.
4. Rejoice even when things are dark.
5. Say yes to God when you are young.

As I was preparing this message, the song, "The Great Adventure" by Steven Curtis Chapman kept coming to mind.

*Saddle up your horses
We've got a trail to blaze
Through the wild blue yonder of God's Amazing grace
Let's follow our leader into the Glorious unknown
This is the life like no other
This is The Great Adventure*

*Come on, get ready for the ride of your life
Gonna leave long faced religion
In a cloud of dust behind
And discover all the new horizons
Just waiting to be explored
This is what we were created for!*

Are you ready to saddle up your horses?

Action Steps

1. Step out in faith and do something bold and audacious. If you're saved and have not yet been baptized, it's time!
2. Remain faithful when dark times come. I came across this picture of Edgewood from 1955. By God's grace, this church has remained faithful since 1905.
3. Take the tithing challenge by giving at least 10% of your time and your treasures to the Lord's work.
4. Be intentional and have a gospel conversation with someone this week. Walk across the street, the lunchroom, the campus, the factory floor, or the office, and build bridges with someone who doesn't yet know Jesus. Look to be a peacemaker in our divided political climate.
5. If you are not yet saved, today is your day of salvation. Repent of your sins, believe Jesus died in your place and was raised on the third day, and receive Him into your life.

In 1898, two traveling salesman shared a room in an overcrowded hotel and ended up reading the Bible together. This began a conversation about the need for accountability among traveling salesmen because they were known as womanizers, gamblers, and drinkers. These two men began praying about starting a ministry and invited other salesmen to join them. A year later, they held their first meeting, and no one showed up. But they pressed on, continuing to sow the seed until it germinated.

Today, the Gideons are organized in over 200 countries, and more than 100,000 businessmen, all volunteers, have given away over 2.5 billion copies of God's Word!

Listen to this illustration from the book about the Gideons called, *Witness to History*.

Randy Smith was involved with some other Gideons as they were distributing New Testaments to students outside the busy entrance to a major university in Brazil. At one point he gave a New Testament to a young man who scoffed and said, 'Do you know what you can do with all these Bibles? You can just throw them away like I'm going to do now.' He wound up his arm and threw the Bible like a Frisbee, as hard as he could onto one of the flat roofs of a nearby building.

Later that day, Randy and his team turned to see a man covered with tar stains on his arms, face, and clothing. He had been working on a nearby building, putting tar on the roof to keep it from leaking and said, 'Today I was making plans to take my life because I have messed it up so badly. But then a miracle happened. God hit me on the head with this New Testament! I have read it and want to know how I can be forgiven and have eternal life. Would you please tell me how?' He was led to faith in Christ on the spot.

You never know what God will use to hit us over the head. He uses unexpected events and unexplainable mysteries to accomplish His will.

Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.

Gospel Invitation

Membership at 10:45

Ashton Anderson

Grayson Doran

Betty Tambaro