

Sam, Ship your grain across the sea. After many days, you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures. Yes, and eight. You do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant. Whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things.

Sow your seed in the morning and at evening. Let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. I have seen something else under the sun. The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong. Nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned.

But time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come. As fish are caught in a cruel net or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

Thank you, Cooper. How about Cooper, huh?

So, a long, long time ago, there was a very successful businessman who decided to just leave for a while, get out of town for an extended period of time. This guy had more money than he knew what to do with, so he thought he'd just invite three of his employees in and basically say, hey, I'm going to give each of you some money, and I want you to take care of it while I'm away. So to the first one, he gave \$5,000. And this employee very carefully and very intentionally invested the money. To the second employee, he gave \$2,000.

And this employee, like the first, looked at everything and very carefully and intentionally invested the money. To the third employee, the businessman gave \$1,000. Unlike the other two employees, this employee decided that he wanted to protect the money against all risks, every risk possible, even banks. So he took the money, he wrapped it in plastic, found a container, put it in the container, dug a hole in the ground, and buried it in his backyard. Well, after a long absence, the businessman returned.

He called in the three employees and said, I just want to know what happened with my money. The first one smiled a really big smile. And he revealed that through careful and intentional investments, the \$5,000 had become \$10,000. Well, the boss was very happy and commended him and said, good work. You did your job well.

You are now my Partner. The second employee also gave an accounting

and said, I'm happy to tell you that the 2000 has become 4000 now and again. The boss said, good job, good work. You did your job well. And from now on, you are my partner.

The third employee was asked for his report.

Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound, down to the last cent. I thought we were going to see this, but keep reading it. The master was furious.

That's a terrible way to live. It's criminal to live cautiously like that. If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with bankers with where I would have at least gotten a little interest. Take the thousand, give it to the one who had the most, who risked the most.

And get rid of this. Play it safe, who won't go out on a limb. Throw him in to outer darkness. Utter darkness. So what do you think of that?

This is what Jesus is saying. And it's a. A story, a parable. And he says, the first two servants, they both took calculated risks. Risks.

They received the gift with gratitude and then took calculated risks to invest it. There were no guarantees, but they had faith and they had confidence. That was fueled by that faith. And so they took a careful chance and invested what was given to them. The third one was different.

The third one was one who watched the wind and he looked at the clouds and he wouldn't sow, he wouldn't reap, he wouldn't cut hay, he wouldn't do anything. He was driven by fear of all kinds. So he tried to protect himself against all uncertainty. He avoided all risks. He takes the approach because the future is uncertain.

I will protect myself by doing nothing.

Jesus condemns him in the harshest way. Not because he failed, but because his faithlessness led to inactivity and passivity. So this parable of Jesus reflects the ancient words of Ecclesiastes that Cooper just read for us a few moments ago. Words from Ecclesiastes 11 and then chapter 9. I don't know about you, but I don't like uncertainty.

Most of us don't. At one point, I was actually called out in front of a group of people. I was called an information freak because I wanted to know what was going on. It was kind of chaotic and I Wanted to know

what was on. Going.

Going on. I think I was called that this morning. No, just kidding. That's an inside joke. If you were in a.

There. Never mind. I don't know where that came from. Sorry. It's okay.

But anyway, you know, most of us want to know what the outcome is going to be. Can we predict this and can we predict that? We just want to know. But you know what? Ecclesiastes repeatedly deconstructs this desire that we have to know what going to happen to be able to predict exactly the way things will be.

It says three times in the passage, you do not know, and basically you will not know. But it says, even though you don't know, even though you won't know, you still move forward, you still go forward in faith. You continue to do things, to live actively, not passively. Chapter 11 begins with these words. Ship your grain across the sea.

After many days you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures. Yes in eight. You do not know though what disaster may come upon the land. So in these opening verses regarding the future, he says, you do not know.

You do not know. But. But you still ship your grain, you still invest, you still move forward in faith. The essence of faith is I trust God with what I don't know, I don't understand, but I'm going to trust Him. I don't know what's going to happen, but I will trust Him.

I trust him with the unknown, I trust him with the unknowable. He'll use that expression, you do not know two more times in this passage. In verse five, talking about the mystery of God, the mystery of life, the mystery of the wind. He says, you just do not know. You don't know how the wind works, you don't know how life is formed in the womb, and you don't know how.

God is always working. He moves in mysterious ways, and we just don't know. In verse 6, he talks about sowing seeds. He says, you sow your seeds and you really don't know what's going to happen. You don't know if you you'll reap a good harvest or a harvest at all.

You just don't know. But he says, you keep sowing, you keep working, you keep doing stuff. Don't be lazy. In verses three and four, he warns against paralysis by analysis. He says that the clouds are full of water.

They pour forth, they pour rain on the earth. Whether a tree falls to the side south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant. Whoever looks at

clouds will, will not reap. I think he's saying some things are inevitable.

Rain is going to fall. Conditions that we cannot control produce consequences that we cannot control. Some things are final. A tree falls and that's where it will be. In other words, he's saying something.

When something happens, it sometimes cannot be reversed. Often it cannot be reversed. Now, as an old farm boy, I really relate to verse four because it says, if you wait for perfect conditions, you will do nothing. My son and I agonized this week, this last week, about cutting hay. We were watching extended forecasts, just kept going up and down for Friday, up and down.

We finally said, ben, we just need to cut the hay. So we cut the hay Tuesday. Oh, it's looking good. 24% chance of rain Friday. 85% chance of rain Friday.

It's like, what are you going to do? And you know what? Friday morning produced a little sprinkle at our hay field. And so we have a bunch of hay bail on Friday. But it was that agonizing time of, is it?

Should we or shouldn't we? And if you wait, you'll never do anything. If you wait for the perfect conditions, wait for the perfect forecast, it just won't happen. Over analysis leads to paralysis, meaning that you won't do anything if you overthink it. At some point, you have to take a calculated risk.

I think we should. Let's go for it. Let's do it. We cannot control everything. We control very little.

We cannot know everything. And I think relatively speaking, we know very little. And yet, even though we can't control things and we don't know things, we still do things by faith and trust in God. And so we should do the good that we're able to do while we can, trusting God with the outcome. There's another mysterious twist to life, recorded in chapter 9, verses 11 and 12, where he says, I've seen something else under the sun.

I think he's sighing like, ah, something else. The race is not to the swift always, and the battle to the strong. Nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant, or favor to the learned. But time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come.

As fish are caught in a cruel net or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. Ancient words ever true.

I don't know about you. My observation, my personal experience is life does not turn out like we think it will often. It just doesn't always correlate with what we think will happen and predict will happen. You know, you can do everything right. Anybody had this experience.

You just do everything right and just do it so carefully, and then it doesn't turn out right or it's not fair. And you can have all the skill in the world, you can have all the wisdom that you can experience and strength and wealth. You can have all those things. But it does not guarantee success. It just doesn't guarantee it.

Life happens. Death happens. Life is full of mystery. Life is full of uncertainty. This does not mean that God is absent or does not care.

It doesn't mean that life is meaningless. Randomness. Rather, Ecclesiastes is just as an interesting book because it is calling us to enter into the mystery of God, enter into the mystery of life with humility, that you don't really understand everything. And it calls us to enter into the mystery of God, the mystery of. Of life, with faith.

Trusting God. So I say I don't know what the future holds, but by faith I know who holds it. And so I will trust him. And because I trust him, I will obey him. And I will obey him when in essence, he says he take a calculated risk.

Take a calculated risk. Invest. So do stuff. Do good things. So what does it mean for you and me?

What does it look like? It starts here. It means that faith does not wait for certainty. You can't wait for everything to be figured out. And so what does it look like in a home?

What if you're in a loveless marriage? You continue to choose kindness and love in that marriage, even though it's strained with your children. You keep correcting and encouraging and praying for your children, even though you think they're probably going to end off with a deep end somewhere. You just keep persevering in love, even though you can't see for sure what the future is. You keep praying for your prodigal son.

You keep praying for the distant daughter, the resistant sibling, even though it seems like nothing is ever going to change. You keep loving, you keep persevering because God has called us to that. Even though success is not guaranteed at work. What does it look like? I think you show up with integrity when it's easier, just everybody else is cutting corners and cheating and whatever.

No, I'm going to show up with integrity. And so I'm going to take the next faithful step. I'm going to do the next right thing, even though I don't know exactly how that's going to turn out. I'm going to refuse

to bury my gifts simply because the outcome feels risky, unclear, or maybe totally unappreciated. I'm just going to keep doing the right thing.

For some of us, this is about obedience in just daily life, in all realms of life.

So based on this idea of trusting God with the future, it just means I'm going to serve even though I'm not recognized. I'm going to give even though I don't know exactly what will happen, going to speak when silence might be easier. I'm going to step forward with God when he leads. Even when I can't see where it's going. I'll just take the next right step.

And so you move forward before everything feels certain. Because obedience is often required before confidence comes. This is not in my notes, but I thought about it several times this week. I think maybe four or five years ago. My three sons and Jim Soulers, I think some of you know him.

We did rim to rim in the Grand Canyon, north rim to south rim in one day. And I got injured before we started, so I wasn't able to train like I wanted to. So I was by far the weakest link. And so we got to where we were starting to climb out the Bright Angel Drive Trail, and we were still had like 3,000ft of elevation to cover. And it got dark, which we knew it would, so we had headlamps.

And I remember very clearly just being able to see what was right in front of me. And later when I went back and saw it in the daylight and saw how that Bright Angel Trail zigzagged straight up, I was saying, I am thankful I could not see. I mean. I mean, I could not see beyond that first step, that next step. And I think that's the way it is with faith.

God calls us to take that next step. And probably the reason we are not allowed to see the future is we would probably just like, I don't think I can do this. And so we just take the next step, trusting God with the outcome. Ecclesiastes warns us over and over about watching the wind and the clouds. And for some of you, it's about putting your faith in Jesus.

You've been holding back. I know people do this. They hold back, waiting for certainty before coming to Christ. Well, I don't feel like I know enough or I feel like I need to be better. I need to clean up my life before I come to Him.

That's not. That's not the call. The call is to come as you are. Faith doesn't require to have everything figured out. In fact, you won't.

And it's just the opposite. Come by faith and walk together and learn

together. Just keep walking. So don't watch the clouds, don't watch the wind. Don't be so cautious that you don't ever do anything.

Jesus sharpens that warning from Ecclesiastes in a very harsh way with that one servant. Tragedy is not failure. Tragedy is faithless in activity and passivity, not doing anything. So here's the call. Take the next right step.

Give your life fully to Christ. Then do the good you are able to do while you're able to do it with what God has entrusted to you and leave the outcome to God.

So kind of know what it looks like in our own lives. What does it look like for our church? What does it look like for a church? I think it means this. If we refuse to become.

If we refuse to become a church that is not forward looking, then we're not pleasing to God. We want to entrust. Entrust God with what we've been entrusted with and move forward without fear and without any concern about the uncertainty of what we're doing. So we pray carefully, we plan wisely, and then by faith, we move forward. Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church.

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