



# Living with the Unexplainable and Unexpected

Ecclesiastes 11:1-8

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Let me rattle off some well-known axioms — concise statements of wisdom — that are practical in nature and see how many of them you can recognize:

Look before you leap.

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.



What are some other axioms that you may know? What do they mean?

These axioms are found all around the world. They are universal, self-evident principles simply because they emanate from the character of truth, which originates with God, who is the source of wisdom.

Even the world knows when they're hearing the wisdom of some practical truth.

All the axioms I mentioned, by thy way, show up in some form in scripture.

In fact, several of them effectively show up in the private journal of one of the wisest people who ever lived. So, let's go back to his journal — the Book of Ecclesiastes — and pick up our study at chapter 11.

I want to cover the first 8 verses in chapter 11 in our study today.

If you're new to our study, Solomon has written about life down here under the sun with a sense of despair and boredom and dissatisfaction. Life under the sun, without God, leads to an unfulfilled life.

But now, as we've learned, here in the latter part of his journal, Solomon has drawn God back into the picture, and everything has been given a new perspective.

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ecclesiastes: Be Satisfied* (Victor Books, 1990), p. 125

But keep in mind, this new perspective isn't because Solomon has discovered all the answers to the problems of life.

Here in chapter 11 he's going to admit that there are a lot of things in life he doesn't understand.

In fact, he repeats a phrase 4 different times in these verses – if you have your Bibles open you'll notice the first one appears in **verse 2. For you know not.** You might circle that phrase and draw a line to the first part of **verse 5** where it appears again: **You do not know**; then again you see it in the latter part of **verse 5: You do not know**; and once more in **verse 6: you do not know.**

Solomon says four times, there are things in life we do not understand.

But instead of ending the discussion by saying, "Let's all throw in the towel and cry in our soup," he will say, "Let's roll up our sleeves and rejoice."

Adapted from David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Integrity Publishers, 2004), p. 284

In other words, it's possible to go through life without having everything figured out, and at the same time have joy and thanksgiving in your heart.

Now for our study today, I'm going to divide Solomon's practical advice into two categories.

We'll call the first category;

### **The unexpected events in life.**

And Solomon is going to encourage us to not let them paralyze us with fear.

*Don't let them paralyze you with fear.*

#### **Now verse 1:**

*Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:1-2*

Let me paraphrase that to read: You can't begin to anticipate all the unpredictable events in life.

This phrase, "Cast your bread upon the waters" is one of the more well-known wisdom statements from this journal.

I heard someone just recently talking and they alluded to this text by saying, "Keep casting your bread upon the waters and then get ready to make sandwiches."

In other words, it will come back to you — so stay at it.

This expression is broad enough to incorporate any number of contexts. While we're not really sure which one

Solomon has in mind, they all point to the same principle of sowing and reaping.

It's possible that Solomon is thinking of financial investing in **verse 2: give a portion to seven or eight** is encouraging diversifying your investments 7 or 8 different ways; which is another way of saying, don't put all your eggs into one basket. And that's wise advice.

Solomon may have been referring to his fleet of ships, exporting and importing merchandise. The Hebrew verb **to cast means to let loose; to send out.**

William D. Barrick, *Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament* (Christian Focus, 2011), p. 185

Solomon doesn't want someone to depend on one ship but spread out their cargo on 7 or 8 ships, so that if one ship goes down in some disaster, everything won't be lost.

Solomon basically writes that here in **verse 2**, "You don't know what's going to happen" in other words, "you can't predict the results of your investments." Which might lead us to become paralyzed by fear. I mean, if we can't guarantee a return, how can we invest?



Describe a time you felt led to do something without knowing if it would work out. What did you do? What was the eventual result?

Later on, Solomon will spell it out that we plan as best we can and then trust God with the results.

Prepare for the worst but work for the best.

Hudson Taylor used to say it this way during his ministry in China; "Look after things — and the responsibility rests with God."

Don't allow the unexpected events of life to paralyze you with fear.

Solomon now changes the illustration from the world of a merchant to the world of a farmer, notice **verse 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.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:3*

The point Solomon is making is that no one has control over when the rain will fall — even though rain will probably fall when the clouds look full, it might not; and no one can predict if and when and where that tree may fall. We can't predict the unpredictable.

**Again, in verse 4:**

*He who observes the wind  
will not sow, and he who  
regards the clouds will not  
reap.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:4*

In other words, maybe the wind will spring up and blow away the seed; or maybe those clouds will trick me, and I'll harvest prematurely, or wait too long and miss the peak of harvest.

What's the wind doing? What are the clouds doing?

Solomon is describing a person who has become paralyzed by fear because they can't guarantee success.



Do you know anyone who is scared to do something because of a fear of failure?  
What is that person's life like?

They are sitting there waiting for the perfect circumstances in life before taking a step forward.

Wiersbe, p. 128

Opportunity is knocking on the door, but they won't answer it, because things might go wrong; bad things might happen.

And they might.

So, what's Solomon saying here? Don't get out of bed? Don't plant trees or sew seed or send out ships or make investments? No! Sow the seed! Send out the ships! Plan it, but then do it.

It is impossible to eliminate risks from life — but nothing ventured, nothing gained.

If you waited until the risks were gone, you would have never learned how to ride a bike, or drive a car, or get married, or start a business.

Solomon is effectively saying: don't wait for the perfect conditions in life before taking your next step in life.

And that goes for taking some ministry step in obedience to the Spirit of God; don't wait for the perfect conditions in life before taking your next step of faith.

I like Eugene Petersen's paraphrase of this text that interprets Solomon's advice well, "*Don't sit there watching the wind. Do your own work. Don't stare at the clouds. Get on with your life.*" (*The Message*)

The second category of Solomon's inspired advice covers not only the unexpected events of life, but now:

### **The unexplainable work of God**

And Solomon's key point will be this:

*Don't let these unexplainable works of God rob you of joy.*

#### **Notice verse 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.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:5*

The word for bones here is used in other passages for the embryo — the developing life.

And we've come a long way since Solomon in understanding what takes place in the womb.

Years ago, when Marsha would have that ultrasound, we'd get a printout of the ultrasound. It was black with white dots everywhere and we took their word for it that it was a baby.

We now have those amazing 3-D ultrasound images of a baby.

Adapted from David Gibson, [Living Life Backward](#) (Crossway, 2017), p. 122

I would have loved to have seen a 3-D image of our twins from that ultrasound; we could have had a clear picture of them in there, probably fighting and fussing.

But as advanced as we are today, we're still like Solomon — we cannot see the invisible, immaterial work of God's hand that creates and animates life.

We could render this: "you do not know how the life-spirit comes to the embryo in the womb of a woman."

David A. Hubbard, [The Preacher's Commentary: Volume 16](#) (Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 228

We still can't explain how God imparts to that fertilized egg the animating essence called immortal life.

It's as if Solomon says, "Listen, you want to talk about how far we've come in all our knowledge? Let's go all the way back to the womb! Even in there, the very beginning of your life was unexplainable.

So, from the womb to the tomb, your life is filled with the mystery of God at work.

Don't let the fact that you can't explain everything rob you of trust *in* Him — because if it does, it will rob you of joy *in* Him and in life.

There are things you just can't explain.

Solomon goes on to illustrate this in our own work — **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.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:6*

You don't know if God will prosper your work this year, or next, but plant your field and enjoy the ability to work in the morning and in the evening.

Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.



**What are some of the harms of procrastination? What are the most common reasons why people put off things until later?**

Can we explain everything that's happened in life? No. Can we predict what will happen in life? No.

But did the sun come up this morning?  
Yes. Are you enjoying it?

That's where Solomon leads us here *in verse 7*:

*Light is sweet, and it is  
pleasant for the eyes to see  
the sun.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:7*

In other words, are you enjoying the fact that you get to experience yet another day?

The light, Solomon writes, is sweet – this word “sweet” is used in scripture to describe:

- the taste of honey (**Judges 14:18**);
- the thrill of a kiss (**Song of Solomon 2:3**);
- the enjoyment of God's word (**Psalms 19:10**).

Enjoy what you can in life! Notice what he says next:

*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.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:8*

That is, everything is fleeting — time runs away so fast.

And in your fast life, as you look back over your shoulder, what do you see?

Days of darkness, difficulty, struggle and sorrow. And evidently it's okay to remember them, learn from them and trust God through them.

Solomon asks here in **verse 8**, what else do you see? Days with events and moments and conversations and accomplishments over which you can rejoice.

Solomon is saying, enjoy the rising of the sun and another day to live — savor it, share it, make the most of it.

Adapted from Hubbard, p. 230

Which is another way of saying, when opportunity knocks — and a new day is knocking — answer the door!

The apostle Paul said it this way;

*Making the best use of  
time, because the days are  
evil.*

*Ephesians 5:16*

He didn't say, “Make the best use of time *before* the days get evil, or *after* the days of evil are over; no, make the best use of time in spite of the fact that the days are difficult, and evil surrounds us.

Stay at it; do the right thing; roll up your sleeves; answer the door.

But it's tempting, isn't it, to wonder if anything we do for God really matters. We pray for a friend or a family member and wonder if the prayer will ever be answered. We give money to the Lord's work and to the poor and wonder if anyone's life is really changed; we

witness to friends and co-workers and wonder if anyone will believe the gospel and be saved?

Adapted from Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes* (Crossway, 2010), p. 253

We're not told but keep casting the seed — you could use this to illustrate the spreading of the bread of life which is Christ. Sometimes you get a glimpse of fruit from walking with Christ and the work God is doing.

I'm currently reading the book I was recently given by one of the men in our church who serves with this incredible evangelistic ministry. The book is entitled, *Witness to History*, and it gives the history of the Gideons.

It all began when two traveling salesman shared a room in an overcrowded hotel in 1898. They didn't know each other, but this was the alternative to sleeping outside on a park bench. One of the men said that he was in the habit of reading his Bible before going to bed each night. The other man said that he also was believer and they agreed to read the Bible together.

That began a conversation about the need for accountability among traveling salesmen as well as a gospel outreach among these men who were categorically known to be womanizers, gamblers and drinkers. They prayed about starting some sort of organization that collected these men by territories for training and encouragement.

They invited many salesmen to join them, and a year later, they held their first

meeting, and no one showed up. But they pressed on — they kept casting.

Today, the Gideons are organized in 200 different countries and more than 100,000 businessmen — all volunteers — have given away, so far, 2 billion copies of God's word.

I'll give you an illustration from this book to encourage us all to keep sowing the seed.

Randy Smith from Louisiana was involved with some other Gideons distributing New Testaments to students, standing outside the busy entrance to a major university in Porte Alegre, Brazil.

At one point, they gave a New Testament to a young man who looked at it and then scoffed at them. He said, "You know what you can do with all these Bibles? You can just throw them away like I'm going to do now." And he threw the New Testament like a little Frisbee, as hard as he could over on one of the flat roofs of a building nearby. And he walked away.

Later in the day, Randy and his team turned to see a man standing there, 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. He said to these men, "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 Gideon Bible. I have read inside that I can be forgiven and have eternal life. Would you please tell me how?" And he was led to faith in Jesus Christ.

You never know.

There are many things in life we can't predict; don't let the unexpected events of life paralyze you with fear.

There are a lot of mysteries too. But don't let the unexplainable mysteries of God's work in your life rob you of joy.

While there is the sweet light of day, this day which God has made, let's make the most of it for the glory of God.

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