

Cast Your Bread Upon the Water

August 23, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

Session Outline

1. Send Your Bread (Ecclesiastes 11:1-4)
2. You Don't Know (Ecclesiastes 11:3-6)
3. Let Him Rejoice (Ecclesiastes 11:7-10)

Theological Theme

Enjoy the days God has gifted you, for we are not guaranteed tomorrow.

Call to Action

How are you seeking to live in a way that glorifies God today?

Cast Your Bread Upon the Water

Introduction

Carpe diem. This Latin phrase literally translates to “pluck the day,” but we often think of it as “seize the day.”¹ Horace, an ancient Roman poet, used it to convey the idea that we should enjoy life while we can. He wrote, “pluck the day, trusting as little as possible in the next one.” We aren’t guaranteed tomorrow. This idea speaks to us as meaningfully today as it did when Horace first wrote it.

But this isn’t just a worldly idea. Following Christ leads us to live this way also.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes.

Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

—James 4:13-15

We don’t know what tomorrow will bring, so we must live every day for the Lord. Solomon explored this idea in our text today. We don’t know what will happen, but when our trust is in God, we can face anything.



When you hear the phrase, “carpe diem,” what comes to mind?



How are we to seize the day as followers of Christ?

Session Summary

In our passage today, Solomon dispensed wisdom about how to live well and wisely because we never know what tomorrow will bring. We can’t predict the future. The best we can do is work hard and make wise decisions for today. Life is short, so rejoice in every year that God gives you. Be glad. Find joy. And most importantly, fear the Lord.

1. Send Your Bread (Ecclesiastes 11:1-2)



What point did Solomon make in this verse?



The heading in the CSB Study Bible titles this section “INVEST IN LIFE.” What do you think it means to invest in life?

Like many Proverbs, this passage of Solomon advises prudent living. We may not always think of biblical wisdom in this category, but it takes money to live in our world today, and financial generosity ensures that the ministry of the church thrives and grows.

The Bible doesn't teach that money is bad, only that the love of money corrupts (1 Timothy 6:10). When we keep our priorities straight, with the Lord firmly in the center of our lives, seeking Him first, money is a powerful tool God can use for the good of the kingdom and for His glory.

Honor the LORD with your possessions
and with the first produce of your entire harvest;
then your barns will be completely filled,
and your vats will overflow with new wine.
—Proverbs 3:9-10

Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life. —1 Timothy 6:17-19

Ecclesiastes 11:1 speaks of a long-term investment. In Solomon's day, this meant investing in overseas trading (shipping grain to a foreign country, knowing it would one day pay off). Today, we have many modern ways to make long-term investments wisely.



What does it look like to make wise financial investments today?
What are some tools to help with this? Why is it important that we keep our focus on the Lord as we pursue investment?

Verse 2 speaks of diversifying your investments. We simply don't know what will happen in the future. Many a well-meaning individual has thrown all their eggs into one seemingly good investment, only to be devastated when it didn't work out. When we diversify our investments, we increase our chances of success (if one investment fails, we still have others).

Wealth

While Ecclesiastes discourages the pursuit of wealth, it favors wise investment and diligent work. Verses 1–2 speak of long-term investment, not charity. To “give portions to seven or eight” is, in modern terminology, to diversify investments. While we do have to look out for dangers on the horizon, we cannot allow ourselves to be so cautious that we do nothing. Better to recognize that all things are in God's hands and proceed with our work with an eye toward all possible contingencies.

2. You Don't Know (Ecclesiastes 11:3-6)



What was Solomon exhorting his readers toward in these verses?



How does understanding that we don't know what tomorrow will bring shape the way we live today?

We don't know what tomorrow will bring. Solomon named some events in nature that can give a clue as to what the future will bring but still are no guaranteed. Dark clouds often bring rain. But as we know well today, the forecast, even predicted by educated and experienced experts, can change on dime.

We get ourselves into trouble when we think we can read signs like these as a certainty. Verse 4 cautions the person who spends so much time trying to decipher what the future will hold that they don't work to provide for themselves today and for the future.

Think of those who hope to play the housing market or the stock market. If you wait for the “perfect moment,” sometimes you get lucky, but it's possible to miss the boat by living that way.

There are so many things in the world we will never fully understand. We don't know with certainty which way the wind will blow. We know much more about how a baby is formed in a mother's womb today than Solomon did, but many mysteries still exist for us when it comes to the wonder of the human body God created. Solomon said well:

so you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.
—Ecclesiastes 11:5b (NIV)

These words were also written in relation to investing. We cannot hope to understand what the future will bring, so waiting for the “perfect” moment to make wise or obedient moves with our money doesn't make sense.

The final advice that Solomon dispenses in these verses is simple: Work hard. You don't know what will work and what won't, so work hard and don't make assumptions. And understand that not everything will succeed. Just like the farmer of Solomon's day wasn't always guaranteed a good crop, we aren't guaranteed that a venture we work hard at will succeed.

- ❓ Where has God called you to work and invest, even though you don't know what the outcome will be?

One thing we are guaranteed, though, is that God will take care of us:

“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be provided for you.”
—Luke 12:31

3. Let Him Rejoice (Ecclesiastes 11:7-10)

- ❓ What was Solomon's point in these verses?
- ❓ How is living life to the fullest connected to faithfulness to Christ?

Remember Ecclesiastes main theme of the temporary nature our existence? In our first week of this study, we talked about how life on earth is short—like a puff of breath on a cold morning, here one minute and gone the next. Solomon explored the idea of how we should spend the time we are blessed with on earth, and arrived at this conclusion: Enjoy the time you have and fear the Lord.

In verse 7, “light” is symbolic of life. It can be sweet. It is good to be alive!

In verse 8, “darkness” is symbolic of death. Solomon wasn't writing about the afterlife here, but rather making the point that life will be short, and death will be long.²

Knowing this, we should enjoy every single day that God has gifted us, and view them as they are—a gift.

Youth is a precious and fleeting time of life that Solomon advised to enjoy and be happy. Young people have a tendency to look forward to the next stage, but cherishing the moment (seizing the day!) is the better way. Today we might be eagerly awaiting tomorrow, trying to fast forward through the stage of life we find ourselves in, but one day, we may look back and long for the days we are living now. Don't let the joy God is giving today pass you by.

You who are young, be happy while you are young,
and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.
—Ecclesiastes 11:9 A (NIV)

True joy only comes from the Lord. As Solomon himself explored, you can't buy happiness.

“I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

—John 15:11

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.

—Galatians 5:22-23

The wisest course of action in this life (that will bring true joy!) is to fear (or respect) God as we enjoy our days.



Where can you recognize God’s gifts in your current season of life and not only long for another time—whether past or future?

Conclusion

Days on earth can be hard, but life is a precious gift God has given us. We only get one. Are we living like it?

In our passage today, Solomon gave advice on how to live. He bid us to be wise with our investments and understand that we don’t know what the future will bring. We will never fully understand God’s creation or what is to come, but we can enjoy our days, fearing the Lord and prioritizing our faith.

The reminder that we don’t know what tomorrow will bring is relevant for many aspects of human life. We don’t know what tomorrow will bring, so we should invest in our relationship with the Lord today. Tomorrow might not come for us, so the best time to make things right with Him is now. The best time to share Jesus with that friend or family member on your heart is today. Do not wait to walk forward in faithfulness on the path God created for you.

Look for joy in every season you find yourself in, even when it is hard. Find gratitude. Look for the blessings God has given you. Enjoy your days. Each day is a gift and we don't know how long they will last. As Solomon wrote:

Remove sorrow from your heart,
and put away pain from your flesh,
because youth and the prime of life are fleeting.
—Ecclesiastes 11:10

-  How are we called to manage our money as believers? Why does God care about this?
-  How is the call to live to the fullest for Christians different than what the world might believe?
-  How does living wisely lead us to share Jesus with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the days He has gifted us with. Thank Him for walking with us, even through hard times. Thank Him for the joy He gives, even when times feel bleak. Ask for His help as you make wise decisions about how to live and seek to put Him first.

Memory Verse

*Send your bread on the surface of the water,
for after many days you may find it. —Ecclesiastes 11:1*

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes* by Daniel Akin and Jonathan Akin
- *Be Satisfied* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Ecclesiastes* by Philip Graham Ryken



Historical Context of Ecclesiastes

Purpose

Ecclesiastes shows us that since we and our works are futile—that is, destined to perish—we must not waste our lives trying to justify our existence with pursuits that ultimately mean nothing. Put simply, Ecclesiastes examines major endeavors of life in light of the reality of death.

Author

According to 1:1 and 1:12, the author was David's son and a king over Israel from Jerusalem. Also, 12:9 speaks of the author as a writer of proverbs, so Solomon appears to be the author. Many scholars believe that Ecclesiastes was written too late in Israel's history for this to be true, and they want to date the book at least five hundred years after Solomon's time (later than 450 BC). However, strong evidence attests that the book does come from the age of Solomon. For instance, it displays a great knowledge of literature from early Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Setting

Ecclesiastes is Wisdom literature, meaning that it is in the part of the Bible especially concerned with helping readers cope with the practical and philosophical issues of life. It has roots in the Wisdom literature of Egypt and Babylon. Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are the biblical answer to the search for truth. Proverbs is basic wisdom, giving the reader fundamental principles to live by. Ecclesiastes, by contrast, is for a more mature reader. It engages the question of whether death nullifies all purpose and meaning in life.

Special Features

The Bible is never shy about confronting painful truths or hard questions. The book of Ecclesiastes faces the issue of how we can find meaning in life in light of the seemingly futile nature of everything. It will not allow the reader to retreat into superficial answers. It does not answer this problem by comforting us with hollow slogans. To the contrary, its motto is "Everything Is Futile." But by forcing us to face the futility of human existence, it guides us to a life free of empty purpose and deceitful vindication.

Extended Commentary

Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

11:1–6 This section focuses on making sound investments. It may seem odd that the Bible has such teachings, but much of Proverbs is concerned with advice on how to avoid poverty by prudent action. Most of us need a certain degree of prosperity in order to have a good life, and the advice here is valuable for both ancient and modern readers.

11:1–2 These verses deal with financial investment, not charity. The phrase *bread on the surface of the water* refers to investing in overseas trading ventures (1Kg 9:26–27). The phrase *after many days you may find it* refers to an eventual return on the investment, and the phrase *to seven or even to eight* refers to diversifying one's investments.

11:3–5 These verses expand on the reason that a person must diversify his investments. No one knows what will happen, so it is best to be ready for anything. Verse 3 essentially states that there are some signs that indicate what will happen in the future. Dark clouds do not guarantee—but they suggest—that a storm is coming. Certain trends are likely to remain the same. A fallen tree almost certainly will stay where it is. On the other hand, a person can be too concerned with looking for indications of what will happen. Verse 4 says that people who will not commit until they are absolutely certain of success never do anything. Verse 5 tells us that we know little about the processes that govern the world. Understanding all about the weather or the formation of a fetus is beyond us. Thus, we should not demand infallible information about the future before making any investments.

11:6 A final word of advice on achieving prosperity: work hard in the hopes that at least one of your ventures will succeed.

11:7–12:7 Ecclesiastes is primarily concerned with making us understand that we are mortal, that our days are few, that all our works will fade away, and that we should govern our lives accordingly. In this, the last major passage of Ecclesiastes, the book reviews its essential conclusions about how we should spend the time we have. Essentially, the conclusion is twofold: enjoy your days under the sun and fear God.

11:7–8 In the Bible, light is often associated with life and darkness is associated with death. Light is beautiful, but the main point of light is sweet is that it is good to be alive. The assertion that the days of darkness ... will be many does not deny the concept of an afterlife, nor does it specifically allude to an interim period between death and bodily resurrection. It is simply a way of saying that life is short but death is long. Enjoy these days because they are few and pass quickly.

11:9–10 In these verses two pieces of advice are in tension with each other. The first is that we should enjoy life and the second is that we should fear God. The danger is that some people will try to enjoy life by doing things that are offensive to God. Whoever does such things destroys himself and loses both happiness and God. On the other hand, those who have the wrong kind of fear of God believe that anything that makes people happy must be bad; thus, they deprive themselves of legitimate joys.

A young person is specifically addressed because the elderly, as described in 12:1–7, are already in the grip of death; the capacity to enjoy life has to a degree already passed them by.³

References

1. [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/carpe%20diem](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/carpe%20diem)
2. Duane A. Garrett, "Ecclesiastes," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
3. Ibid.