

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 11

### Take a Chance

What if the Wright Brothers didn't take a chance?

Who decided to make the first cup of tea?

Sometimes we have to take risks in order to succeed. This is an idea the Teacher will focus on in Ecc 11.

**[Slide 2] Read Ecc 11:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

<sup>2</sup> Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

While the theme of Ch 11 is different, the style is the same. It begins with some proverbs.

Discuss: You might have heard Ecc 11:1 before, but what does it mean?

Scholars have suggested 2 possibilities:

- The teacher is advocating generosity or hospitality. (if you are helpful to others, they often will be helpful to you)
- The teacher is offering investment advice. (in ancient times, doing business overseas was one type of investing that offered great potential for profit. Mediterranean port cities were popular places for importing and exporting.) (Nothing new under the sun)

Diversified investments usually means better protection.

So which option? The interpretations are not too different. Both have a sense of investment, whether a business venture or in relationships. Looking for a future return when we are in need.

Ecc 11:2 – not a literal number, but rather “plenty” or “more than plenty”

Ecc 11:3-4 look like weather advice, but they are related to 1-2.

- Seasons are going to change.
- Rains will come according to God’s timetable.
- Do not use uncertainty as an excuse for laziness.

Knowing when to plant, harvest or travel depends on the cycles of nature, not our own desires or schedules. While farmers know the cycle of the seasons, they do not know exactly what will happen. Farming (and life in general) requires risk.

“A time to plant and a time to reap” generally, but who knows the weather tomorrow?

**[Slide 3] Read Ecc 11:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

**[Slide 4]**

**11:5 ESV 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.**

**11:5 NASB Just as you do not know the path of the wind, and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes everything.**

Ruach can mean “wind” and “spirit” (sim to pneuma in greek)

\*Either translation is absolutely true.

Gen. 1:2 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.

(Ruach Elohim)

The work of God is ultimately mysterious and beyond our understanding. “hebel”.

In light of this, what is our approach...

- Throw up our hands in despair?
- Work diligently so we can be as prepared as possible for uncertainty?

Actually in Ch 11, the teacher is helping to balance what he has said in earlier chapters. Since we are not in control, we might be tempted to never take a chance on anything. But the teacher is saying the opposite.

- If you don't try, you'll never accomplish anything.
- If you wait for a perfect opportunity, you'll never act.
- A wise person will do all the planning he/she can, then take appropriate risks.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 11:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

<sup>8</sup> 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.[b]

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain[c] from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

So in light of the uncertainty we've seen the teacher refer to, celebrate the light we have. Life is short compared to death; make the most of what we have. Our society/culture strives to prolong life (anti-aging creams, vitamins, health spas, anti-oxidants, etc) We try not to use the word death. We say, “he passed”. But the teacher refloats on death to help us live more fully in the present. Life is hebel. Brief and fleeting. Enjoy it!

Hold our joys of present life loosely, with the awareness that such joy is temporary.

**[Slide 6]** Note the warning in verse 9: we saw it in 3:17, we will see it again in 12:14. Remember our handling of #YOLO.

*As a historical note, similar teaching is found in the Instruction of Ptahhotep from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt: “Follow your heart as long as you live, / Do no more than is required, / do not shorten the time of ‘follow-the-heart.’ ” (ca.1900 BC) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30508/30508-h/30508-h.htm> , Section B, Number 11.*

*The similarity of the Egyptian and biblical exhortations to “rejoice in” and “follow” the heart is striking, **although the Bible is distinctive for linking this concept to a fear of God.***

11:10 – banish anxiety; cast off troubles. (There is nothing new under the sun)

**[Slide 7]** Isaiah 26:3 **You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.**

1Pe5:7 **casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**

11:10 – youth and vigor are hebel – meaningless in the long term; brief – hold that thought as we move into the context of chapter 12.