

"Remember your Creator" Ecclesiastes 11:1–12:8

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Date: 16 November 2025

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[0 : 00] I'll be reading from Ecclesiastes chapter 11, starting at verse 1, going to 12, verse 8. 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. 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. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

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.

In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand. For you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

[0 : 59] Light is sweet and 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. 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. Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth. Before the evil days come and the years draw near, of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them.

Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rains. In the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent.

[2 : 02] And the grinders cease because they are few. And those who look through the windows are dimmed. And the doors on the street are shut. When the sound of the grinding is low.

And one rises up at the sound of a bird. And all the daughters of song are brought low. They are afraid also of what is high. And terrors are in the way.

The almond tree blossoms. The grasshopper drags itself along. And desire fails. Because man is going to his eternal home. And the mourners go about the streets.

Before the silver cord is snapped. Or the golden bowl is broken. Or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain. Or the wheel broken at the cistern.

And the dust returns to the earth as it was. And the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. Remembrance Day.

[3 : 02] This past Tuesday. I was listening to the radio. I think it was on the Wednesday. The 12th. And it was a CTV interview. But they played it on 580. I forget the interviewer's name.

But she interviewed a man named. I wrote it down here. Elmer Friesen. 103 year old man from Calgary, Alberta. Elmer Friesen. It was his first time in Ottawa for Remembrance Day.

He was a veteran himself. He wanted to go for many years. And he just said to his son, I want to go to Ottawa for Remembrance Day. And his son said, okay. I'm not sure how old his son is.

But his son was behind him pushing a wheelchair. And this man, still quite sharp, gave a pretty good interview. But a part of the interview was quite sad. Because the interviewer said, every year there are fewer and fewer veterans from World War II alive.

And then he went on to, of course, agree and talk about some of his best friends that are no longer with him. His brother as well. And this man who is 103, who has seen quite a lot.

[4 : 08] Very proud of his trip to Ottawa. Is very accustomed to death. And in many ways, it was this picture of how aging can be very difficult.

Aging can be very, very difficult. You lose people. You reflect on missed opportunities. You know that you have many, many, many more days behind you than ahead.

We've reached the second to last week in Ecclesiastes. Next week, we'll wrap things up. It's almost a bit of a postscript. But this will be the last teaching from the sages' lips. And over these past ten weeks, we've been eight Sundays in Ecclesiastes.

And we've examined the vanity or the futility of living life under the sun. But having these eternal and ultimate desires for meaning and purpose.

It's been especially meaningful, at least for me. But I'm assuming for some of you as well to study this book. Because generally speaking, we here in the West are suffering, currently suffering, a meaning crisis.

[5 : 27] We've never known a more affluent time in human history with opportunities and things and money and nutrition. We've kind of talked about this over the weeks.

And yet, there is, again, generally speaking, there is a missing part in all of our hearts. We are suffering here in the West with a meaning crisis.

So Ecclesiastes is very wonderful because it helps expose and diagnose why we have that meaning crisis. It's been tough.

It's a very scary thing when you hear, either given to somebody else that you love or yourself maybe, a terminal diagnosis with no treatment available to heal you.

It's a very hopeless thing. So Ecclesiastes diagnoses our meaning crisis. And we've seen bits and pieces where it gives us an antidote.

[6 : 59] Here in our section, as it reflects on the totality of life, especially from the perspective of an aging, maybe even on death's door individual, it will give us a sober antidote to our meaning problem.

The book is drawing to a conclusion. Will it help us ultimately look beyond this life under the sun? And I'm going to put forward today that the sage in chapter 11, verses 1 to 12, 8, the sage will help us to find this antidote in three very tempered imperatives.

Okay? They build upon one another. And here they are. As you consider life, be bold. Okay? Be bold, but wise.

Be joyful, yet humble. And then finally, be godly and remember your creator. Be bold, but wise. Be joyful, yet humble.

Be godly and remember your creator. Follow along with me, by the way, if you have one of these scripture journals. I think there might be one left. At least it was when I looked in the bin early this morning.

[8 : 18] Grab it if you're the last one. You win the prize of being the last person with a scripture journal. But we're on page 40. Follow along, starting in verse 1, and we'll read to verse 4.

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.

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

So chapter 9, we learn that life is fragile, and that no matter how hard we try, we cannot escape the truth of being subject to the things completely out of our control, especially time and chance, especially the fickleness of other people.

These are things we can't control that deeply affect us. Here, the sage confirms that truth once again, but then encourages us, his readers, to use that as motivation for action.

[9 : 28] There is much debate about the meaning of verses 1 and 2. So some commentators have suggested the whole idea of casting your bread upon the waters is about aggressively investing.

Other people have suggested it has to do with charity, giving to the poor, especially verse 2, giving a portion to seven or even to eight.

I mean, that could be diversifying our money as well. Other people have seen it as a reference to a marine economy because of the waters.

To be perfectly honest, okay, I'm not sure. I'm not sure how to understand verses 1 and 2. I would like to put forward that it's probably the first two that I mentioned, either a means of investing our money or our time or whatever it may be, or being generous with our money or our time, one of those.

But whatever it is, it's very clear that in life, we are not playing with house money. Risks are involved in life. We have to take risks. The risks, though, are not careless or immoral risks, but they're calculated risks with the best knowledge we have, knowing that, again, remembering chapter 9, there are so many things out of our control, especially time and chance.

[10:55] Verses 3 to 6 seem to emphasize this point, and it provides three quick examples of how limited our knowledge truly is. There's rain clouds. There's rain clouds. They fill up.

They empty out. We can't control that. There's falling trees. Again, wherever they fall, that's where they're going to land. We have no control over that. Again, I mean, yes, you can think of big, heavy machinery.

Point stands. This is like 3,000 years ago. A tree falls. It's huge. You're not moving it. That's the idea behind it. And finally, the blowing of wind. We cannot control how the wind blows.

We are subject to it. And in each case, these examples depict situations where we really are completely not in control.

We are actually subject to such things. And yet, the sage is saying, be decisive in your choices and strive to be free from doubts and unnecessary worries when it comes to living life.

[12:01] Take risks. But know that when you take them, they might be successful. They might fail. He continues on in verse 5 and 6, furthering this point.

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.

In the morning sow your seed, and at the evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. We cannot wait for a better situation to present itself in every situation.

Okay? We do not have the ability to know that if I just wait another day, or another week, or another month, or another year, or maybe even another decade, it will be an optimal situation.

I will mitigate all my risks. I will enjoy all the reward. We do not know that. Okay? People have put off very important aspects of life only to find that that prospect is no longer afforded to them, for whatever reason.

[13:12] And it's a very difficult thing to take in. We are to, instead, see what is before us, and with the most amount of wisdom that we can muster, to put our shoulder to the plow, and leave the domain of the unknowable to the God who knows everything.

See, the only true certain fact in life is that there will be always uncertainty. And such uncertainty, it can't be allowed to prevent us from action.

Remember, the sage is telling us to be bold, but to do so, he tempers it with wisdom. So we see uncertainty, and we do not crumble, but instead we stand strong, and we go to work.

We take chances. We see excessive focus on prediction can lead to an action. This is what the sage is getting at here in verse 4.

He who observes the wind, looking for the signs, looking for the optimum situation, he will not sow. And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

[14:30] There remains a mystery with human life. So many things that we can just not control whatsoever. I commend to you, again, chapter 9.

The time and chance and the fickleness of people are things that affect us in huge ways that we really truly cannot control. God alone governs the universe.

He governs the cosmos. We do not. And we really deceive ourselves if we try to unearth, turn over every rock to understand how everything works, rather than to look to the one who is truly in control of everything and knows everything.

So you see here, it is saying to take risks, but also to embrace wisdom, for wisdom lies in recognizing that we have limits. There is a limit to what we can truly understand, both individually and collectively.

And I will just say this. That is not to say that faith is always blind. Understanding is a good thing. The Bible pushes us to knowledge, pushes us to understanding, to investigate the world that God has created.

[15:45] But it also warns us to put ourselves in the shoes of the Creator. We are not Him. So friends, be bold with life, but be wise.

And consider it before the days began to wane. And if it fails, it fails. Try again. Do not be crippled with defeat.

See it as an opportunity to grow. I want to suggest to you that this could be a source of great joy. And this brings us to our second point.

Starting in verse 7. To be joyful, but humble. And let me read verses 7 to 10. Light is sweet and 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.

[16:49] 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.

Verse 10. Remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body. For youth and the dawn of life are vanity. Verse 7.

Light is sweet and pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. The sage is telling us that life is beautiful. Not every moment of life is beautiful. But on a whole, life is beautiful.

And therefore, it's worth living. It's good to find joy in the life we have because this life under the sun, it's vanity. It goes by very quickly. But it definitely matters how we live and what we enjoy. One can rejoice in their youth, but as a swindler or as a hedonist. But such a life is not praise. So then the question is, how should we live life in a happy way, but also in a humble way?

[17:57] The sage offers advice. However, it seems quite modern. Let me read with you verses, or read with me rather, verses 8 and 9 again.

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. Verse 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, in the sight of your eyes. You know, the sage, and this is one of the difficulties of Ecclesiastes.

And it's given me fits, but I think in a good way. He'll say one thing with such seriousness, okay? Such kind of absolute truth.

And then, like a chapter and a half later, he says the complete opposite with the same amount of conviction, okay? What do I mean? To follow one's heart and to walk by sight?

[19:05] He says, he says, in the previous couple chapters before, the hearts of the children of men are full of evil. They're full of evil, okay?

And it's not just the sage who says it, but the entirety of scripture seems to say and suggest that the heart is actually the thing you do not want to follow. Jeremiah chapter 17, verse 9, says this.

And this is like one of dozens. But it says this. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? Let me read verse 9 to you again from chapter 11 of Ecclesiastes.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. Why is there this back and forth with the sage? I mean, telling a young person today to follow their heart is very common. It's a very common piece of advice, okay? Be your authentic self.

[20:09] Follow your dreams. Anybody who is in the way of you achieving your most authentic self, they're a problem to remove, not something to consider as we are forming who we are.

Everything has to do with the self. Everything has to do with following one's heart. Yet, again, we see with scripture that this is not the case.

Is the sage simply a moral relativist? Sometimes I wonder if he is. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't. See, being joyful, in this context, and we'll continue on here, it's not just about being a happy person.

It's not about having an experience that makes you satisfied in a moment, even if that moment is a bit of a prolonged moment. Being joyful is not about being simply a happy person.

You see, it is closely linked with living rightly, and we see this in verse 9. The joy and the cheer that the sage is talking about is connected to knowing God as judge, just in the second part of verse 9.

[21:37] This is what it says, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. To be a joyful person is to be a humbled person with the understanding that decisions have consequences.

And following our heart isn't a great thing if it leads us into a self-destructive lifestyle. And especially if it contravenes and disobeys the law of God.

And that is where his judgment comes in. In addition to that, we see that an aspect of joy is deeply connected also with doing the hard work of growing and maturing in the Christian faith.

Verse 10, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. More than anything else, humans need to understand and embrace what it means to be human made in God's image, not in our own.

To know that our work on earth is not simply self-serving, but ultimately has a grander purpose. That there is a cosmic well done at the end of our labors.

[23 : 09] If we live otherwise where we are self-serving, then our lives will become either trivial or they will become very destructive.

They will be about ourselves. And ultimately our joy will not be joy for it will be short-lived happiness and the experience will come and go.

It will also lead to vice. So interestingly, the paradox here with the sage, and I think the sage, he deals in the economy of paradoxes.

It means to grow and find joy in life, we must humbly submit to divine demands placed upon us. So, to separate joy from humility is to deny a genuine enjoyment, a genuine, real, objective enjoyment in life, and to let pride and self-interest be the guiding forces.

And yet, still we experience this vexation because we live as eternal beings in this life under the sun.

[24 : 31] So, how then do we navigate bitterness and frustration for having these eternal desires and yet constantly coming up against the wall whereby we try to satisfy them in the things that we do here on earth or the people we love or the hobbies that we participate in?

How do we avoid this vexation and this bitterness and this frustration? I think the next part might be the very key to the entirety of the book of Ecclesiastes.

We'll especially see this next week, but I think chapter 12 verses 1 to 8 it puts everything in perspective because our problem isn't that we are mortal beings with eternity written on our hearts and yet here we are living this life under the sun.

I think it has everything to do with the fact that we fail to remember an eternal perspective. We are clouded with the here and the now and we are all, all, all too often forgetting that there is a life to come and it is eternal.

So again, the sage is building upon these tempered imperatives and we finally get to our last point which is to be godly and remember your creator.

[26 : 00] Read with me just verse 1 for now. Remember also your creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say I have no pleasure in them.

Let's read actually all the way to verse 8. Verse 2. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent and the grinders cease because they are few and those who look through the windows are dimmed and the doors on the street are shut and the sound of the grinding is low and one rises up at the sound of a bird and all the daughters of song are brought low they are afraid also of what is high and terrors are in the way the almond tree blossoms the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails because man is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the cistern and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it vanity of vanities says the preacher all is vanity the sage ends verse 8 with the same way he began in chapter 1 verse 2 vanity of vanity says the preacher all is vanity a poem that highlights the reality of being in the winter of your life there's a strong temptation to dissect every sentence and word in this section verses 2 to 6 but

I'm not going to do that I think it risks taking away from its poetic essence what we see is a life that is fading into death the poem is about aging and as we grow older physical and emotional challenges increase our bodies inevitably decline our friends and family members will pass away we struggle to adapt to the changes brought by innovation and we find we may find that some goals remain unachieved strength diminishes desires fade and recovery from illnesses take much longer or might not happen at all I remember my grandfather he died I was 20 and he was 76 he was like the first of his cohort I don't know it's a weird way to say it but first of his his friend group to die and it was so packed the funeral the funeral hall my grandfather was a very quiet man he routinely didn't go to weddings or events because he was just shy he was a shy man my grandmother died three four years ago and she was everybody's favorite favorite aunt aunt and she had a ton of friends but

she had a ton of people die in her life and at her funeral

I think there was maybe 30 people not because people didn't love my grandmother but as you die as you age the life that you once knew begins to crumble and here she was a very beloved person with 30 people again I don't think it's a reflection on how she treated people or not but it was very striking to me when I considered both of these things together aging is difficult in some ways those that die young and the sage has mentioned this they can potentially be considered the fortunate ones they don't have to suffer a decline but we don't get to choose how we die how we go out we don't get to choose if we die young or in middle age or in old age but if we are wise if we are wise considering that life again is vaporous whether it is as a 20 year old or as a 60 year old or as an 85 year old or as

Elmer Friesen at 103 that life is still a vapor if we are wise we consider this and hopefully it spurs us to remember that we have a creator and therefore we can live in a godly way so the trick is to consider this not at the end of your life but as soon as possible verse 1 begins with one of again the most important imperatives not just in Ecclesiastes but in all of scripture remember remember your creator remember God a constant refrain throughout the Old Testament remember remember remember remember God's deliverance remember his commandments remember his covenant remember what we'll see is that remembering is much more than simply recalling something that has been forgotten instead remembering involves action it involves fidelity and allegiance and a love and a devotion to remember one's anniversary isn't just to say it's that time of year again high five go to work come home eat dinner go to sleep it means recalling one's vows reaffirming love speaking kind and loving words expressing affection and joy maybe giving gifts it's an action to remember it has implications and the same applies to the Lord to remember

[32 : 14] God as our creator is to acknowledge that although this life is fleeting and fragile and futile right it is it is vaporous and that we will return to dust from which we came God remains worthy of worship and glorification in fact referring to him as the creator reminds us that this world was made with purpose and that he was the one who breathed it into existence spoke it into existence and therefore we as the pinnacle of his creation were also created with purpose with intentionality and our primary purpose is to glorify God but also to enjoy him all of our days and into eternity so this remember it's at verse 1 but it's actually commanded four other times or four times total rather in this section from verse 1 to verse 8 and although it doesn't say remember four times what we do see is that in verse 1 2 and 6 there's this word that says before which recalls verse 1 remember so remember the Lord as your creator before before before remember

God before the evil days come remember God before life darkens remember God before life is utterly spent and again since we can never know the exact hour of our death the call is to remember in the present it's not to remember in the future but is to remember right now and here's the true beauty of this act of remembering for as we seek to remember God God remembers us consider Hannah this is from 1st Samuel chapter 1 Hannah is one of two wives of an Israelite and God seems to open the womb and bless the one wife and Hannah remains barren but it's not just that she's barren she's neglected she is forgotten she is an afterthought completely overlooked and what does she do she cries out to

God to remember her remember me she says remember me bless me and what does God do he provides for her and expresses his love to her he remembers her and it spurs him on to action through her son Samuel Israel would be delivered from all of her enemies and guided by the Lord I'll read just two verses 1st Samuel chapter 1 verse 11 this is Hannah speaking and Hannah vowed a vow and said oh Lord of hosts if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me not forget me but remember me remember your servant and give your servant a son then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall touch his head it continues on in verse 19 of 1st

Samuel chapter 1 and this is what it says they rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord this is Hannah and her family then they went back to their house at Ramah and Elkanah Hannah's husband knew Hannah his wife and the Lord remembered her and in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son and she called his name Samuel for she said I have asked for him from the Lord you see God would not forget the promises that he made to Hannah he will never forget the promises that he makes ever and by remembering them he acts upon them I'll wrap up with this in Luke chapter 1 God remembers the promise that he made to Abraham centuries and centuries and centuries and centuries before that through his seed the world not just Israel but the world

would be blessed like with Hannah Mary was blessed with a child that would be the embodiment of God's remembrance so again

God doesn't just say I remember making that promise to Abraham but rather I will show you how I remember by seeing those promises come to fruition so like Samuel through Christ God he remembers his promises to bless and to heal and to help all those who live vain lives under the sun yet who have eternity written on their hearts and what does he do he helps us to enjoy fellowship with him forever and Jesus himself remembers for after Jesus took upon himself the cross upon his back but really the sins of the world upon his back dying on a Roman crucifix and rising again he appeared to his disciples and he commissioned them to proclaim that the one true God is the God who remembers and then he tells them this

[37 : 47] I am with you always to the end of the age and friends that is an aspect of God remembering and that truth is for us today remember also your creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say I have no pleasure in them friends remember your creator for your creator remembers you he sent his son for you he fulfilled his promises for you and that his son defeated death for you and his promises remain that he will neither leave us or forsake us if you are here this morning and you're a Christian or kind of on the fence about Christianity or outside of the Christian faith if you are wondering is it worth being a Christian is it worth living a life where I consider

God as creator and that I remember him is he worthy of my remembrance the answer is yes because God first remembered you and proved it in his son Christ do