

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 — The Uncertainty of Life and the Call to Joy

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 deals with one of the great realities of human life:

We do not know everything that is going to happen.

The future is uncertain.

Weather changes.

Opportunities change.

Circumstances change.

Health changes.

Economies change.

People change.

Plans fail.

Unexpected events occur.

Yet the Preacher does not tell us to become paralyzed by uncertainty.

He tells us to act.

Give.

Sow.

Work.

Rejoice.

Use your opportunities.

Do not wait for perfect circumstances.

One of the strongest lessons in this chapter is found in verse 4:

“Whoever watches the wind will not sow, and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.”

The person who waits for perfect conditions may never begin.

There will always be:

A reason to delay.

A possible problem.

An uncertain outcome.

A risk.

A cloud in the sky.

Faith does not mean knowing every outcome.

Faith means moving forward responsibly while trusting God with what cannot be known.

The chapter also reminds us of the mystery of God’s work.

We do not fully understand:

The wind.

Life in the womb.

Providence.

The future.

Yet God understands all of it.

The final part of the chapter turns directly to young people.

Youth is a gift.

Joy is appropriate.

Life should be enjoyed.

But joy must always be joined with responsibility.

The young person is told:

Rejoice.

Enjoy your youth.

But remember:

God will bring every choice into judgment.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 11 is:

Because life is uncertain and brief, we should live generously, work diligently, act faithfully without waiting for perfect conditions, enjoy the life God gives us, and remember that every choice is made under His ultimate judgment.

I. CAST YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS

Ecclesiastes 11:1 — Give Generously and Trust God

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”

The Preacher begins with an image of releasing something valuable.

The point is generosity and investment in what cannot immediately be seen.

Giving often requires faith.

You release something today without controlling exactly how or when the result will return.

Generosity therefore requires trust.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 15:10

Give generously to the poor and do not give with a resentful heart, because the Lord your God will bless you in your work and in everything you put your hand to.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become tired of doing what is good, because at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Luke 6:38

Give generously to others, and generosity will return to you in overflowing measure. The standard you use in giving will also be used in what comes back to you.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity often requires releasing what you can see while trusting God with what you cannot see.

Key Truth

Faithful giving is never wasted.

II. DIVERSIFY YOUR GENEROSITY AND PREPARATION

Ecclesiastes 11:2 — Give Portions to Seven or Eight

“Give portions to seven, yes, even to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.”

The Preacher teaches practical wisdom.

Because the future is uncertain:

Do not put everything into one place.

Share.

Prepare.

Spread resources wisely.

The principle includes both:

Generosity.

And:

Prudent preparation.

Cross References

Luke 6:30

Give to the person who asks from you, and do not continually demand back what you have freely given to someone in need.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow, because you do not know what even one day may bring.

2 Corinthians 9:6

Remember this principle: the person who sows only a little will reap only a little, while the person who sows generously will also reap generously.

Spiritual Principle

Uncertainty should make us wiser and more generous, not fearful and selfish.

III. SOME EVENTS WILL HAPPEN WHETHER WE CONTROL THEM OR NOT

Ecclesiastes 11:3 — Rain and the Fallen Tree

“If the clouds are full of rain, they pour it down upon the earth; and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie.”

Some realities move beyond our control.

Full clouds eventually release rain.

A fallen tree remains where it falls.

The Preacher is teaching us to recognize reality.

We cannot control everything.

Some things happen.

Then we must respond to what has happened rather than endlessly wishing circumstances were different.

Cross References

Isaiah 55:10

Rain and snow come down from heaven and water the earth, causing it to produce growth and seed for the farmer and food for those who eat.

Matthew 5:45

God causes His sun to rise on both evil and good people, and He sends rain upon both the righteous and the unrighteous.

James 5:7

Be patient, brothers and sisters, as you wait for the Lord. Consider how a farmer patiently waits for the valuable crop from the earth and depends upon the seasonal rains.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom accepts realities that cannot be changed and acts faithfully within them.

IV. DO NOT WAIT FOR PERFECT CONDITIONS

Ecclesiastes 11:4 — Watching the Wind

“Whoever watches the wind will not sow, and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.”

This verse is one of the clearest warnings against procrastination in Scripture.

The farmer who constantly analyzes the weather may never plant.

The person who waits for perfect conditions may never act.

There will always be uncertainty.

There will always be risk.

Cross References

Proverbs 20:4

The lazy person refuses to plow because the weather is uncomfortable, and when harvest arrives he searches for crops but finds nothing.

Luke 9:62

Jesus said, “Anyone who puts his hand to the plow and keeps looking backward is not properly focused on the kingdom of God.”

Galatians 6:9

Do not become weary in doing good, because at the proper time we will harvest the result if we continue faithfully.

Spiritual Principle

Perfect conditions rarely arrive.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not use uncertainty as an excuse for disobedience.

V. GOD'S WORK REMAINS MYSTERIOUS

Ecclesiastes 11:5 — The Wind and the Womb

“As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the bones are formed in the womb of a woman with child, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.”

Human knowledge has limits.

We observe life.

But we do not fully understand every process or every purpose.

The Preacher points to:

The wind.

Life in the womb.

God's providence.

All contain mystery.

Cross References

Psalm 139:13

You formed the deepest parts of my being and carefully shaped me within my mother's womb.

John 3:8

The wind blows wherever it chooses. You hear its sound, but you do not know fully where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

Job 9:10

God performs great things beyond our ability to fully search out and wonders beyond number.

Spiritual Principle

Not understanding everything God does does not mean He is not working.

Key Truth

Mystery should lead to humility, not unbelief.

VI. KEEP SOWING

Ecclesiastes 11:6 — Morning and Evening Diligence

“Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”

The Preacher tells us to keep working.

Do not depend upon one effort alone.

Work in the morning.

Continue in the evening.

You do not know which effort will bear fruit.

Cross References

Psalm 126:5

Those who sow while weeping will one day reap with songs of joy.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become tired of doing what is right, because at the proper time we will reap if we refuse to give up.

2 Corinthians 9:6

The person who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, while the person who sows generously will reap generously.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness keeps sowing even before the results are visible.

Application

Do not stop doing good simply because you cannot yet see what is working.

VII. LIFE ITSELF IS SWEET

Ecclesiastes 11:7 — The Blessing of Light

“Truly, the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.”

After discussing uncertainty, the Preacher reminds us:

Life is still a gift.

Seeing another sunrise is a blessing.

Light represents:

Life.

Opportunity.

Experience.

Joy.

Cross References

Psalm 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies display the work of His hands.

Psalm 97:11

Light is sown for righteous people, and joy is prepared for those whose hearts are upright before God.

John 8:12

Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not continue walking in spiritual darkness but will possess the light that gives life.”

Spiritual Principle

Another day of life is not something to treat casually.

VIII. REJOICE, BUT REMEMBER DARK DAYS WILL COME

Ecclesiastes 11:8 — Enjoy the Years God Gives

“However many years a man may live, let him rejoice in them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is vanity.”

The Preacher balances:

Joy.

And:

Reality.

Enjoy your days.

But remember:

Life changes.

Old age comes.

Difficulty comes.

Death comes.

Joy should therefore be intentional.

Cross References

Job 30:26

When I hoped for good, trouble came instead. When I waited for light, darkness arrived.

Psalms 90:10

Our years may reach seventy, or eighty if strength allows, yet even our strongest years contain labor and sorrow. They pass quickly, and soon we are gone.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

Remember your Creator while you are still young, before difficult days come and years arrive when you say, “I find little pleasure in them.”

Spiritual Principle

The reality of future darkness should make present light more precious.

IX. YOUTH SHOULD BE ENJOYED RESPONSIBLY

Ecclesiastes 11:9 — Joy with Accountability

“Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”

This verse contains both permission and warning.

Young people are told:

Rejoice.

Enjoy life.

Use your energy.

Experience the days of youth.

But:

Remember judgment.

Freedom is not the same as irresponsibility.

Cross References

Numbers 15:39

When you see the tassels on your clothing, remember all the Lord's commands and obey them. Do not follow the sinful desires of your own heart and eyes that would lead you away from Him.

2 Corinthians 5:10

Every one of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each person may receive what is appropriate for the things done while living in the body, whether good or bad.

1 John 2:16

Everything belonging to this fallen world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and pride in possessions and achievements—does not come from the Father but from the world.

Spiritual Principle

God permits joy, but He never separates joy from accountability.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Enjoy your freedom without forgetting the One before whom you will answer for how you used it.

X. PUT AWAY SORROW AND EVIL

Ecclesiastes 11:10 — Youth Does Not Last Forever

“So then, banish sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your body, for youth and the prime of life are vanity.”

Youth feels permanent while a person is young.

It is not.

Energy changes.

Strength changes.

Appearance changes.

Life moves quickly.

Therefore:

Do not waste youth in bitterness.

Do not waste youth in sin.

Cross References

Ephesians 4:22

Put away the old way of life that was shaped by sinful desires and was continually being corrupted by deception.

Psalms 25:7

Do not hold the sins and failures of my youth against me. Remember me according to Your mercy and faithful love because You are good, Lord.

1 Timothy 4:12

Do not allow anyone to despise you because you are young. Instead, become an example to believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Spiritual Principle

Youth is too brief to waste in sin, bitterness, or foolishness.

XI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 11

1. Be Generous

Generosity requires faith.

We often give without seeing immediate results.

Principle:

Do good without demanding an immediate return.

2. Do Not Wait for Perfect Conditions

The person watching every wind never plants.

Principle:

Some opportunities disappear while we are waiting for certainty.

3. Accept That Life Is Unpredictable

You cannot know every future event.

Principle:

Prepare wisely, but do not pretend you can control tomorrow.

4. Keep Working Faithfully

Sow in the morning.

Keep working in the evening.

Principle:

Faithfulness often means continuing before results become visible.

5. Rejoice in Life

Light is sweet.

Life is a gift.

Principle:

The brevity of life should increase gratitude rather than destroy it.

6. Youth Is a Gift

Youth should be enjoyed.

But youth should not become an excuse for foolishness.

Principle:

Energy is a gift to steward, not permission to sin.

7. Judgment Makes Every Choice Significant

God will evaluate how life was lived.

Principle:

Enjoy life in a way you will not regret when you stand before God.

XII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT GENEROSITY

Generosity involves risk.

You release something from your hands.

You cannot always control:

How it is used.

When fruit appears.

What return comes.

But generosity reflects trust.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Open hands demonstrate greater faith than clenched fists.

XIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT UNCERTAINTY

The chapter repeatedly says:

You do not know.

You do not know what disaster may come.

You do not know the path of the wind.

You do not completely understand God's work.

You do not know which effort will succeed.

This should not produce paralysis.

It should produce:

Humility.

Preparation.

Diligence.

Faith.

Key Truth

You do not need certainty about every outcome before you can act faithfully.

XIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT PROCRASTINATION

Verse 4 exposes a common excuse:

"I will begin when conditions improve."

But conditions are rarely perfect.

There is always:

Wind.

Clouds.

Risk.

Uncertainty.

Spiritual Principle

Procrastination often disguises fear as wisdom.

XV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT DILIGENCE

Verse 6 says:

Sow in the morning.

Do not let your hands become idle in the evening.

That is diligence.

It means:

Keep working.

Keep serving.

Keep planting.

Keep learning.

Keep trying.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You cannot control which seed grows, but you can control whether you sow.

XVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S MYSTERY

Some of God's work cannot be completely explained.

That does not mean His work lacks order.

We simply lack complete understanding.

Spiritual Principle

The limit of human knowledge is not the limit of God's wisdom.

XVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT JOY

The Preacher tells people to:

Rejoice.

Enjoy the light.

Enjoy the years they are given.

Biblical wisdom is not joyless.

It knows life is temporary.

That is precisely why life should be gratefully received.

Key Truth

Joy becomes deeper when we recognize that every day is temporary and therefore precious.

XVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT YOUTH

Youth brings:

Energy.

Opportunity.

Strength.

Possibility.

But youth is temporary.

The wise young person does not assume:

“I have plenty of time.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Use your strength before your strength becomes only a memory.

XIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT JUDGMENT

Ecclesiastes 11:9 says:

God will bring every choice into judgment.

This gives seriousness to freedom.

We make choices.

But choices have consequences.

Spiritual Principle

Accountability does not eliminate joy.

It teaches us how to enjoy life wisely.

XX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does “cast your bread upon the waters” mean?

It pictures generosity and faithful action without immediate visible return.

It encourages us to release what we have and trust God with the result.

Question 2

Why should portions be given to seven or eight?

Because the future is uncertain.

The verse encourages generosity and wise distribution rather than placing everything into one place.

Question 3

What do the rain clouds teach?

Some events develop and occur beyond our control.

Wisdom recognizes reality instead of pretending everything can be controlled.

Question 4

What does verse 4 teach about procrastination?

Waiting for perfect circumstances can prevent action altogether.

At some point, the farmer must sow despite uncertainty.

Question 5

Why does the Preacher compare God’s work with the wind and development in the womb?

Both demonstrate how limited human understanding is.

We can observe much without fully explaining every mystery.

Question 6

What does verse 6 teach about work?

It teaches diligence.

Continue working because you do not know which effort will succeed.

Question 7

What does verse 7 mean when it says light is sweet?

It means life itself is pleasant and should be received gratefully as a gift.

Question 8

Why should a person remember the days of darkness?

Because life includes aging, difficulty, and eventually death.

That reality should increase appreciation for present life.

Question 9

Does verse 9 give young people permission to sin?

No.

The verse encourages joy but immediately reminds the young person that God will judge every choice.

Question 10

What does it mean to follow the ways of the heart and eyes?

It acknowledges the desires and interests associated with youth, but the warning about judgment shows those desires must remain under God's authority.

Question 11

Why should sorrow be removed from the heart?

The Preacher warns against wasting the brief years of youth in unnecessary grief, bitterness, or anxiety.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 11 change about our lives?

It should teach us to:

Give generously.

Stop waiting for perfect circumstances.

Work diligently.

Trust God with uncertain results.

Enjoy life gratefully.

Use youth wisely.

Remember judgment.

XXI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 11 asks several searching questions.

Am I Generous?

Do I give only when I can guarantee a return?

Am I Waiting for Perfect Conditions?

What have I delayed because I am afraid something may go wrong?

Am I Trying to Control the Future?

Can I prepare wisely without pretending I know tomorrow?

Am I Still Sowing?

Have I stopped doing good because I have not seen results yet?

Am I Grateful to Be Alive?

Do I treat another day as ordinary instead of recognizing it as a gift?

Am I Using My Present Strength Wisely?

Am I wasting opportunities I may not always have?

Am I Enjoying Life Responsibly?

Can I rejoice without forgetting accountability?

Am I Living With Judgment in View?

Would I make the same decisions if I remembered I must answer to God?

XXII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Wait for a Windless Day”

There will always be reasons not to begin.

Not enough money.

Not enough time.

Not enough certainty.

Not enough support.

Not enough confidence.

Too many clouds.

Too much wind.

The farmer who demands perfect weather may never plant anything.

Principle:

Faith does not wait until risk disappears; faith acts wisely while trusting God with what remains uncertain.

XXIII. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH AND PRESUMPTION

Faith does not mean:

Ignoring danger.

Refusing wisdom.

Rejecting preparation.

Faith means:

Preparing responsibly.

Acting obediently.

Trusting God with the outcome.

Presumption says:

“Nothing can go wrong.”

Fear says:

“Something might go wrong, so I will do nothing.”

Faith says:

“Something may go wrong, but I will still obey God wisely.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Wisdom prepares.

Faith acts.

God determines the outcome.

XXIV. KEEP SOWING

Some seeds grow quickly.

Others take time.

Some efforts succeed.

Others do not.

But Ecclesiastes says:

Sow in the morning.

Keep your hands active in the evening.

This applies to:

Ministry.

Parenting.

Teaching.

Work.

Witnessing.

Giving.

Encouragement.

Prayer.

Spiritual Principle

Do not stop planting good seed because yesterday's seed has not yet appeared above the ground.

XXV. LIFE IS A GIFT TO BE ENJOYED

The Preacher does not teach:

Life is brief, therefore despair.

He teaches:

Life is brief, therefore rejoice.

Light is sweet.

Seeing the sun is good.

Another day means:

Another opportunity.

Another conversation.

Another act of service.

Another prayer.

Another kindness.

Another chance to glorify God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not allow the certainty of death to make you stop living before life is over.

XXVI. YOUTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Young people often feel:

Strong.

Invincible.

Unhurried.

The Preacher says:

Enjoy youth.

But remember:

Youth ends.

Choices remain.

Judgment comes.

Therefore:

Use strength wisely.

Build good habits early.

Choose relationships wisely.

Guard your eyes.

Guard your heart.

Guard your body.

Principle:

The best time to begin living wisely is before foolish habits become deeply rooted.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 teaches us how to live when the future is uncertain.

And the future is always uncertain.

You do not know:

What tomorrow will bring.

Which investment will succeed.

Which effort will produce fruit.

Which door will open.

Which problem will appear.

How long present opportunities will remain.

But you do know enough to act faithfully today.

Give.

Do good.

Sow.

Work.

Rejoice.

Do not spend life waiting for perfect conditions.

They may never arrive.

There will always be wind.

There will always be clouds.

There will always be uncertainty.

There will always be something you cannot control.

The question is not:

“Can I guarantee the outcome?”

The question is:

“Can I faithfully do what is right?”

The chapter also teaches us to continue sowing.

Maybe you have been:

Praying.

Teaching.

Serving.

Giving.

Working.

Encouraging.

And you have not seen the result you expected.

Keep sowing.

You do not know which seed will grow.

God does.

Ecclesiastes 11 also tells us:

Enjoy life.

See the sunlight.

Receive another day with gratitude.

Enjoy the years God gives you.

But remember:

They are temporary.

Young person:

Enjoy your youth.

But do not waste it.

Your strength will not remain forever.

Your opportunities will change.

Use them now.

And remember:

God will bring every choice into judgment.

Therefore:

Enjoy without rebellion.

Work without laziness.

Give without fear.

Plan without arrogance.

Act without demanding certainty.

Rejoice without forgetting eternity.

Live knowing that life is uncertain.

But God is not.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the gift of life.

Thank You for every day You place before us.

Teach us to live generously.

Open our hands.

Keep us from selfishness.

Help us give even when we cannot immediately see the result.

Teach us to trust You with every seed we plant.

Father, protect us from procrastination.

Show us where we have been waiting for perfect conditions that may never come.

Give us wisdom to prepare.

Give us courage to act.

Help us stop using uncertainty as an excuse for disobedience.

Teach us diligence.

Help us sow in the morning.

Help us remain faithful in the evening.

When we do not see results, keep us from becoming discouraged.

When one effort fails, give us wisdom to continue.

When another succeeds, keep us humble.

Father, we confess that we do not understand everything You are doing.

Your work is greater than our understanding.

Teach us humility.

Help us trust You when the path ahead is unclear.

Thank You for the light.

Thank You for the sun.

Thank You for another day.

Teach us to rejoice in the years You give us.

Keep us from wasting life in bitterness, fear, and unnecessary sorrow.

Father, speak especially to the young.
Help them understand that youth is a gift.
Give them joy.
Give them strength.
Give them purpose.
But also give them wisdom.
Help them remember that choices matter.
Guard their hearts.
Guard their eyes.
Guard their bodies.
Guard their futures.
Remind all of us that we will answer to You.
May that truth not destroy our joy.
May it purify our joy.
Help us enjoy what is good.
Reject what is evil.
Use every season wisely.
Give generously.
Work diligently.
Trust deeply.
Rejoice gratefully.
And live every day with eternity in view.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Key Verse

“Whoever watches the wind will not sow, and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.” — Ecclesiastes 11:4

Central Truth

Because life is uncertain and brief, wisdom calls us to give generously, act without waiting for perfect conditions, work diligently, rejoice gratefully in the life God gives, and remember that every choice will ultimately come before Him in judgment.

Ecclesiastes 11 in One Sentence

The Preacher teaches that uncertainty should produce generosity, diligence, faith, and humility rather than paralysis, while calling both young and old to rejoice in God's gift of life and live responsibly in view of coming judgment.