



[ 13 : 06 ] Thank you.

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[ 15 : 36 ] Thank you.

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[ 19 : 36 ] Thank you.

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[ 22 : 06 ] And we pray.

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[ 24 : 36 ] Thank you.

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[ 27 : 36 ] Thank you.

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Thank you.

[ 30 : 36 ] is how can we live well? How can we live wisely? How can we live and experience life?

Not exist, but how can we live in this world, in the years that we're given under the sun? I'm reminded of the line in that film of a few years back, Braveheart.

And as Braveheart comes towards the end of his life, as he's been put to death, I think he's offered some kind of drink, some kind of sedative, and he's asked the question, will you take this because you're going to die?

He's facing death, and the response was, every man dies, but not every man really lives. And Ecclesiastes 11 and into chapter 12, it's about how to live life, how to live life.

So there's various things that we'll work through. Four points, I think it is. First of all, there are things to risk in life. The second thing we see is that there are things to relax about in life.

[ 31 : 52 ] The third thing is there's things to rejoice in. The fourth thing is there are things to remove. That's a short passing point.

And the final thing is there are things to remember. So first of all, we see that there are things to risk in life.

Verse 1. Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. And that's a verse that we're quite familiar with, I think.

Most of us will have heard that phrase, cast your bread upon the waters. It's a kind of strange phrase to use. It's an unusual picture, to cast your bread upon the waters.

We tend to store bread away in cupboards. We serve bread at dinner. Our bread is the food of life. But why would we cast it on the waters? So the phrase is somewhat enigmatic.

[ 32 : 56 ] The commentators think it can be traced back to the merchant trade, to those who went out in boats to sea. And the picture that Solomon may have been connecting with was that of traders on the sea.

Ships would leave full of grain and they would be away on the waters, away from their community, away from their homes, away from their people. They would be away out and sea, these cargoes full of grain.

And they'd be away for many days. But after selling their grain, they would return with a great reward. So there's the risk of taking the grain, heading off to sea, looking for this deal.

But then there's the reward as they come back. The venture's paid off and they have money. They've managed to sell what they went off to seek to sell.

So there's an element of risk. Cast your bread, cast your grain upon the waters. For you will find it after many days.

[ 34 : 05 ] Then verse 2, give a portion to seven or even to eight. For you know not what disaster may happen on earth. And this is, it's the same point, but it's coming from a slightly different angle.

Sometimes we need to take a risk for ourselves. So we see the people who head off from a particular place to sell their grain in order that they can bring back the fruits of that to the place that they came from.

It's a benefit, but it's a benefit that they will realize and enjoy themselves. Sometimes we're called to take a risk, not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. And Solomon is saying here, be generous with what you have.

Be generous with the portion that you have so that those who are in need will be helped. Because there may come a day, says Solomon, when you're the person who's in need.

There may come a day when you are the person who has gone through some disaster. You're depending on others. So there are things to risk in life.

[ 35 : 16 ] There are risks that we're called to take. Sometimes we benefit from these risks.

Sometimes other people benefit from these risks. And when I was preparing this, I was reminded of a true story.

Some of you will have heard this story. I was checking into the detail of it. But it's a story about the people of St. Kilda. And the people of St. Kilda were in great need.

I don't have the precise time for this. I think it was in the war years. The people of St. Kilda, they were in great need. They'd had a terrible winter and they were starving. Literally, they were starving.

They were desperate. And they were praying for God to help them. They're crying out, asking the Lord to help them. So that's St. Kilda. One night, not in St. Kilda, but in Scalpy, there was a man called Norman, who I think was a grand uncle of Ina, Ina Morrison.

And Norman and Scalpy, he was praying. He was in the secret place. The door was closed. Think about Matthew 6. And he's praying. And as he was praying, this verse that we read came to him as he prayed.

[ 36 : 39 ] Cast your bread upon the waters. And it came with great power, this verse. Cast your bread upon the waters. And then his mind suddenly went to the people of St. Kilda.

He was overwhelmed thinking about the people of St. Kilda. He didn't know what was going on in St. Kilda. He just had the people in his mind. And so as he prayed, that the Lord put it in his heart to act.

So in his mind, he felt moved to get a firkin, I think you call it, a barrel, and to fill it with food, fill it with salt and pepper, and seal it, and put it on the waters.

Literally, put it on the waters on the shore in Scalpy. And so that's what he did. After praying the following morning, he got this barrel, he filled it up to the brim with salt herring, he sealed it tight, and he put it out onto the water.

And for many days, he heard nothing. I don't know how many days. You can ask Angus, Alec, and John McSween, and Donald, and others. You'll know this story perhaps better than I do.

[ 37 : 49 ] But for many days, nothing was heard. Fast forward to some time later, and there was a man who came ashore in Scalpy from St. Kilda.

And this man from St. Kilda, he was telling the people in Scalpy of how they had been starving and how they'd been praying. And each day, they would scan the shoreline because in these days, food was coming in in tins, and they could sometimes pick up tins and they could eat the food that was coming in the tins.

So they would scan the shoreline that they'd eat, see if there was anything they could eat in these difficult years. And as they were scanning the shoreline, they saw something bobbing about. So

when it was close enough to get to it, they pulled it in and they got this barrel. And it was filled with salt herring. And it was a lifesaver for them. And this man from St. Kilda was talking about how they had prayed and God had answered. This firkin full of herring was the means of survival for many people in St. Kilda. And it's just an illustration of how sometimes we are called to take a risk.

[ 39 : 14 ] Sometimes for our own sake, sometimes for the sake of others. It's very easy to be super cautious. It's very easy to say, we might need that salt herring. It's very easy to say, well, I haven't got a whole lot of money so I need to bank it away.

I need to lock it away. It's very easy to say, well, I need to hold on to what I've got. So I don't know what's in the future. Solomon, I think, or God through Solomon in this passage is saying, don't be so frugal.

Don't be so cautious. Don't be so fearful. Be generous. You don't know how long life is. There are all kinds of people in need.

And if you have the means, use them well. Use them wisely. Cast your bread upon the waters. Give generously. We're not just talking money. We're talking time. We're talking talents. We're talking all the things, actually, that connect with us morning, too. Give generously in the few years that we have in this world.

[ 40 : 33 ] Take a risk for Jesus' sake. Derek Kidner, the commentator, says, if there are risks in everything, it's better to fail in launching out than in hugging one's own resources.

Let me start again. If there are risks in everything, says Kidner, it is better to fail in launching out than in hugging one's own resources to oneself.

So the question I suppose we consider as we move on from this point is a question of risk. How ready are we sometimes to take a risk?

How ready are we to take a risk for Jesus' sake? When did you and I last take a risk for Jesus' sake? Maybe not money. Maybe it's a question of giving time that perhaps we think we don't have that much of.

Maybe it's a question of giving some of our talents. Recognizing that we are limited in what we can do, but thinking, well, I can do something. Maybe it's a question of getting involved in a ministry.

[ 41 : 46 ] Maybe it's a question of going and inviting someone to church. That's a risky business in a wee village. So we don't know how they're going to react to us. When did you last take that kind of a risk?

When did we last speak to a friend about Jesus and about eternity? It's risky. But these are risks that are worth taking.

These are risks that we are called to take in our time under the sun. Think the risk. That's the first point. The second thing is things to relax about.

One of the things that we know and that we experience as we live on an island is that there are various things that we just can't control.

We can't control the weather. We cannot control Calmac. So we can make plans to go to a certain place at a certain time on a certain day where these plans may well change.

[ 42 : 52 ] And if they change, there's nothing you can do about it and there's nothing I can do about it. We may as well just relax and not get too stressed out about it.

There are certain things that we are called to relax about. And that's the point that Solomon is making in the next section, verses 3 and 4.

He says, 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 lie.

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. Again, it's slightly cryptic. What's the meaning of this?

Well, one of the commentators says, The clouds follow their own laws and times, not ours, and the fallen tree consults no one's convenience. And we know that in a storm.

[ 43 : 52 ] We actually have a feeling of that just now. The clouds have been gathering over the afternoon. We were kind of, I was going to walk down the road at quarter to six, and then I started to hear rumbles, and the clouds were getting dark.

I thought, I better take the wee car. Because we don't know what the weather is going to do. It might clear. It might burst. And in a storm, you can be heading to storm a way.

The wind blows. The tree falls. The road is blocked. There's nothing we can do about it. We don't get to control these events. We can't control the weather.

We can't control the direction a tree falls in a storm. These are things that we can't predict and manage. But we see here that the, verse 4, the farmer, although he observes the wind, and although he may have fears about the weather, he sows anyway.

He's hopeful of a harvest. Verse 5 is a change in picture. There's a change in metaphor. And Solomon says, 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.

[ 45 : 09 ] And again, these verses, they relate to what one commentator calls the unknown and the unknowable. And there are many things in this life which are unknown and unknowable.

There's the weather. There's the harvest. The farmer experiences this. And the expectant mother and the waiting father have to experience this as well.

In Solomon's day, there was no 13-week scan. There was no picture of what was going on in the womb. The work of God in creation of new life, it was absolutely hidden.

And the reality is that so much of God's work is hidden from us. And so much of what we experience in this world is beyond our control.

But that shouldn't cause us to despair and fret and stress and try to engineer things constantly.

[ 46 : 25 ] It should actually cause us to relax and to trust God with the things that we can't see and the things that we can't control.

And it should cause us just to proceed to live life in humble faith. So 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.

So if we're looking for advice from Solomon on how to live wisely and how to live well, there are things to risk.

There is a time to step out in faith. There are things to relax about. There are things that we cannot control, we cannot see, but we must trust God with.

Third point, things to rejoice in. Verse 7 and 8. Light is sweet and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

[ 47 : 50 ] 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.

The message of this next section here, verses 7 and 8 and into verse 9 as well, I think probably it's best summed up in the hymn that we sang.

We sang that hymn the second item of praise, Bless the Lord, O my soul. And so the hymn begins with that first verse that says, the sun comes up it's a new day dawning.

It's all bright and it's sunny and on the day when the sun comes up and the day dawns, what are we to do? Well, the hymn writer tells us we're to sing Bless the Lord, O my soul.

And that's kind of verse 7 territory. We have light and pleasant sunny days sometimes. And on these days where it's light and it's pleasant, we should sing, we should rejoice and sing Bless the Lord, O my soul.

[ 49 : 04 ] It's not hard to do that on the bright sunny days. But then as the hymn goes on, we sang these words, but on that day when my strength is failing.

And now we're into verse 8, we're into kind of darker territory. And the picture that we have in the hymn is of a person who is no longer fit and who's no longer young and who's no longer energetic and full of health.

But they're a bit weary. It feels like the end is coming. So what are we to do on these days? Well, we're to sing Bless the Lord, O my soul.

And that's the message that comes through in verse 8. God says through Solomon, so if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all.

That's what I underlined in my notes. Let him rejoice in them all. Not just the verse 7s, but also the verse 8. Not just the bright and sunny days, but also the dark and dreary and difficult days.

[ 50 : 26 ] Rejoice in them all. And that's a challenge to rejoice in all the years. But actually, it's the supernatural gift of God to his children.

Because joy is a gift that comes from God. Joy is one of the gifts of the Spirit. And sometimes we know a greater intensity of joy in the bad years than we do in the good years.

because sometimes it's when we're in the depths of hard times that we know how much we need God. And as we come to him, how he helps us.

Time after time after time, as we come to him, Psalm 130 territory, Lord from the depths to the eye, cried, and we come to him, and he helps us.

He gives us joy. And it's joy that takes us through all of the years. So Solomon says to the young man, remember that and rejoice.

[ 51 : 45 ] Rejoice, verse 9, 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.

Literally, it says in verse 9, knowing all these things God will bring you into the judgment. It's that day of judgment.

Now, in verse 9, there's a phrase there which comes quite close to a phrase that I don't like. For those who watch X Factor and these kind of programs, probably the phrase that I dislike more than any phrase is that phrase, follow your heart.

And you get it all the time. You know, there's some person who's standing there with a guitar, and what's your story? They say, oh well, you know, I was working in a bank and I had a steady job and I was a bit bored and I just threw on my, I put my notes in, I've got my guitar and I've got a toothbrush and I travel from one end of the country to another and I'm trying to make it big, I want my name in lights, I want to be a star.

And they said, congratulations, well done, you just follow your heart. You think, don't do that.

Solomon is kind of saying to this young man, you can follow your heart.

[ 53 : 14 ] And you can know joy in life, but there's a condition. And the condition is that before you start following your heart, you give your heart over to God.

The God who is the judge of all the earth, the God that you will stand before on the last day, the God who offers to be your savior and your friend if you trust him.

If you know him, if you've handed over your life, your heart to him, then you can walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes and you can know joy.

can I ask you, especially the young ones, have you given your heart over to God yet?

Have you trusted in Jesus? Have you said sorry for your sin? Have you asked him to come in and be your savior?

[ 54 : 30 ] have you asked him to come in to your life and be your guide? Are you ready to meet the God who you will stand before one day on the day of judgment?

Things to rejoice in. Fourthly, things to remove. Just very briefly, verse 10. Solomon says, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. So what are we to remove? Well, we're to remove, verse 10, vexation, which isn't a word that we use very often. Vexation, what is vexation? Well, one commentator helps us out and he says, vexation is the bitterness provoked by a hard and disappointing world.

So vexation is that bitterness that can take root in our hearts when we experience hard knocks and life feels disappointing in seasons.

And maybe people let us down and people disappoint us. And the pain, the pain from your body that Solomon speaks of in verse 10, is likely the pain that comes from allowing that bitterness, that vexation to take root in our hearts.

[ 56 : 01 ] And the reality is, and we experience this personally, we see this in individuals, there's nothing that robs us of joy more than bitterness.

There's nothing that sucks the joy out of life more than a cynical spirit. And so Solomon says we're to remove that.

Do some heart surgery, says Solomon. If there's vexation in your heart and it's starting to take root and it's starting to influence, cut it out. Remove it.

And someone here might say, well, that's easy for you to say. Yeah, but I've got things in my life that are difficult just now. I've got things to deal with.

I've got things in people who have disappointed me. I'm struggling just now with all kinds of things going on through my head. And that may well be true. But think about Jesus.

[ 57 : 07 ] Think about Jesus. Think about how Jesus felt and what he experienced in his time in this world.

Because remember, he is the God-man. He feels what we feel. So we may be going through seasons in life where we're thinking, well, I can't flourish, I can't develop because, yeah, I'm angry and I'm nursing a wound about this or the next thing.

But there's things going on and people have let me down and I've got all this that's weighing me down. Think not about yourself, think about Jesus. He came to his world only to see how broken it was and to feel how broken it was day by day.

Can you imagine the grief of that? He came to his people, the people that he created, the people that he loved, the people that he desired to save, and we despise them. and rejected him. Think about the disciples of Jesus, those he was closest to.

[ 58 : 26 ] How did they respond to him? They doubted him, consistently. And in this time of greatest need, they deserted him.

and Peter denied him, and Judas betrayed him, and he knew that all this would happen way before time.

And yet we never see vexation. We never see bitterness. We never see cynicism.

We never hear sarcasm. We never observe a huffiness in the actions and the reactions of Jesus.

And you and I are called to be like Jesus. So if there is vexation, bitterness, cynicism in our hearts as believers, we are to repent of that.

[ 59 : 37 ] We are to ask for the strength, for the help of God to remove that, to rip it out, so that we can experience joy again.

There's things to risk in life. There's things to relax about. There's things to rejoice in. There's things to remove and finally, and very briefly, there's things to remember.

And I'm not going to read the verses again. Time is gone. But look at verse 1 to verse 8 of chapter 11, chapter 12, sorry.

There's things to remember. And what we are called to remember here in these verses is we're to remember our creator.

And boys and girls, young people, I want you just to listen to me. I know it's the end of the service, and I know this is the time where maybe we're feeling a bit tired, but listen to me for a moment.

[ 60 : 48 ] Listen to what God has to say to all of us. But this is a word especially for you. God, through Solomon, says to us, remember your creator in the days of your youth.

Remember him, which means that you're to trust him. You're to commit your life to him. You're to believe in him.

You're to follow him. And God says to Solomon, don't leave it till you're 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 or you've got great hair or no hair like me.

Remember him today. We're going to sing in a minute, the sands of time are sinking. And that's the reality.

We think of the the timer, the egg timer thing and the sand is dripping. The sand of time is sinking.

[ 62 : 00 ] The line is getting lower and lower. The day of opportunity, the day where we can trust Jesus is fading. And the most important thing, the most crucial thing that we can do is to remember God.

Yes, you've got exams. they're important. They're not as important as remembering God. Yes, you want to get a job. It's important. It's not as important as remembering God.

You want to get a girlfriend. You want to get a boyfriend. You want to get a husband. You want to get a wife. All these things are things in life. But the most important thing, the most crucial thing, is that we remember God.

We trust Jesus. Everything else, by comparison, is meaningless. You can become a rock and roll star. You can become the best football player in the western isles or the western world.

It means nothing if we don't remember and trust God. God. So today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, but today, whether you're 10 or 20 or 30 or 90 and you're still hearing this, today if you hear his voice, Psalm 95, don't harden your heart.

[ 63 : 41 ] Not again. 2 Corinthians 6, 2, in a favorable time, I listened to you and in a day of salvation, I have helped you. Behold, says God through the apostle Paul, now is the favorable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. And that's the plea. this is the message of the gospel that's deep in the Old Testament that comes through Solomon and it comes particularly to the young.

Remember your creator. Trust Jesus to be your savior in the day of your youth. finish with a quote actually.

Stuart Olya. And it's a quote that will encourage the young and it should probably disturb some of those who are a bit older.

He says, how few there are who come to the Lord in later years. There's some here perhaps who are in later years.

[ 65 : 04 ] There's some who will be watching who are in later years. How few there are who come to the Lord in later years.

To magnify his grace, God saves some at this stage in life, but hardly any. So if you're in later years, hear that tonight.

And respond to the call of the gospel. Trust Jesus whilst there's time. This should not surprise us, says Olya, when we have read such a passage as the one we have just considered.

There is a favored time to seek and find the Lord. There is a favored time to serve him. And that time is youth. So young ones tonight, especially, this is for you.

Do not waste your lives chasing all kinds of rubbish. Don't make your lives meaningless. Don't serve this world.

[ 66 : 23 ] Don't serve yourself. But serve the Lord. Trust Jesus. Remember him. Give him your life.

And glorify him in all that you do. let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us, we pray, to hear your word, to hear the call of the gospel.

And whether we are young or whether we are old, we pray that our hearts would not be hardened, that our souls would not be unresponsive, but that we would trust you, that we would remember you, and that we would give every day of the rest of our lives to glorify you.

For you alone are worthy. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll sing to finish the words on the screen. Sorry, I went on a bit long there at the end. We kind of went off script.

694 in the hymn book, The Sands of Time Are Sinking. The Sands of Time Are Sinking The dawn of heaven breaks The sunNING He is the fountain, the deep sweet breath of love.

[ 68 : 32 ] The streams on earth are tasted, more deep I'll drink above. There to an ocean fullness His mercy doth expand.

And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land. With mercy and with judgment I will guide thee all.

And I, the juice of sorrow, were lustered by His love. I'll bless the land that guided, I'll bless the heart that plowed.

With throned where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land. I bless the love of heaven, give storm and wind untide.

But like a weary traveler that he hath on his kind. Amid the shades of evening, rising spikes, lingering star.

[ 70 : 05 ] I hear the glory dawning in Emmanuel's land. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forevermore.

Amen