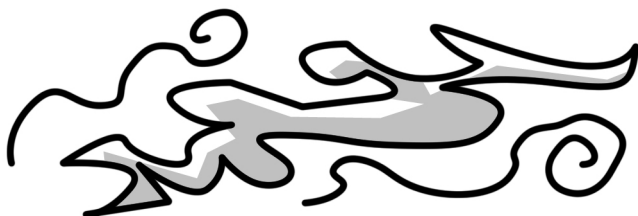


The Way of the Wind



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ecclesiastes 11.*

Memory Text: “As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes all things” (*Ecclesiastes 11:5, NKJV*).

The ancient Greeks believed in fate; your destiny was decided beforehand by the gods, and that was it. This ideal was expressed in Homer's *Iliad*, when the great Trojan warrior Hector says to his wife (who had been begging him not to go back to battle, fearing that he would surely die), “No man will hurl me down to Death, against my fate. And fate? No man alive has escaped it, neither brave man nor coward.”—*Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 212.

That's not, however, the biblical position. We are not objects of cold fate; we have no predetermined destiny, except one: eternal life with Jesus Christ (*Eph. 1:1-11*). God's plan was for all of us to find salvation in Jesus: That's why Jesus' death was for the whole world, with no one left out.

That we all aren't saved shows that our fate isn't sealed beforehand. Our future is open. We have choices to make, choices that will determine our destiny. This week we look at more of Solomon's wisdom regarding the choices left us as free beings who are sometimes swept up in events beyond our control. Maybe the events aren't in our hands, but our responses often are.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 24.*

Casting Your Bread

Ecclesiastes 11:1 has been speculated upon for many long centuries now. What does the phrase “Cast your bread upon the waters” mean? Various interpretations have been offered; the traditional one says that this is dealing with the question of charity. “He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor” (*Prov. 22:9*). “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” (*Isa. 58:7*). This makes a great deal of sense, especially considering the importance the Old Testament puts on helping the poor and the needy; it would seem strange, then, that a whole book dealing with practical wisdom would not say something about such an important teaching.

Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11. What’s the message in those texts and how do they seem to be saying, in another way, the message of Ecclesiastes 11:1?

A lot of speculation has gone into Ecclesiastes 11:2, as well. What are the meanings of the two numbers there? If we keep it in the immediate context of the verse before it, and assume that it is talking about charity, the emphasis seems to be on being generous in what we give. There is so much need and want out there; we all should do our share, to whatever degree we can, for who knows what evil shall come. That is, who knows what kind of trouble and suffering will arise; therefore, we should be ready to help when the opportunity arises.

Whatever the exact meaning of these phrases, the principle certainly is a Christian principle: that of giving of ourselves in order to help others who might be suffering from the evil that is upon the earth. According to the Bible, we are admonished to help others, especially those who are in need.

What’s your attitude toward those who are needier than you? How willing are you to share whatever you have, no matter how meager, with those less fortunate?

Clouds, Rain—and Fate

There are about as many different interpretations of Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4 as there are interpreters. If we read it just for what it says, Solomon is talking about the forces of nature: If a cloud gets full of rain, it pours out on the earth; if a tree falls, then where it falls is where it rests. What's the point?

What is found in verse 4 that could help us better understand what is going on in verse 3?

Verse 3 is talking about rain; sometimes, too, in a rainstorm there is wind, and sometimes that wind knocks over trees. All these are forces much greater and stronger than human beings are. If we today are often at the mercy of nature, how much more so back then? Solomon's point, then, could be about how we deal with events and things that, like nature, are beyond our control. How do we respond? Do we just stand there and watch, allowing ourselves to be dominated by them; or do we, trusting in God and in His love for us, seek to be faithful to our tasks and obligations despite things that we cannot control?

What are some things that we as human beings all face that are, indeed, totally beyond our control?

Though there are forces greater than us, nothing in this world is greater than God, who upholds all things by His power (*Heb. 1:3*). None of the forces you mentioned in your answer above were beyond the power of God. Thus, regardless of events that overtake us, it's so important to remember that over and beyond them all is God, our Creator, who loves and who cares about us. We are not left to blind chance or to cold fate. Storms may come, the wind may blow, and there seems to be little, if anything, we can do about these events. What we can do, however, is remain faithful to God amid whatever happens.

Read Matthew 6:25-34. What is Jesus saying here that fits in with the lesson for today? More important, what's He saying here that could give you hope to trust in God's love and care for you, regardless of your situation?

The Way of the Wind

“As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes all things” (*Eccles. 11:5, NKJV*).

Considering the interpretation we gave to Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4, this next verse fits right in. As human beings, we just don’t know so many things. Everything—from the way of the wind (that word for “wind” is also the same word for “Spirit,” which could add a whole new dimension to the meaning of the text) to some basic aspects of the physical world, including our own development in the womb—is filled with awe and mystery. Even today, with all we know about the growth of a fetus, there is still so much that is beyond our knowledge.

Here, then, is a point worth remembering: If so much about God’s work in the physical world is far beyond our understanding, how much more so His work of salvation and redemption? We can see in nature the depths of God’s creative power and genius; the simplest things are filled with mysteries that science cannot explain. Any wonder, then, that there would be other aspects of God’s work of salvation that are far beyond our understanding, as well? (*See Rom. 11:33-36.*)

Read Isaiah 55:6-13. What is the message there? What hope is found in there for us? How does it relate to what we’ve read in Ecclesiastes 11:5?

And though God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, we can know at least that His thoughts to us are “thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (*Jer. 29:11*). And that expected end is eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth, a life without suffering, Satan, loss, and death. That’s the expected end, the promised end, the end that Jesus had in mind for each of us when He died on the cross.

Make a list of the ways in which you have seen that God’s thoughts toward you are, indeed, thoughts of peace and not of evil. Take time to praise and thank Him for what He has done for you.

Light and Darkness

All through the Bible we see the image of light and darkness contrasted with each other, the idea of light being good and darkness being bad.

Look up the following texts. What do we learn from them about the contrast between light and darkness? *Isa. 5:20, Luke 11:34, Acts 26:18, Rom. 13:12, Eph. 5:8, 1 Thess. 5:5, 1 Pet. 2:9, 1 John 1:5.*

Darkness isn't something in and of itself as much as it is the absence of something, in this case light. If you stood in a totally dark room and were asked "What do you see?" you would reply "Nothing," or you would say "I see total darkness." They are the same thing.

With these thoughts in mind, read Ecclesiastes 11:7, 8. What's the message Solomon is giving here?

God is the Giver of light, of truth, of goodness, of joy, and hope. Darkness is the absence of these things, and in darkness come lies, evil, suffering, and despair. Solomon is saying that whatever ways God has blessed your life, there will always be days of darkness, days of pain, of suffering and despair. No one escapes them. Perhaps his message simply is, Don't get complacent. Things might be going well today, but who knows what tomorrow will bring? Not that we should worry but only that we should not take any of the blessings we get from God for granted. We should be praising God and thanking God from a grateful heart for all the good things we have, for who knows what evil will arise?

In your own experience, what has made the difference between your days of light and days of darkness? What caused the days of darkness? What practical things can you do in order to help yourself live better in the light that comes from God?

Days of Thy Youth

Read Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10. What is Solomon saying here? What kind of tension, or contrast, do you see in these verses?

Is God taking away with one hand what He offers to us with another? Have a good time, but just remember that God's going to judge you for it in the end. Is that what this text is saying? An ancient Rabbi, commenting on this verse, said it's like a child being told "You might as well sin now, because you are going to be punished for everything anyhow."

Of course, as the rabbi knew, that's not the point of the text. The point, instead, seems to be that life is a gift from God, and because it is from God, it is something good. We were created to enjoy our lives, to enjoy our bodies, to enjoy the things that God made. In youth especially, when we have energy, power, ambition, and hope, we are to enjoy ourselves.

But *enjoyment* is a relative word. We can "enjoy" ourselves through "the pleasures of sin for a season" (*Heb. 11:25*), or we can enjoy ourselves in the Lord; that is, we can enjoy the gifts that God has given us in the way that He intends for us to enjoy them. So often young people, so full of energy and passion, easily can be led astray to use these gifts from God in a way that will bring ruin on them now (*see Proverbs 7*), not to mention that one day they will have to answer to God in judgment for their actions.

How does Ecclesiastes 11:10 help us keep what he's saying in verse 9 in perspective?

Again, if we keep in mind all of Scripture, what Solomon is saying is, enjoy the gifts that God has given you, but enjoy them as blessings, not as sin and evil, and just remember to keep it all in perspective, because one day your childhood and youth, even your life itself, will be over, and then you will have to answer for all that you have done.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 272; vol. 6, pp. 271, 272; *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 178–187.

“Remember that you will never reach a higher standard than you yourself set. Then set your mark high, and step by step, even though it be by painful effort, by self-denial and sacrifice, ascend the whole length of the ladder of progress. Let nothing hinder you. Fate has not woven its meshes about any human being so firmly that he need remain helpless and in uncertainty. Opposing circumstances should create a firm determination to overcome them. The breaking down of one barrier will give greater ability and courage to go forward. Press with determination in the right direction, and circumstances will be your helpers, not your hindrances.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 331, 332.

“Some men have no firmness of character. They are like a ball of putty and can be pressed into any conceivable shape. They are of no definite form and consistency, and are of no practical use in the world. This weakness, indecision, and inefficiency must be overcome. There is an indomitableness about true Christian character which cannot be molded or subdued by adverse circumstances. Men must have moral backbone, an integrity which cannot be flattered, bribed, or terrified.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 297.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is your church doing to help those who are in dire need? What more can you do to help?
- ❷ As a class, talk about some events in your own community, or even nation, that are out of your control, and yet that affect all of you. How have you each responded to these events? How has the church responded? What can you do to help others learn to cope better with things that they can’t control?
- ❸ George Bernard Shaw once quipped, “Youth is wasted on the young.” What can you do as a class to help your young people, so full of energy, vigor, and passion, to avoid making decisions that will negatively impact them for the rest of their lives? What practical things can you do to help steer them in the right direction?

The Promise-Keeping God

by Jeane Zachary

Nina and her husband operate a small business in India. One day some people came by giving away pamphlets. Nina requested one and glanced at it. She realized that the pamphlet was a religious tract.

“I have many questions about Jesus,” Nina told the woman who gave her the tract. The woman invited Nina to ask her questions, then she answered them. “I would like to learn more about Jesus,” Nina said. “I want to know why He is called God.”

The visitor invited Nina to attend an evening Bible study the next night. Nina went to the meeting and was relieved when her husband did not ask her where she had gone. But the next Bible study ran longer, and Nina was late getting home. Her husband met her at the door, angry that she had not told him where she was going. She continued attending the Bible studies, though her husband warned her never to take their children to Christian meetings.

The seventh Bible study dealt with returning tithe to the Lord. Nina listened carefully. She and her husband were having some financial problems, and two friends had failed to return money they had borrowed several years before.

The concept of testing the Lord reminded Nina of the overdue loans. That night she prayed, “Lord, You know that my family urgently needs money. If our friends return the money that they borrowed, I will return the tithe to You.” Nina prayed this prayer on Thursday evening. On Friday she received five thousand rupees (about US\$115); one loan was paid in full. The next day Nina placed five hundred rupees in the offering plate. During the next week the other loan was paid in full, and the following Sabbath she placed two hundred rupees in the offering.

“Jesus Christ is a good God,” Nina says. “He keeps His promises. As long as I live, I will follow Jesus and return a faithful tithe to the Lord.” Nina has been baptized and continues to faithfully return a tithe of her business income. Since she first began returning tithe, she reports that her business has doubled.

Nina’s husband is beginning to understand what Nina has discovered. He has told her, “There is power in your God.” Nina prays that her husband will see more of the power of Jesus and give his heart to the Lord as she has.

Our tithes support church workers around the world; our Mission offerings support the many ministries that lead people such as Nina to the feet of Jesus.

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