

“Reasonable Risks”  
Ecclesiastes 11:3-6  
(Preached at Trinity, February 18, 2024)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 1-2** Solomon pressed two Divine commands.  
**Verse 1** – “Cast your bread”  
**Verse 2** – “Divide or give your portion”
  2. The details of the verses are difficult to comprehend. We always have to remember, even when we read passages that are difficult passages, they are not beyond our comprehension and are not without God's sovereign design. He has given His Word to us for our benefit. What did Solomon mean by casting bread and then finding it after many days? What did he mean by giving a portion to seven or eight? The overall emphasis is on giving and generosity. I applied it to the importance of benevolence and to diligence in our Kingdom labors.
  3. As we continue with **Verses 3-6** we find a continuation of the context of **Verses 1-2** as well as an application to a broader context. Solomon is speaking on the topic of sowing and reaping.  
In these verses Solomon pictures a farmer standing in his field watching the weather and the uncertainties of life and he never actually sows his field. It portrays the actions of a fool. The one who looks at the clouds and never sows will never reap.
  4. In these verses we learn several words of wisdom to keep us pressing on in due diligence.
- I. We need to be reasonable risk takers.
- A. **Verse 3** – illustrates stormy conditions.
    1. The clouds are full and floods threaten. Perhaps it will flood. Perhaps it will be even worse tomorrow. The farmer stays inside and waits.
    2. Likewise, there is the threat of windy conditions. Trees may be blown over. There is no way to predict what will happen. Will the tree fall towards the north or to the south? It might be best not to sow today.
    3. And to further illustrate this farmer's lack of diligence, if the tree falls, it might be best to let it lay where it falls.
  - B. It is a picture of sloth. Solomon spoke of such a one in Proverbs.  
**Proverbs 6:9-11 NAU** - "How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? <sup>10</sup> "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest"-- <sup>11</sup> Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man."  
**Proverbs 24:30-34 NAU** - "I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, <sup>31</sup> And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down. <sup>32</sup> When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction. <sup>33</sup> "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest," <sup>34</sup> Then your poverty will come as a robber And your want like an armed man."

**Proverbs 22:13 NAU** - "The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside; I will be killed in the streets!"

- C. It also paints a picture of a person frozen in fear. Life is full of the unexpected. There is always the unknown—unknown dangers, unknown risks.

**Ecclesiastes 11:2** - "for you do not know what misfortune may occur"

**Ecclesiastes 11:5 NAU** - "Just as you do not know the path of the wind"

**Ecclesiastes 11:5 NAU** - "so you do not know the activity of God"

- a. We aren't supposed to be foolhardy or careless. But we will never succeed in life without taking risks. How do you know if you'll make a passing grade in this class? You won't know unless you enter the class.
- b. People refuse to get married, have children, accept a promotion. It's too risky.
- c. It is usually generational. Children reflect the fears of their parents. Don't swing too high. Don't ride too fast. Children are taught to avoid any form of risk-taking and it carries over to adulthood.
- d. There are consequences to our actions. It is easier to blame others for our circumstances. Excuses are much easier than bold action.  
The report of the spies sent in by Moses is instructive for us.  
Ten of the spies spoke from fear and doubt. They said it wasn't worth the risk.

**Numbers 13:31-33 NAU** - "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." <sup>32</sup> So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of *great* size. <sup>33</sup> "There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."  
Joshua and Caleb were of a different heart. They saw the same things but knew they could trust God to prevail.

**Numbers 14:7-9 NAU** - "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup> "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us-- a land which flows with milk and honey. <sup>9</sup> "Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."

- e. Fear keeps people from following Christ. What will others think. Fear keeps people from sharing the Gospel. What if I say the wrong thing? What if they reject my words?

**Revelation 21:8 NAU** - "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

- f. People procrastinate. Perhaps tomorrow will be more opportune time. Perhaps the weather will be better. They are fair weather Christians.

- D. Solomon is saying the person who doesn't give himself to sowing cannot expect the blessings of a harvest.

**Ecclesiastes 11:4 NAU** - "He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap."

II. We need to trust the good Providence of God.

- A. It takes faith for a farmer to sow his field.

1. Who knows if it will rain?
2. Who knows if an early frost will destroy the crop?
3. What about wildfires, tornados and hurricanes? What about war?

The Book of Job tells of such unexpected events.

**Job 1:14-17 NAU** - "a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>16</sup>

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>17</sup>

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

4. How can we predict these unexpected events. The answer is simple. We can't.

**Ecclesiastes 11:5 NAU** - "Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things."

5. The cloud and the fallen tree in **Verse 4** describe God's acts of Divine Providence. We can't control the clouds, nor the tree blown over by a storm. We cannot know what God is doing and we cannot stop it. So what are we to do? How are we to live? We are to take action. We are to sow our seed.

**Ecclesiastes 11:6 NAU** - "Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good."

6. There is a drought in the land. One farmer sows his seed looking to God to send the rains. The other sees the parched soil and doesn't sow. Which one has the greater possibility of reaping a harvest?

The secular proverb bears some truth – "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

- B. We are to trust God and devote ourselves to serving Him. We must enter the future with all due diligence.

1. Yes, the future is full of unknowns. There are many dangers.

**Ecclesiastes 11:2 NAU** - "you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth."

2. We are to give all diligence in our plans. We are to prepare for our vocation. We are to plan to get married, have children.

3. I always counsel young people, “Have a plan and a backup.” We need to make bold plans. Fear of failure cripples and stunts. This is true in all of life. We must be willing to take reasonable risks.
4. What are reasonable risks? It is the recognition that in our fallen world there are dangers everywhere. But in the midst of danger God commands us to take dominion over the earth. We must labor hard. We must be willing to battle the obstacles.
  - a. We must pray for God’s wisdom and we must exercise sound judgment. It probably would not be the wisest thing to bring your wife and children to the Alaskan wilderness during the Klondike or Yukon gold rush in the 1890’s. Thousands rushed into the area with the prospect of finding gold. They were referred to as stampeders. Many died from exposure, disease, and violence.
  - b. At the same time, we must understand that no venture is free from risks. We must make bold plans trust our great God. American missionary William Carey was stirred by the lack of engagement by most Christians in the spread of the Gospel. In 1792 he wrote:
 

“Multitudes sit at ease and give themselves no concern about the far greater part of their fellow-sinners, who to this day are lost in ignorance and idolatry.”<sup>1</sup>

Risks are a part of Gospel work. Carey famously said, “Expect great things from God, Attempt great things for God.”

C. God calls us to trust Him—today.

1. Tomorrow remains a mystery. We need to guard against delaying our service.
 

**Luke 9:57-62 NAU** - "As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." <sup>59</sup> And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup> But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup> Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." <sup>62</sup> But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

  - a. It is a present imperative –  
Literally - “Follow Me now and keep on following Me”
  - b. Following Christ means obeying His commands without reservation, without question. No man may set conditions on following Christ. An unwilling mind will always make excuse.

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<sup>1</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792), 8.

Matthew Henry – “Many are hindered *from* and *in* the way of serious godliness, by an over-concern for their families and relations; these lawful things undo us all, and our duty to God is neglected, and postponed.”<sup>2</sup>

2. We live by faith today. I’ve had far too many come to me boasting of how much they’ll serve God later—after they graduate, after the kids are grown, after they retire.
3. God doesn’t call you to serve Him at some point in the future. He calls you to serve Him today.

**Conclusion:**

1. The farmer in this passage is just watching and waiting, and not farming. He’s not sowing his field. He is frozen in procrastination. He keeps waiting for better conditions with fewer risks.
2. We are called to action. Yes, there are risks and dangers, but we are called to live. We are called to labor. There are no guarantees in life. We are called to wisely move forward. May God grant us to be Kingdom minded, Christ honoring. May we march forth fearlessly.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1651.