

## 12. The Way of the Wind

**Biblical material:** Ecclesiastes 11.

### Quotes

- Everybody hurts, sometimes. *R.E.M.*
- To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else. *Emily Dickinson*
- Life is not a spectacle or a feast; it is a predicament. *George Santayana*
- I've looked at life from both sides now  
From win and lose and still somehow  
It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all. *Joni Mitchell*

### Questions

Why are we told not to worry? If life is so unpredictable, what does this say about an all-powerful God? Is it really true that any decision is better than no decision at all? Just because we do not understand “the way of the wind,” should we give up the attempt to understand? What dangers are there in not looking for understanding? What does this say about God?

### Discussion

Solomon summarizes his rather varied conclusions regarding life and how to live it. Clearly he speaks from a perspective that is hardly “do as I did.” This is more “do as I say, because I tended not to follow my own advice”! His first point relates to generosity, and an unselfish attitude. No doubt he now recognizes that he self-referenced lifestyle did not help himself, or others.

He then moves on to the inevitability of life, and instead of becoming fatalistic, urges positive activity. Often the fact that life happens without much input from us is used as an argument for passivity, since “it doesn't matter what I do.” But Solomon argues the opposite—since you can't affect where the tree falls, do not worry overmuch. Nothing in life is certain, so don't worry about the weather—or you may wait a very long time, (especially waiting for a fine day in England in winter...)

Since you do not know how many years you will have, enjoy them all, says Solomon. This is not some pleasure-seeking philosophy, rather an enjoyment of the time we have, making the best of the limited time we recognize that is ours. Consequently, he tells us to “banish anxiety from your heart” (verse 10 NIV), because fretting over anything doesn't help. As Jesus also pointed out, worrying doesn't extend life—and as medical science tells us, anxiety has a tendency to shorten the few years we have anyway...

For there is a judgment too—the decision-making process that determines lives rightly lived, or otherwise. In many ways, Solomon gets closest to truth in affirming the blending of judgment and enjoyment—rightly choosing what brings true joy.

A Rabbinic saying reminds us: “Don't worry about tomorrow's worries. You do not know what a day will bring forth. Perhaps tomorrow you will not exist, so you will have been worrying about what for you may never exist”. Why worry over possibilities? Our frail human minds are often overwhelmed by what may come. We are quite able to imagine the very worst, and then live as if it has already happened. But this too negates our confidence in a trustworthy God. He does not promise ease and still waters, but he does promise to be with us on the way.

“So do not be anxious about tomorrow, tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own” (Matt. 6:34, NEB). We need to take Jesus’ words seriously, and live them. We may not know “the way of the wind,” but we know our loving and righteous God. It is enough!

### **Comment**

Instead of beginning the conclusion in chapter 12, some commentators suggest that the conclusion really begins in 11:7: “Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.” (NIV). At least this is a rather more positive point of departure, a recognition that despite all the problems of life, it can still be sweet, in the same way as we as children of light enjoy the warming rays of the sun.

Remembering Solomon’s own experience makes a reading of verse 9 that much more poignant: “Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy 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 to judgment.” (NIV). In other words, life is meant to be lived, very positively, but thought is vital—what is of real and lasting value. All too often we are satisfied with that which does not satisfy, and which will be judged as empty and meaningless by God in the end...

Solomon’s advice is at least *practical*, and not just an exercise in vague philosophy. He is writing a warning, a testimony to a life that was not spent too wisely by the wisest man. The irony is obvious, and this could not have been an easy book to write, knowing that down the generations his readers would be wondering why he did not put these principles into practice throughout his life. His call is not to vain conjectures about life, but to truly and definitively *live*, recognizing God as the source, the sustainer, and the object of our lives under the sun.

“Instead of asking yourself whether you believe or no, ask yourself whether you have this day done one thing because He said *Do it*, or once abstained because He said, *Do not do it*. It is surely absurd to say you believe or even want to believe in Him, if you do not do anything He tells you.” *George Macdonald*

### **Ellen White Comments**

Christ might have opened to men the deepest truths of science. He might have unlocked mysteries which have required many centuries of toil and study to penetrate. He might have made suggestions in scientific lines that would have afforded food for thought and stimulus for invention to the close of time. But He did not do this. He said nothing to gratify curiosity, or to satisfy man’s ambition by opening doors to worldly greatness. In all His teaching, Christ brought the mind of man in contact with the Infinite Mind...

Christ did not deal in abstract theories, but in that which is essential to the development of character, that which will enlarge man’s capacity for knowing God, and increase his efficiency to do good. He spoke to men of those truths that relate to the conduct of life, and that take hold upon eternity. {COL 22-3}

Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. More and more we enter into fellowship with the heavenly world, and we have continually increasing power to receive the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of eternity. {COL 355}

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