

Don't Waste Your Life

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Preacher: Andy Robertson

[0 : 00] Thank you. Thank you, folks, for having me here tonight. If you could get your Bibles open to that passage that Corrie read to us, Ecclesiastes chapter 11, looking at verse one all the way through to chapter 12 verse 8. Let me just give you a bit of context.

You might be new to church, you might never have read the book of Ecclesiastes before, and that might seem like quite an odd reading as we looked at it. This is what's known as a wisdom book in the Bible. That means that it is written to teach God's people how to live wisely. And it's written by a guy with the slightly cool and enigmatic name of the preacher. And the preacher in Ecclesiastes wants us to get wise by learning to get real.

He wants us to get real about the difficulties that we will face in life. He wants us to get real about the fact that everything you are working for now will fade out. He wants us to get real about the fact that every single one of us is going to die. At the beginning of the book and right at the end, he has his catchphrase, you can see it there, in verse 8, vanity of vanities says the preacher, all is vanity. Now that might sound like a bit of a downer. I'm glad that we sang that Psalm there actually because that word vanity in the original Hebrew language is maybe not the best translation. Vanity means something more like breath, like we sang in Psalm 39. So he ends by, he begins and he ends his wisdom by saying a breath, a breath, everything is just a breath. If you were to step outside and it's freezing cold, you know those moments where you just see your breath in the icy air just for a brief moment. Well, the preacher in Ecclesiastes would say that's your life, that's your achievements, that's everything that you've been working for. All of it is just a breath. Now he tells us that not so that we will get down or depressed, but so that we will realize something key about our lives. And that key truth is that we are not in charge. We are not the boss. We need to see how small we are to realize how much of a breath life is so that we can learn something so important for making the most of life. So that we can learn to put all our hope, all our trust on the majestic, infinite, great and good God who does control our lives. See, if we think about times where we have been foolish, often folly is done when we blow ourselves up and shrink God down. And so the preacher in Ecclesiastes wants to do the opposite. He wants to shrink us down, show us who we really are, and in doing so, magnify who God is.

Von Roberts, a minister from down south, he sums up the message of Ecclesiastes well, sums it up with five words, face facts and fear God. That's what this whole book is about, face facts, get real about what life is like in this broken world, but don't use that to despair, use it to fear God, to trust God, to hold him in reverence and in awe.

Now, in those chapters that we just read that Corey read to us, these are the closing words of the preacher. And I want us to think about these words, to picture them as the words of an old man on his deathbed trying to impart wisdom to a younger man and encouraging him, make the most of your life, this mere breath of existence, make the most of it. This is what we need to think about if we are to make the most of the time that we have. So these are the wise words of a wise teacher, but before we look at them, I want to begin by quoting to you from another wise teacher, probably one of the wisest teachers outside of the Bible, Gandalf the Grey. In the Lord of the Rings films, Frodo is speaking to Gandalf about how he wished he never had this task of having to destroy this evil ring, and Gandalf responds by saying to him, so do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what we are going to do with the time that has been given to us. What are you going to do with the time that has been given to you? We don't know how long that time will be, but what are we going to do with our lives? That is what the preacher is wanting to ask this young man, what he's wanting to ask all of us in

[5 : 35] Ecclesiastes 11 and 12, what will you do with the time God has given to you? And if we really are to use that time to its fullest, the preacher would say that we must, we must know, we

must remember who God is. And so in this chapter, he tells us three truths about life and how knowing God rightly should affect our approach to them. So here's what they are, three points.

This is this, life is unpredictable, so take risks remembering God's in control. Secondly, life is good, so enjoy it when you can remembering God is your judge. And thirdly, life is brief, so accept your mortality, remembering God is your creator. Let's work through those three points. Firstly, life is unpredictable, so take risks remembering God is in control.

Look at how he begins verse one. Speaking to this young man, he says, cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. It's confusing, isn't it? But even if you can't understand the details of what he is saying there, it sounds to me like he's talking about feeding some ducks, but even if you can't understand the details, you could probably get the gist of it. What he is saying is make sure in life you make risky investments. Cast your bread out on the waters. Probably that is a reference to sea trading at this time. So you send out all your produce on a ship, a very risky thing to do back then.

Preacher says do it. In fact, don't just give a portion to one risky venture, he says give to seven or eight. Verse two is probably similar to a proverb we have in English. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Don't make one investment, make loads. Who knows? Who knows what disasters are on the horizon? Why should you do this? Because you've got no control over your life. You have no control over life, just like you have no control over nature.

Verse three, 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 it will lie. These are things that happen that you cannot predict or control. So don't be the kind of person who is so overly cautious in life, always waiting for the right time to do something that you don't actually do anything. That's his point. Verse four, I love these verses. Really behind these verses, verse 46, are behind a lot of what we, why we wanted to do a church plan in Charleston.

[8 : 32] Ecclesiastes 11, verse four, he who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the cloud will not reap. 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 in the morning. Sow your seed and in evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper this or that or whether both alike will be good. Here's what good farmers are going to do. They are not just going to spend all their time waiting for just the right climate to sow their seed. Good farmers just going to get on and do it, and the fact that he has no control over the weather.

And this is the preacher's point with how we view life. There are things that we can't control about life, things that we can't even understand. And he uses the example here of how a baby is formed in the womb and given life this amazing, miraculous event. Even with all our technology today, we can't help but see it and think, wow, what a miracle.

He says, look, it's not our doing, but we do have a part in it. But it's God who forms that child, the maker. He is the one who dictates when the rain will pour, when the trees will fall, and how we will be formed. He is in control of life, not us. So being wise with the time that we have means learning to let go and to take risks that trust in God. Stop standing, staring at the clouds, and start living. Now, that doesn't mean start living for yourself. It means letting go of thinking that you can control it all, and you can have it all, and you can be it all. Let go of trying to be God and let God be God. It's so important, so wise to plan in life. Don't mishear this. We've got to plan. Proverbs has much to say about this, but Proverbs 19 verse 22 also says this, many are the plans and the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. He's in charge, and often his plans don't match what our plans will be. And so sometimes we just have to take risks. Now, don't mishear this. Not stupid risks. It's not like getting all your money and going down to the bookies and putting it on a horse, but wise risks. That means risks that honor God and trust Him with our choices. And part of that has to be seen in how generous we are, and being willing to give stuff away, being willing to give our time away, being willing to give our time for people. Don't hold on too tightly to the things of this world. We are just passing through it. Everything's just a breath. For some of us, there may be many decisions, and we are just being way too cautious about them. And the reason we are being cautious is not because we are being wise, it's because we're trying to control the outcome rather than give it to God. Maybe, I don't know, many of you here tonight, maybe for some of you, the most important risk you need to take tonight is to follow

Jesus, to surrender the control of your life over to Him and say, Jesus, I trust you no matter what. Let me say that is a very risky thing to do, and you could lose a lot doing that. But it's so worth it.

Here's the big way, though, I think we should apply this wisdom, not just with the choices that we make in life, but we should think about this in terms of the work that we do for Jesus and His kingdom. See, the greatest gift we have is Jesus, and it's the labor that we do for Him that matters the most. And by the way, it's really interesting, you know, when Jesus talks about kingdom work, this is what He says in Matthew 4, verse 26. He says, That's quite similar to Ecclesiastes 11, 4 and 6.

And it's the same principle, right, when we tell others about Jesus, it works, even if we don't know how. Sometimes it produces harvest, sometimes it does nothing. Sometimes it produces a wonderful response, sometimes it produces hostility. But at the end of the day, it's not down to us, it's down to God's sovereignty. So whilst we need to be wise in engaging with others, we need to recognize that there's a danger we can spend so much time waiting for the right moment to share Jesus that we never actually share Jesus. Sometimes we just need to get out and sow the gospel seed. That's all Jesus calls us to do. We're the soars, we're not the growers. And so let me ask you, as I ask myself, as we think about taking risks, what wise risks are you taking for Jesus? I think with my generation, this may be a generalization, but I think one of the big worries might be in terms of the church is that many of us make choices based on how comfortable we can make our life, rather than on what benefits Christ and His kingdom. I want to live in this place, I want this size house, I want this school, and that's what matters. And the kingdom expansion of Christ is something we want to applaud, but from a distance. Our life is not about being comfortable.

[14:59] And woe to us if we do that at the expense of others coming to know the eternal salvation of Jesus. We want to be careful, but our time is too short to spend it staring at the clouds.

And so the preacher says to this young man, make sure you take wise risks, risks that acknowledge God is in control. Life is unpredictable, so take risks remembering God is in control.

Here's the second thing he says, life is good, so enjoy it when you can, remembering God is your judge. Have a look at verse 7. Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 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 just a breath.

And so what's life like for the preacher? He says it is like a warm, basking in the sun. It's great yesterday at the wedding just to have the sun beating down on us. It feels good, especially when you're from Scotland. It's a gift from God. Enjoy that then, enjoy life as a gift. When the times are good, enjoy them. But look, the preacher's not naive, he's lived life to the full. He knows that this world is broken and that life won't always be good. There will be many days of darkness amidst the light. Some of you might feel that that is a day you are in. Remember the maker and judge of all things. Nothing is pointless with him. When times are dark, the preacher would say in something like Ecclesiastes 3, look to the one who has time in his hands. But when times are good, make sure you enjoy it. Verse 9, rejoice, oh 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 in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. When life is good, enjoy it, make the most of it. And if you have a good understanding of who God is, then you should be able to enjoy the good that God gives. And everything good is a gift from

Him, is it not? See if you follow Jesus, you should be able to enjoy the things of this world more, not less. Because the problem we have often is that we take the things of this world according to Paul and Romans 1, we take them, the created things, and we put them in the place of the Creator. We worship them. But if we worship God, we're not worshiping the gifts, we're worshiping the giver of the gifts. And therefore we can enjoy the gifts more. See, you don't make too much of this world and you don't make too little of it.

[18:01] You realize that it's all passing away, but it's not your reason for living. And if you have Christ, you have everything. That's why the apostle Peter says this about what it's like to follow Jesus. In 1 Peter 1 verse 8, he says, though you have not seen Jesus, you love Him, though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible. He's the source of joy. And when He's number one, you can enjoy His creation. And so it's so good to climb Arthur's seat and enjoy it, to enjoy the sunshine or the rain, to enjoy the hills and the mountains, go out and have a nice meal, have a burger, cook for somebody, read some good books, listen to great pieces of music like Beethoven or Iron Maiden. Enjoy football, enjoy sport, enjoy travel, celebrate birthdays, sing and write songs, eat toffee fudgy, wudgy ice cream. Enjoy a bacon roll and praise God that we live in the new covenant because so many good food comes from pigs. As long as

we're not indulging these things over God, a monk who locks himself away in a room, away from the world, is not being spiritual. But unbiblical might even say ungrateful. Give God the glory and the thanks for all the good you have. Enjoying the world that God has made shows that we really grasp the goodness of the God that we say we love. He is a very generous

Father. Let me tell you something. When I get my boys a gift for Christmas time and my girl as well, she's only two, so she's quite happy just with getting wrapping paper. But when I give the boys a gift, here's what I want to see them do with that gift. I want to see them enjoy it. Here's what I don't want to see them do, throw it away. Nor do I want to see them love the gift more than they would love me. But give them the gift so they can enjoy it. God's a far better Father, infinitely better than us. What good things do you have that you can give thanks to Him for now? And how can you enjoy them more?

You must remember that joy is not the devil's realm. This is God's. Maybe you feel that there isn't much in your life. Maybe family have gone. Maybe you're isolated and you're just struggling. Maybe you're one of these people who's in the days of darkness that the preacher speaks of. Please note that God is still a good Father. He has not been less generous because what is the greatest gift that the God of the universe could give to you? Was it not His own Son? And if we have Him, we do have everything. Think on who He is. Enjoy these smaller things. But do so, the preacher says, mindful that God is going to bring everything into judgment. That's what he says at the end of verse 9. Now, that sounds like he's kind of putting a bit of a downer on our joy there. I don't think so. That's not what he's doing at all. He's commending joy. The truth about God being our judge is not there to ruin our joy but to direct our joy because God knows how to best live in His world. And so when we listen to Him, when we obey Him, that's a path of joy. Share His joy. You know, what is it that thrilled Jesus the most? What thrilled Jesus the most in the Gospels? The few times that it talks about Him being, in some cases, overwhelmed with joy were the moments when lost sinners returned to God, to be found and to be forgiven. That gave Him such joy. And so for us, enjoy in life. Again, it involves sharing this gospel.

Give everything to Him. Remove vexation from your heart, says the preacher in verse 10. Jesus said something similar. He said, don't worry about tomorrow, what you eat or what you drink, but seek first the kingdom of God and these things will be sorted. Don't spend your life constantly worrying so that you're missing the good that has already been placed in front of you. Do you know what I think the preacher is trying to do here with this wisdom? Is encourage this young man, encourage us to have a spirit of thankfulness. Often thankfulness is the remedy to so much of our anxiety. What has God given me? Don't miss it. Enjoy it. Life is unpredictable, so take risks remembering God is in control. Life is good, so enjoy it when you can. Remembering God is your judge. Thirdly, finally, life is brief, so accept your mortality. Remembering God is your creator. Here's his final words to the young man that he is speaking to. Remember your creator. He's saying, don't be deluded young man, that you are somehow going to live forever. Don't be a fool, you are not the king of this world. And the preacher's emphasis here on God being the creator, which is an emphasis he has all throughout Ecclesiastes, is to remind us that we are creatures. He is the one we answer to. There's a great book in Ecclesiastes by a minister called [24 : 15] David Gibson. He says in that book that we need to realize that when it comes to the story of our lives, we are not the main author. Remember your creator. Remember your creator before it's too late. Remember who he is and who you are in relation to him. This is a message to everyone, but this is especially a message to the young here. I think there's a tendency when you're young, and I'll let you guys define what young is. There's a tendency when you're young to think you're invincible, that you've got your whole life ahead of you to do what you want. But remember, you have been made by God for God. You must remember it now because days will come. Days of darkness, days of trouble, and when you remember it now, that will equip you for those days. There may come a time where it seems too late.

In Charleston, I have honestly found that some of the hardest people to share the gospel with are some of the elderly people in our community. You'd think that if you were old, you were on death's door, you'd be open to having discussions about where we're going to spend eternity. It's not the case. I had a 93-year-old man wanting to have a square go with me because he didn't like Jesus or Christians. He's just so set in his ways, but he wanted us to run a youth club because he didn't like the kids in the area either.

Now, it's not always the case. It's what's amazing about God's grace. It's so great that even the hardest heart can be transformed by it, the first person to become a Christian. The church plant that we were doing was an elderly woman, and she's amazing. Maybe some of you here became a Christian later on in life. Those of you that do follow Jesus, guarantee though, if that is the case, you wish that in your youth you had remembered your Creator. What the preacher does in verse 2 to 6 is he closes his words with a beautiful poem to remind us of what is coming. Remember Jesus now because before you know it, your body will one day deteriorate and you will die. Now, just look at this poem. It's a poem about, it's kind of like a house getting slowly more and more run down, but it's also a metaphor to describe the aging process. Have a look. A lot of fun. Verse 3. Verse 2, sorry, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent. That's what happens. Your legs go. You start to stoop over. Your knees give way.

[27 : 30] The grinder cease because they are few. You know what that's a reference to? It's your teeth going. Those who look through the windows are dimmed. Your eyesight starts to go. The doors on the street are shut when the sound of grinding is low. Going deaf. You get up early. Your voice starts to go. Verse 5, you become more afraid, especially the frailty you get. The almond tree blossoms. You know what that is? Yes. Those of you that are fortunate enough to have here at elderly, at an older age, it's going to go gray. The almond tree blossoms and then you drag yourself along. The desires go and then you go in the verse 5 to your eternal home and they line the streets for your funeral. That is what is going to happen. Young person, that's what's going to happen if you are fortunate enough to live that long. The folly of our culture is that we try and ignore that. We cannot accept our mortality. We do not know how to deal with death. That's why we have anti-aging cream, botox and just for men. Trying to undo this inevitable process. You can't stop the house getting run down just by putting new curtains up. Every day we breathe, therefore, is a gift given to us from God. Life is precious. That's why in verse 6, the preacher uses it as a metaphor of being like a silver cord or a golden ball, a precious thing that is so fragile and yet so easily broken. It's a gift that God gives to us. It's a key message of Ecclesiastes. Life in his world is not about gain. It's a gift. And death, well according to verse 7, death is when God takes that gift back. When he takes us back to himself. A breath, a breath says the preacher. Everything is just a breath. If we are to truly live now, it begins not with us but with the God who made us. You're just a breath. And so where is the infinite God in your life? You know, you could have the perfect lifestyle.

You can get the kids. You can get the best job. You can get the perfect family. You can grow old. You can retire. You can get everything on the bucket list achieved. But if you've not got Jesus, what was it for? All that you have achieved will be wiped out like a sand castle in the tide and then you will die and then you will stand before the throne of God, your judge, and be cast away from him. Jesus says, what good is it to gain the whole world and yet forfeit your soul? But come to him because in him there is forgiveness. In Jesus there is life. There is light both now and forever. He is the only one who can die for our sins. He is the only one who can bring us back to our Creator as His children. He is everything. And when you have Him, it's like you have what you were made for. And so to trust in Christ is a good life regardless of what happens. And for all who follow Jesus, one day when we have passed through this life with its days of darkness, the promise is we will be with Him. And when we get there, then we are home. We're just travelers. This world is not our home. The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us of that. We're pilgrims. When we get there, then we will be home. When we see Him, Jesus tells us in Matthew 25, it's like we give our life back to Him. And regardless of what you have done in your life, if you have come to Christ, He will say to you, well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come now and share your master's joy. Let me pray. Father, all that we have our entire life, it's just a breath. Help us get real about that. Help us not make this world our home. But remember, we are pilgrims passing through. That home is with you. That true joy and satisfaction will be found ultimately in you. Father, may we have that trust in you so that we can make the most of the time that we have here. Not making too much nor too little of this life and of this creation. Help us to not try to be controlling over every aspect of our life, but to learn to take wise risks that trust you. Help us, Father, to enjoy life when it is good, to be thankful for the many good things that we have. They're a gift of your grace, not least of which your Son Jesus, who is with us always. Help us rejoice in the goodness that we see in front of us. That is a gift of your kindness to us. Help us

remember that we are fading out. Help us accept that and remember you as we do, knowing that because we have Jesus, although we might, these bodies might be failing, this is not the end. We have a glorious, eternal future waiting us. A future that is guaranteed because Jesus has died and risen from the grave to feet in death, and we will follow in His wake. So may we live a life now that focuses on the Master and the home that we are going to. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.