

Ecclesiastes 11:1–6 | “How to Live in Uncertainty”
Preached on September 27, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to Ecclesiastes 11, and we will be in verses 1–6 today.
[pause]

We are nearing the end of our study in Ecclesiastes, as after this morning, we will only have two more Sundays in this series. [pauseeeee]

There’s a saying that goes, “Some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good.” [pause]

This shows that some people think that the faith doesn’t touch on the ordinary, everyday activities of life.

They relate Christianity *only* with church services, church events, and things like that. [pause]

This is because people put things into the boxes of ‘sacred’ and ‘secular.’

So church attendance, prayer, and Bible reading would be sacred, but not raising children, working, making financial decisions, and the like. [pause]

That kind of thinking is completely false, for the Bible continually talks about how we are to live in everyday, ordinary matters...

And the passage that we have in front of us today is a prime example of that. [pause]

It will get down into how wisdom can be exercised in everyday life, especially when it comes to work and money. [pauseeee]

I’ll READ the passage. [READ 1–6]

This passage meets you right where you are in life, for it reminds us that...

I. Life is full of uncertainty.

Throughout this passage, it keeps hitting this theme of uncertainty in life, and it’s clearly stated in the second half of verse 2: “you know not what disaster may happen on earth.” [pauseee]

For the most part, disasters are unforeseen. [pauseee]

Now sometimes people may guess or predict that something *may* happen, but they don’t always know for sure. [pauseee]

Just look at all of the extreme weather events that have happened throughout history, and you can see this truth very clearly. [pause]

It’s not only the weather, though, for a car accident could happen out of nowhere.

You could come down with a disease or illness, and your life would be changed forever. *[pause]*

A fire or flood could come upon a family, or the financial markets could be hit drastically, like back in 2008. *[pause]*

Life is filled with unexpected events, which fill life with uncertainty—you don't even know what will happen later today or tomorrow. *[pauseeee]*

Mankind is always faced with the knowledge that we do not have complete knowledge. *[pause]*

We do not know, nor control what is to come. *[pauseeee]*

When you think about it, the things that we *do* know and control are actually very tiny.

And so humanity's pride should be constantly pushed down and driven away by this truth. *[pauseeee]*

If you feel like life is uncertain, realize that there's not something wrong with you, but you are actually feeling *reality*. *[pause]*

We get so frustrated with this feeling, but it's foolish to do so because we are frustrated at something built into reality that will not change. *[pauseeeee]*

Life as a whole will not all of a sudden become fully certain because you have thought of everything and figured it all out.

So stop trying to act like God, when you aren't! *[pause]*

Humbly recognize your limitations. *[pauseeeee]*

Solomon goes on to give illustrations of this uncertainty and they are found in: the weather, the womb, and the work of God. *[pause]*

First, the weather. *[pause]*

Verse 3 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 it will lie." *[pause]*

We are good at observing the workings of nature, but we can't control or fully predict them. *[pause]*

Think of a rainstorm...

Meteorologists can somewhat predict when a rainstorm may happen, but it's not like we can control it. *[pause]*

If clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves—it just happens.

We don't say, "Hold on cloud, I want you to wait 3 more hours and *then* dump the rain,"—no—the rain doesn't listen to our voices. *[pauseeee]*

Think about how much technology we have nowadays, and *still* the weatherman isn't right in his predictions. *[pauseeeee]*

A week or so ago, we as a family were planning to take a hike at Parker Dam. *[pause]*

Kate looked at the weather, and it said 'no rain.' *[pause]*

We got there, and what did we experience? Rain. *[pause]*

The weather is unpredictable and uncontrollable. *[pauseeeee]*

This is also seen in trees falling...

Verse 3 talks about how a tree falls, and that's where it lies. *[pause]*

This is probably saying that we know that a tree falls down when a storm hits, but we don't control where it falls.

It falls in a certain direction, and there it lies. *[pauseeeee]*

Back in July, our town got hit pretty badly by a thunderstorm, and there were at least 3 houses in my neighborhood that had trees fall onto their houses. *[pause]*

None of those people knew beforehand that the tree would fall nor controlled where it would fall, yet it happened. *[pauseeeee]*

Verse 4 also makes a similar point...

It talks about how if you observe the wind and regard the clouds, you won't sow or reap. *[pauseeee]*

We try to gauge when to sow and reap, but the uncertainty of the weather makes it hard to know what's going to happen.

And so life is full of uncertainty, and all you have to do is to look no further than the weather. *[pauseeee]*

In all of our technological advancements, let's never forget that we are still limited people, who do not know everything, nor control it all. *[pauseeee]*

Our inadequate knowledge is also seen when it comes to the womb. *[pause]*

Verse 5 reminds us that we don't even fully understand how things work when it comes to our bodies. *[pause]*

Now some translations speak of not knowing the path of the wind, or how bones are formed in the womb.¹

But the ESV just translates it as not knowing how the spirit comes into the bones of a child.
[pause]

Either way, we see that there are mysteries of the human body that we don't understand.
[pauseee]

You would think that our own bodies would be the thing that we know the most about...

Yet there are mysteries that we have never solved, and uncharted territory that we have never trodden. [pauseeeee]

If we can't even understand what is going on in the womb, how could we fathom to know all of the things of this life? [pauseeeee]

Just like we don't know how the spirit goes into the child or the bones are formed in there, so it says, "you do not know the work of God who makes everything." [pauseeeee]

God is up to things that we do not know about or completely understand. [pause]

Some of you are frustrated (maybe even angry or resentful) at God because you don't understand what He is doing in your life, and you need to remember this verse. [pause]

Not knowing the work of God is not God being mean by withholding something from you that you deserve.

It's not you being not spiritual enough.

No—not knowing all the “what’s” and “why’s” of God’s work is a part of being human.
[pauseeee]

This ignorance of what God is doing shouldn't cause us to turn from God in vexation, but should cause us to trust. [pause]

Since you don't know what or why He is doing what He's doing, then it should lead you to recognize your dependence on the Lord. [pause]

As commentator Michael Eaton wonderfully puts it: “Faith flourishes in the mystery of providence; it does not abolish it.”² [pauseeee]

¹ Most solid translations actually translate it this way. (See the NASB, NET, LSB, CSB, & NIV.) The KJV has the first part as, “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit...”

² Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 162.

One guy gave an illustration of “travelers, who boarded a short flight from Detroit to Chicago, expecting a quick, uneventful trip. [pause]

They had to circle Chicago due to heavy fog, and finally, two hours in, the captain announced they were preparing for descent. [pause]

Passengers sighed with relief, glad the wait was over. [pause]

Then came the announcement from the flight attendant...

‘Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you to Chicago’s O’Hare. That’s what I would like to do. Unfortunately, we’re in Indianapolis.’”³ [pauseeee]

Like that plane ride, life often messes up our plans, and we may not have desired or expected to be in the place that we are in, but could it be that that’s just where God wants us? [pause]

Let’s take the expected and unexpected, the known and unknown, the straightforward and mysterious, all from God’s hands with confident dependence on Him. [pauseeeee]

So we see in this passage that life is full of uncertainty, but how are we to live in light of this?...

II. Wisely act amid uncertainty.

A leadership guru named Robin Pou, gave this story of a leader, named Sarah, who was struggling with the decision of whether to promote a long-time employee. [pause]

He asked her, “What’s the hesitation?” [pause]

She answered, “I need to know she will be the right fit for the role before I hire her.” [pause]

“How will you do that?” I asked. [pause]

“I can’t. That’s the problem.” [pause]

“Exactly...It is impossible to have 100 percent certainty on any decision before you make it, because all the information isn’t available before you decide...”

So let’s talk about what you do know. What does your current information suggest?” [pause]

“Hire her!” Sarah said. [pause]

“Then how much more information do you need in order to make the decision you have already made?”...

“None!” She said. [pause]

“Great. Then, you can make your decision confidently.” I coached. [pause]

³ Alan Smith, <https://sermonillustrator.org/2026/07/04/divine-detours/>. (Slightly edited by me.)

“Wait,” she pleaded, “what if I hire her and the worst happens?” *[pause]*

Calmly I asked, “Sarah, what’s the likelihood that the worst-case scenario could happen?” *[pause]*

“About a 1% chance,” she resignedly acknowledged. “It’s just that I don’t want to make a mistake.”⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever felt like Sarah: indecisive because you don’t know what will happen and don’t want to make a mistake? *[pauseee]*

It could be as little as when to wake up, what to eat, or what to wear, but it could be as big as who to marry, whether to invest and where, or whether to buy that home. *[pauseeee]*

The passage before us has shown us that life is truly full of uncertainty, but that doesn’t mean we should sit back in ‘analysis paralysis’ forever...

On the contrary, it calls us to act, and to do so wisely. *[pauseeee]*

Look at verse 4, “He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.” *[pauseee]*

If a person with a field is obsessively watching the weather, they will never actually make a decision to sow or to reap, and the reason is because the weather is so unpredictable...

There may be clouds now, but it may clear out...or it may be clear now, but a storm may be on the way. *[pauseeee]*

Now there is wisdom in watching the weather and making decisions based on that...

But this is talking about how if you wait to do something once you are 100% sure of what will happen, then you’ll never do it. *[pauseeee]*

Some of you are waiting for the “perfect time” to do something, but that perfect time has never arrived, and so you *still* haven’t done it. *[pause]*

Maybe it’s that perfect time to witness to someone, and it’s never arrived, so you’ve never shared the Gospel with them. *[pause]*

Maybe it’s that perfect time to confront someone with something that they did to you...

And now it’s been a long time since it happened, and you haven’t said a word, but your bitterness has surely settled in. *[pauseee]*

Some of you are looking for every obstacle or risk to disappear before you’ll act, but it’s been years...

⁴ Robin Pou, <https://robinpou.com/analysisparalysis/>. (Edited and slightly condensed by me.)

You think, “I’ll step up and serve in church once this is off my plate, or once I feel more confident in my abilities,” but you’ve said that for years upon years...

When are you going to actually DO IT?! *[pauseeeee]*

Like that farmer, are you going to always observe the wind and clouds, but never get out there to sow and reap? *[pause]*

For some of you, you don’t need more time, more information, more certainty, or more confidence, you need to just do it. *[pauseeee]*

Understand that the rewards don’t go to the person sitting on the sideline, but to the one in the fight! *[pauseeee]*

Look at 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.” *[pause]*

Get out there and sow!

Sow in the morning, and in the evening, for you don’t know what will prosper and what won’t, but if you do nothing, you can know for sure that you’ll get nothing. *[pauseeeee]*

We don’t know the future or what will come of our actions, but that doesn’t mean that we should not act...

Instead, we act, and then trust God with the results. *[pauseeee]*

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” *[pause]*

Paul didn’t know if and when God would give the growth, but he planted. *[pause]*

Apollos didn’t know either, but he watered. *[pause]*

We do what we are called to do, and leave the results to God. *[pauseeee]*

It’s impossible to know with 100% certainty what will happen after you make a decision.

And this means that we must act amid uncertainty, but that’s why we need *wisdom*, and wisdom is not idle forever. *[pauseeee]*

You must understand that living in uncertainty will take making wise, calculated risks at times, but they are worth it, for if you do nothing, you will end with nothing in your hand.

So use wisdom, definitely, but get out there and work hard. *[pause]*

Use your God-given gifts, time, and resources—step out in faith, don’t sit back in fear. *[pauseeee]*

Now what does this wise living look like?...

He gives us some practical instructions back in verses 1–2. *[pause]*

Verse 1 says, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” *[pauseee]*

Now this verse doesn’t mean to literally throw your loaf of bread into the water and gather it again a few days later.

Instead, “bread” here signifies your resources. *[pause]*

“The waters” are probably referring to trade and commerce using ships back in that day.

So to cast your bread upon the waters is to commit your resources to investments that will eventually bring you returns. *[pauseeee]*

Now you must understand that to invest in things takes some risk and commitment, but with patience, it can pay off. *[pause]*

This doesn’t mean that we foolishly put our money into everything, for we should use wisdom in what we invest in.

But we should use wisdom to act with the future in mind. *[pauseeeee]*

I don’t believe that this is commanding all Christians to invest in the stock market, but I believe that the point is to NOT let fear cause you to just hoard up your money, but steward it well.

Put your money to productive use. *[pauseeee]*

When we do this, we are showing that we are people who don’t cower in fear due to the uncertainty of life...

But we are people who step out in wisdom and faith, knowing that our God reigns. *[pause]*

He is in control, and has given us resources to steward, so will we sit on them or wisely use them? *[pauseeeee]*

Not only are we to make investments, but we are to *diversify* our investments, according to verse 2...

It says, “Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.” *[pauseeee]*

If you remember, back in Ecclesiastes 5, there was this foolish man, who lost his riches in a bad venture, so that his son was left with nothing.⁵ *[pause]*

That’s what can happen if you put all of your money into one place—some disaster can lead to destitution.

⁵ A reference to Ecclesiastes 5:13–14.

But if you diversify where you put your resources, now if some disaster happens to one investment, you are still OK because you have resources in many other places. *[pauseeee]*

The reason that we diversify is because we don't know the future, and so we want to limit risk, and diversifying also creates possibilities. *[pause]*

Verse 6 talks about sowing in the morning and evening because you don't know which will prosper, so we sow in various places, creating more possibilities. *[pauseeeee]*

To invest and diversify shows people who *act*. *[pause]*

They aren't sitting back and hoarding everything in fear.

They aren't sitting idle, due to uncertainty, but are willing to step out in faith and commit to things. *[pause]*

Do you step out in faith? *[pause]*

Are you being a good steward of all that God has given to you, or have you dug a hole and thrown it all in there? *[pauseeeee]*

Investing and diversifying also show people who *wisely* act. *[pause]*

We are not people who just throw our money away, nor are we people who sit on it.

Instead, we use the wisdom that God gives to consider what we are to do. *[pauseeeee]*

Realize that you have only so much time, resources, and gifts, so use wisdom in knowing what to do with it all. *[pauseeee]*

So I want you to think about this: how can you best steward what *you* have? *[pause]*

Don't think about what everyone else has, but what you have. *[pauseeeee]*

This passage teaches us to...

Live wisely in light of the uncertainty of life.

There's a philosophical thought experiment of a donkey who is standing in the middle of two bales of hay. *[pause]*

He is exactly the same distance from both, and both bales of hay are exactly the same in every single way. *[pause]*

Because of this, the donkey doesn't know which bale of hay to eat from since they are exactly the same.

And he agonizes over this decision, not knowing what to do, and eventually dies of starvation because he couldn't decide.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

May we not be foolish like that donkey, sitting idle out of fear of making the wrong choice, but let's wisely act.

Let's use wisdom to gather information, pray, seek counsel, and search the Scriptures, but after that: take a step in faith. *[pauseeee]*

God wants us to live wisely for Him, even amid the uncertainty of life, so serve others, use your gifts, be generous, steward your money well—act! *[pause]*

No longer sit on the sidelines, or sit on your own personal pot of gold.

God has given us everything that we have to be used for Him and His glory, not for us and our glory. *[pauseee]*

So live for the Lord, even if you don't know the outcome of a situation. *[pause]*

Sacrifice, though you don't know what will happen. *[pause]*

Serve, though you may never be noticed by others. *[pauseeee]*

We don't know what will happen in this earthly life, but we do know that it will be rewarded...

For as Galatians 6:9 reminds us, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." *[pause]*

And 1 Corinthians 15 calls us to always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing it's not in vain.⁷ *[pause]*

In the end, anything done for the Lord will be worth it all. *[pauseeeee]*

We live with a lot of uncertainty in this world, but we have a God, who is certainly in control—will you trust Him? *[pause]*

We may not know what He is up to, but we can know that He knows and He cares and He rewards.

So although you don't know what will happen, or what exactly God is up to, you can know that God wants you to act wisely *today*. *[pause]*

Will you do that? *[pauseeeee]*

We may not know everything that God is up to, but we do know *what He has done*. *[pause]*

⁶ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/stretching-theory/202308/the-dangers-of-overthinking>.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

He has sent His Son to this earth to be our substitute. *[pause]*

We needed saving, and we got a Savior, Jesus Christ.

He died on the Cross for our sins, and then rose again victoriously, so that we could be forgiven and given eternal life. *[pauseeee]*

Amidst a life full of uncertainty, we can be certain of this good news, and of the blessings given to us through Christ. *[pause]*

When you place your faith in Jesus, the most important things in life become certain. *[pause]*

I am forgiven, adopted, freed, justified, born again, reconciled to God, and given “a living hope.”⁸

I am in the hand of the Father because of Christ.⁹ *[pauseee]*

No wonder we can live wisely and faithfully amidst a life full of uncertainty, and not cower in fear...

It’s because the most important, foundational, lasting things of life have been made secure for us in Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s live wisely amidst the uncertainty of life, knowing that we have a certain God, who has called us to live for Him.

⁸ A reference to 1 Peter 1:3.

⁹ A reference to John 10:29.