

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: EPISODE 8

WRESTLING WITH LIFE'S REALITIES
INVEST IN LIFE
ECCLESIASTES 11:1-10
11/05/2017



MAIN POINT

A wise person makes good investments and works hard in order to prosper.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you went to college, what was your major area of study? Did you have a minor? Why did you choose this path?

Why do you think most programs require you to take classes outside of one major area? What is the most surprising or unexpected thing you remember learning in school?

A college degree is essentially an investment in your future. The idea of a liberal arts education (studying a wide variety of topics) is to cultivate well-rounded students. A liberal arts education broadens our horizons and gives us understanding of areas that we may not come into contact with otherwise. The goal of a college major is to push you toward an intended career path. Many schools offer or require minors, which ideally complement the major, and thus diversify your educational experience. Diversity keeps us from placing all our eggs in one basket and prepares us for different options in the future. In Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon turned his attention to investments that will help us better secure our future.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 11:1-6.

This section focuses on making sound investments. Does it surprise you that the Bible would speak on such a topic?

Summarize the instructions given in this passage.

Why should the uncertainty of life not keep us from living our lives to the fullest?

Life is unpredictable and dangerous because sin has broken down the boundaries that God created for our good. Rains

that were meant to water the earth and feed it now cause storms and floods. We get homeowners insurance for those instances when weather crosses a boundary. Insurance is an investment to keep us from falling into distress, should the unexpected happen. This is the main theme of Ecclesiastes 11. Because of the unpredictable nature of life, we should take care to invest in multiple areas to protect our future. While we acknowledge that God ultimately holds the future in His hands, we are still called to work diligently. It is God who ultimately brings about any good in work (Eccl. 3:11), and He empowers people to enjoy the fruits of their labor (Eccl. 2:24-26; 3:13; 5:18-20; cf. 6:1-9).

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 teaches that we are to invest wisely because our knowledge is limited, and we never know what may happen next. Verse 6 says that we need to work hard at whatever we do. How do we reconcile the fact that God is ultimately in control with the idea that we are to be responsible and take action?

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that we are to do everything for the glory of the Lord. We trust in His sovereignty and work hard at all that we put our hands to, all for the glory of God. For our ventures to succeed, we must work hard at them. We cannot sit lazily back and expect God to bless us without effort. While the gospel teaches that we cannot earn salvation through work, the Bible is clear that in our professional lives, hard work is a testament to the Lord.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 11:7-10.

Why is it an error to either be preoccupied with death or to ignore it altogether? Which do you err toward? Explain.

If you could go back in the past, what is one lesson you would tell your younger self?

Whether you are young or old, you still have time to maximize your life for God's glory. How are you pursuing His glory in your life?

Either people don't want to think about death, or they focus on it to the exclusion of experiencing any joy in the present. The wise person lives joyfully in the present (Eccl. 5:20; cf. 7:10), yet realizes the brevity and uncertainty of life. The things we invest in today should be things that leave a lasting kingdom impact.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How are you investing in the work of God's kingdom? What resources has God given to you to bless a variety of ministries?

How is diversifying your investments a way of caring for your family? Why should believers have a plan laid out in the event something happens to us?

Making disciples is a wide investment in people. Who all are you investing in so that the gospel will continue into future generations?

PRAY

Praise God for His investment in us and ask that He would give us the wisdom to know when and where to invest professionally and for the sake of the kingdom. Ask that He would multiply our efforts and use them to make much of His name.

COMMENTARY

ECCLESIASTES 11:1-10

11:1-6 .This section focuses on making sound investments. It may seem odd that the Bible has such teachings, but much of Proverbs is concerned with advice on how to avoid poverty by prudent action. Most of us need a certain degree of prosperity in order to have a good life, and the advice here is valuable for both ancient and modern readers.

11:1-2. These verses deal with financial investment, not charity. The phrase bread on the surface of the waters refers to investing in overseas trading ventures (1Ki 9:26-27). The phrase after many days you may find it refers to an eventual return on the investment, and the phrase to seven or even to eight refers to diversifying one's investments.

11:3-5. These verses expand on the reason that a person must diversify his investments. No one knows what will happen, so it is best to be ready for anything. Verse 3 essentially states that there are some signs that indicate what will happen in the future. Dark clouds do not guarantee—but they suggest—that a storm is coming. Certain trends are likely to remain the same. A fallen tree almost certainly will stay where it is. On the other hand, a person can be too concerned with looking for indications of what will happen. Verse 4 says that people who will not commit until they are absolutely certain of success never do anything. Verse 5 tells us that we know very little about the processes that govern the world. Understanding all about the weather or the formation of a fetus is beyond us. Thus, we should not demand infallible information about the future before making any investments.

11:6. A final word of advice on achieving prosperity: work hard in the hopes that at least one of your ventures will succeed.

11:7-8. In the Bible, light is often associated with life and darkness is associated with death. Light is beautiful, but the main point of light is sweet is that it is good to be alive. The assertion that the days of darkness... will be many does not deny the concept of an afterlife, nor does it specifically allude to an interim period between death and bodily resurrection. It is simply a way of saying that life is short but death is long. Enjoy these days because they are few and they pass quickly.

11:9-10. In these verses two pieces of advice are in tension with each other. The first is that we should enjoy life and the second is that we should fear God. The danger is that some people will try to enjoy life by doing things that are offensive to God. Whoever does such things destroys himself and loses both happiness and God. On the other hand, those who have the wrong kind of fear of God believe that anything that makes people happy must be bad and thus they deprive themselves of legitimate joys. A young man is specifically addressed because men (not women) were the original audience for Ecclesiastes and because the elderly, as described in 12:1-7, are already in the grip of death; the capacity to enjoy life has to a degree already passed them by.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14