

02-05-19a Ecclesiastes

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of the Word of God this morning by taking a few moments as we begin to clear our minds and prepare our hearts. We often get to the weekend with the baggage of the previous week as well as all of the tasks that we want to get done during the weekend. It is a great opportunity for refreshment of soul and for communion with God to spend time having cleared our minds of distractions and to be able to focus our attention in fellowship together in the study of God's Word.

God has given us His Spirit to minister these things to our hearts. We could never understand it on our own, but it is coming to the table that is prepared before us, even in the presence of our enemies, to be nourished and partake of that which God has for us. So let's take a moment to thank God for this opportunity and to seek the ministry of God's Spirit as we look at God's Word together.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to earth and walked among us as one of us. He set aside His divine glory and put on the form of a servant, was tested in all points like as we are. He demonstrated for us the power and the strength of Your Word and Your Spirit to guide us in each day and through each test and each challenge, not only to avoid failure and avoid sin, but also to accomplish the positive aspects of Your plan and Your purpose.

We pray that as we partake in our souls of Your Word this morning, that God the Holy Spirit will nourish us and strengthen us and mold us into the image of Christ, so that as we are transformed and as our minds are renewed, we will see clearly not only the blessings and the benefits that come to us personally, but also the place that we have in Your plan and in Your eternal purpose to reflect Your glory and the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Psalm 42. Psalm 42. The book of Psalms is divided into five sections.

This is the first Psalm in the second section or the second volume. And the theme of our study this morning from Ecclesiastes chapter 12 is Remembering God. Our first verse in chapter 12 starts out saying, Remember thy Creator.

And this Psalm addresses a similar concept among many others. And so we're going to read Psalm 42 as our scripture reading this morning. This is dedicated to the chief musician.

It is a contemplation or a masculine of the sons of Korah. As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while

they continually say to me, Where is your God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude. I went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan and from the heights of Hermon, from the hill Mizar.

Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls. All your waves and billows have gone over me. The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

I will say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, Where is your God? Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God." This is a wonderful psalm. We find in the psalms, the psalms of David and the psalms of the sons of Korah and the psalms of Asaph, all of the different authors, just like any hymnal, this was the hymnal for the nation of Israel. And we go through and we find hymns by Charles Wesley or Fanny Crosby or many others.

And here in this psalm, we see the application. You find many practicalities, people who are living their life and going through the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in the light of the Bible they had at the time. How much of a Bible did they have in David and Solomon's day? It wasn't nearly as thick as this one.

It was just the five books of the law. The prophets and the writings had not yet been written. Some of the books were in the process of being written, and some of them were not finished until well after David's time.

So they were essentially looking at the covenant that God gave Moses, the history in Genesis and so on. And so in the psalms, which were sung in the days of David, just like our hymnal, it would take truths that might not be so easy or so apparent to see when you go back and read Leviticus or Deuteronomy and show the outworking of them in daily life. And the psalms are a very rich and fruitful place to go for comfort and encouragement and to see the application.

You can see people working through, you can see David working through and saying, I'm brought down into the dust. And believers are all supposed to be happy and marching onward to the promised land, but everybody faces challenge and difficulty. This is particularly important in the understanding of our passage this morning, because in Ecclesiastes chapter 12, we've had 11 chapters now of Solomon, Kohelet, calling, assembling the people and saying, God has given me wisdom beyond anybody that has ever lived.

The Bible says no one had wisdom from God like Solomon. And so you would think, well, if Solomon wrote a book, there's going to be more wisdom in that thing than, or as much as is to be found anywhere in the word of God. And it's certainly true.

And we've seen that. It's such a shame that the book of Ecclesiastes has been very misunderstood. People say, well, he was a backslider and he was reversion.

He was in human viewpoint and he's recording what he thought when he was all away from God, when he says things like, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die and so on. But as we've gone through verse by verse and chapter by chapter, we have seen that Solomon is very carefully weaving an argument about the meaning of life. You can't get much more profound and much more, I hate to use the word relevant, but where the word of God, the rubber meets the road and whether or not being a believer makes any difference to us as Christians comes down to what Solomon is saying in Ecclesiastes.

What are you doing with your days? What are you going to have in your hand at the end of your life? Well, here we know that there are times when we are cast down. There are times when circumstances afflict us, people afflict us, we afflict ourselves. Remember the three places where temptation and sorrow and tribulation come from, the world, the flesh, which is us, and the devil.

So it's very pertinent to our study to see that in the midst of, it's like the old gospel song, in the midst of storm and trial, stand by me. In the midst of tribulation, stand by me. It's a prayer, it's an appeal to God.

And he says, as the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you, oh God, I am thirsty. Well, thirst is not a pleasant sensation. We don't like to be thirsty and have to remain thirsty.

I've been in long meetings where I ran out of coffee. And you know, you can't always get up and get more. And that's very mild.

We're talking about a serious thirst. Sometimes when there are predators, when there is drought, a deer can be panning for the water and there's no water to be found. And we all have had a taste or a sensation of mild thirst or mild hunger.

But this is talking about the serious kind of thirst. People can die of thirst. And he says, this is the way my soul feels.

Well, how do you feel that way except that God doesn't feel near and God doesn't feel present? You know, you don't get thirsty unless there's a lack. You don't get hungry unless there's a lack. And he says, my soul is not just slightly thirsty.

I'm not just kind of wishing I could go in the next room and refill my cup. It's panting. My tongue is

hanging out.

This is a serious, life-threatening lack. He says, when shall I come and appear before God? Now think about this because this is the Old Testament day. God was not pictured as coming to the individual.

How did you get into the presence of God? You had to go through the rituals. You had to be cleansed. You had to have your sacrifice.

You had to go down to the temple or to the tabernacle. And you came and approached God. And when you got there, who did you meet? Did you meet God? Did you walk into the Holy of Holies? Part the curtains and go in and see the mercy seat? You met the priest.

The priest said, hi there, Uriah. Let me take that goat or that bird here and we'll offer a sacrifice. You place your hand on the head.

Even after you'd gone, you saw a representative. You saw symbols and things that represented God. And so in the Old Testament age, he says, you know, I know my five books of the Pentateuch.

I see the tabernacle and the priest, but I've got a lack in my soul. I'm thirsty and panting. When am I going to meet God? When will I come and appear before God directly? My tears are my food day and night.

The only slaking of my thirst comes from my own tears running down my face and going in my mouth. That's the only moisture I'm getting. And people are saying, where's your God? They're looking and saying, well, you know, all this stuff about being a believer, I don't see it helping you.

You know, you look like you've got the same problems as the rest of us. And he says, when I remember these things, and we stop right there, when I remember these things, here's my status. Here's my, I'm afloat in the wicked and troubled sea here.

What do I remember? He says, I pour out my soul within me, for I used to go with the multitude. I went in with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise with a multitude that kept the pilgrim feast. And we think, you know, I had more joyous days at some previous time.

I used to go in, but I just, I don't have the, I don't feel like that anymore. The, you know, people always talk about, well, when I was a new believer, I had the joy of my salvation. I went out and tried to evangelize everyone.

And now it's all kind of faded glory. It's a memory. I think, boy, you know, how did I get in this miserable condition? I'm thirsty.

I'm beaten down. Enemies are saying, eh, you know, what's the use of your religion, quote

unquote. And you say, you know, I used to go in with the voice of joy and praise.

And I don't, I just don't feel that. I don't have that. So he asks his soul, he says, what's the matter with you soul? Why are you cast down? Why are you disquieted, troubled within me? And he's, he's telling himself, he says, hope in God, for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance or to help my countenance.

It kind of depends on which text version you read, but it's the help of God to rescue us from this beaten down situation. He says, oh my God. And this is the turning point because he starts out and he's thinking, wow, I'm, I'm afloat in a sea of troubles.

He says, I remember when it used to be different. He says to his soul, what's the matter with you soul? And now where's the next place that he turns? And this is the place that a lot of us can miss. This is a prayer to God, isn't it? He's, he's coming to God and he says, when am I going to get to come before you? And he says, oh my God, he goes to God.

We have an entree that the world does not have when they say, well, where is your God? Well, it's a good question to ask ourselves, where is God? We have the privilege because of the blood of Christ. The old Testament saint had the privilege because of the covenant promises of God in prospect, looking forward to the work of Christ. We can go to God.

We have an avenue. We have an entree into the presence of God that no one else in the world has. So he lays claim to that and he says, well, it's a good question.

Where's God? Maybe I'll go address my concerns to him. He says, oh my God, my soul is cast. He just lays it out on the table.

He doesn't say, oh Lord, forgive me for not being joyful and coming in. He says, look, Lord, I'm beaten down here. My soul is cast down.

This is a strong word in Hebrew for being beaten down within me. So he says, therefore, I will remember you from the land of the Jordan and from the heights of Hermon. Why are these two particular things mentioned? Well, he says, there've been times when I was going in with the voice of joy and praise.

That's like the heights of Hermon. Hermon was one of the tallest mountains in Israel. What do you think is the lowest point in Israel? It's where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea.

So whether I'm in the valley of the Jordan or whether I'm on the heights of Hermon, either place, I can't just be remembering God in the good times and going in with the voice of praise and everything's happy. He says, I'll also remember you from the land of Jordan, even as I remembered you from the heights of Hermon and from the hill Mazar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls.

All your waves and billows have gone over me. How low do you have to be for the waves and billows to go over you? It's kind of like Jonah, isn't it? Jonah hasn't been around yet. So the sons of Asaph and the sons of, did I say that was, the sons of Korah don't know what Jonah's going to go through when the seaweed wraps himself around his head and he says, I'm down at the gates of Sheol.

But it's a similar idea. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls. Your waves and billows have gone over me.

The Lord will command his loving kindness in the daytime. This is the good times. The sun is shining, everything's happy.

And in the night, his song shall be with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my rock. And notice every time he starts thinking about the waves and the billows and the low points, he turns back to God and he goes to God.

He says, I will say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? This is a whole lot better than walking around and saying, why has God forgotten me? You know, go to the source. We have an entree. He says, I will go to God and say, he's my rock.

He's my creator. Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning? Because of the oppression of the enemy. Why have you left me in this dismal state? There's all kinds of enemies, by the way.

And when we get to our section of chapter 12 this morning, we're going to see that time itself is our enemy. The progress of sin as it beats down our physical frame is an enemy. And what do you think happens? I mean, we're all relatively young and have most of our good health and everything.

But imagine when you're 70, 75, 80, 85, and all of your physical parts start unraveling and ceasing to function. And you don't have any prospect that, well, you know, next week I may feel better. And maybe I'm going to get stronger and better.

I mean, it's all kind of a downhill slide. And that's an oppression. That's an enemy that, as you get older, you have to fight.

You see the deterioration. As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, and they say to me all day long, once again, this refrain, what's your Christianity doing for you? Where's your God? Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. We have an anchor.

We have a resource. But we have to go there. We have to go and praise Him.

He is the help of our countenance, and He is our God. Well, let's go over to Ecclesiastes.

Actually, we're going to begin by reviewing the last portion of chapter 11 this morning, which we studied last time.

Hopefully, you still have your translation, because many people have come to chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes, and they talk about all the silver cord and the golden bowl and one thing and another. How do we get to that point? Let's review chapter 11. And I'm going to read it from the translation I gave you, just because I think it's somewhat easier to maintain the sense.

Remember that in Ecclesiastes, you have a symbology, just like you have in Revelation. Now, it would be silly to go to the book of Revelation and say, well, you know, John says in Revelation that there's going to be flying scorpions, and they're going to shoot things out of their tails and have the power to hurt men for six months. And to expect that in the tribulation, in the great tribulation period of the last three and a half years, that there are going to be actual flying scorpions with their little segmented legs and their little pointy tails hooked over their back, flying and squirting some kind of weird stuff out of their tail.

I mean, we know that that's symbolic. We know that once you start down a symbolic trail, everything is symbolic. You don't mix symbols and reality.

This is a principle of hermeneutics that has taught J. Dwight Pentecost, things to come. Before he even begins talking about things to come, he says, we've got to establish the ground rules here. You have to remember that in a parable or in a prophecy that uses symbolism, everything that is symbolic and is literal in that picture is going to have a value in a spiritual sense.

So don't mix, you know, keep the literal things literal and weave together your picture there and then extract your timeless principles and your spiritual principles from that. But it's a really difficult thing. And you go to places like the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and that is a parable.

It has symbolic values. There's a literal picture that is designed when you go through observation, interpretation, application, it's a parable. So take the picture, understand what it says, make an interpretation of that, which extracts the spiritual truths, the timeless truths, and then make application of that in your life.

But how many people have gone to that and say, well, you know, we can go over there to Luke and we can find out what heaven and hell are going to be like, and Abraham's bosom, and the great gulf fixed, and these are all representative pictures. Same thing here. When you get to chapter 11 and 12 of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is using concrete real things to talk about spiritual truth.

So he says in 11.1, send out your bread upon the face of the waters, for in many days you will discover it. Give a portion to seven and also to eight, for you do not know what will be evil upon the earth, or this is a business model. You're in agricultural economy and you have a product.

He doesn't say send out your grain. He doesn't say send out your servants. He says send out bread.

Bread is a product. You manufacture it. You have to plant seed.

You have to grow crops. You have to cultivate it. You have to harvest it.

You have to thresh it. You have to get the grain into your barns. You have to take the grain out of the barns and grind it.

You have to make flour. You have to mix it with other ingredients. You have to bake that.

You have to get the finished product of bread. You have to store that. Now you have a product.

It's the end result of a long process and now you have to, it's like I said before, bluebell, you know, we eat all we want. We sell the rest. You partake of what you need for yourself and the surplus.

You're going to try to make a profit. You want to invest this. You want to get a return on this bread so you can buy more seed.

So send out your bread upon the face of the waters. What goes on the face of the waters? Well, ships. They didn't have submarines in those days and they weren't tying it on the back of ducks.

The things that go on the face of the waters is ships. So if you're, and you don't just, you know, what's going to happen if you put a, you know, that pita bread is what they had. They had these things that look kind of like a pizza crust, a little bit, a little bit bigger.

Well, if you throw bread on the water, you think it's going to come back to you after many days? It's going to sink like a stone and the fish are going to eat it. I used to go to Swan Lake in Tulsa that was about a block. My dad used to go there when he was a kid and fish, which he got in trouble for because it was against the city ordinances.

But there's a really funny story about that too because the police came and picked up my dad. I can't remember if my uncle was there or not. He'll tell me when he hears this, but the police came and got him for fishing at Swan Lake and he actually had a fish in his pocket that he hadn't told the policeman about.

The policeman drove him home in his car and my dad took that fish out of his pocket and stuck it behind the seat of the police car. And you know that they didn't find that for many days. You want to talk about something coming back after many days, they probably got to thinking, what is, what is wrong with this car? That was his revenge for them making him stop fishing.

But we used to walk down to Swan Lake and they had swans and ducks, that's why they called it,

that's a little pond there in a neighborhood in Tulsa, and take old bread and throw it out there. Well, that doesn't last long at all. You throw bread out on the water, fish are eating it, ducks are eating it, swans are eating it.

This is putting bread in ships. You're taking a product, this is the fruit of your labors, and you're sending it forth because you want a return on that investment. You want a profit in your hand.

And he says, do this. It says in the law, and it's repeated in the New Testament, that the plowman should plow in hope and the servant should serve in hope. You should expect that there's going to be a return on your labor.

It says in Hebrews, God is not unrighteous to forget your work, your work of faith, your labor of love. You may not see a return. This, why didn't it say, send it with your servants into the city? Because you can monitor that, you can follow that.

When you send it away in a ship, you've got to have faith. You can't see what's going to happen with that bread. Some of it might get lost.

That's why it says in verse 2, give a portion to seven. Seven is the number of completeness. You send out all the ships you can, and then you send out an extra ship.

This is the insurance ship. I'm hedging against the possibility that one of these ships might get sunk, or get taken by pirates, or somebody may embezzle. So I'm not just going to send out all the ships.

The eighth is an insurance ship. Give a portion to seven and also to eight for you do not know what evil will be on the earth. Not everything that you attempt is going to succeed.

Well, now this is all in the business world, in the realm of the physical, and by extension it wouldn't just be agriculture. We take precautions. We have insurance.

We don't know what evil will be on the earth, and we try to be prudent. We try to make sure that we have a little extra in case something happens. My folks live way out in the country and go to the grocery store.

Well, you try to buy a week's worth of groceries, but in the wintertime you get a little bit extra, because if you get iced in, you don't know when you're going to be able to get back to the store. So you put in a little bit of extra. This is just prudence.

Well, that's at the symbolic level. This is the literal level. How do we extract a spiritual truth from that and apply it? Well, what is the book of Ecclesiastes about? What is the first question Solomon asks? He says, the things pertaining to this life are vapor.

It's here and it's gone. Vapor of vapors. Havel havelim, he says at the beginning, and he's going

to say it again here in chapter 12 at the end.

And when you say something of something, we had a similar example when old Saddam over there was saying this is going to be the mother of all battles, or the battle of battles. When you say battle of battles, or king of kings, lord of lords, this is the highest and the ultimate of something. So when he says vapor of vapors, he's saying you can't get any more vaporous than this.

Whether you want to talk about clouds, or fog, or steam, those might be temporary, but there is nothing as temporary as the things in this life. Everything in this life, the concrete that you look around and see, is so impermanent and so ethereal. People lived just like us back in 1902, just like we are in 2002.

Where are they now? Where are their houses? Where is their furniture? Where are all of the strutting and fretting and the concerns and the cares and the hacking and slinging through the arrows and misfortunes of life? Where is it all now? You can find a few people recorded in history books, but it's gone. All of their triumphs and their tragedies and everything else, a few faded photographs, a few paragraphs in a book, and the rest of it is all faded away. It's not even in living memory.

Well, Solomon says, look, if you invest yourself in this life, it's vapor. It's the ultimate vapor. It's here today and gone tomorrow.

He spends all of chapter one talking about how cyclical nature is. Waters are flowing along, you look at the battling of the brook, but next week it's going to be some other water flowing down that brook and that water is long gone and it's off in the sea. It's going to evaporate, go to the clouds and come back down.

So, what is the theme of the book? How can you grab something permanent? What is the prophet to a man? Solomon asks at the beginning and the word, the Hebrew word is Yitron. Can you survive the setting of the sun, the rising and the setting of the sun that constitutes the beginning and ending of life? Can you exit and have something in your hand that you can take with you? He spends the rest of the book talking about different things that he tried and he saw that that wasn't it, and he's been telling us now what it is. So, there's a spiritual truth here, and we're talking about getting a return on the bread that we send forth in ships.

We invest in something and we can't see the result, and we wonder, and he says, have confidence. You will discover the return of sending this away many days later. Well, it says in many days you will discover it.

What does that mean? The sun is going to have to set before you see the return. What does the sunset mean in Ecclesiastes? It's your physical death. The sun rise, physical birth, sunset, physical death.

He says after many days, not only will you live and die, but many other people are going to live and die before you will necessarily see the return on this investment that you have made in certain things. What is this telling us? Don't measure the success of what you do by what you see today. Parents invest themselves in children.

Employees invest themselves in their work, and the company may go under. The kids may not act right. We serve others.

We engage in ministry. You may share the gospel with someone. You may speak the truth to somebody in love, and you don't see any change.

It doesn't seem to bear any fruit. Well, this bread, this speaking the truth in love, this applying the truth, this acting in confidence in the promises of God and the principles of God's Word often does not have a visible return at the time. We are so visually oriented.

We think, well, I must have done something wrong because it didn't work. You know, I like Newton, cause and effect. I do a cause, I get an effect.

I've done a cause, and I don't see the effect. I must have done something wrong. Well, we talked about this when we studied divine guidance, and we say, well, that must have been a bad decision I made there because look at the money that I lost, or look at the people that I alienated.

And we say, well, that must have been a good decision because look at the money I gained, and look at the people that I pleased. It's a faulty standard of measure. Anybody in the world can use that standard of measure.

Well, look at that good decision there. I invested in IBM, and look at all the money I've got now. Or I used Dr. Spock's book, and my kid's a model of functionality or whatever.

That is not the measure. Lots of pagan unbelievers might have had successful businesses, or might have had good kids, or might have had success in real estate, or success in whatever endeavor they have in life, might have become great and famous. Look at all of the celebrities.

And you go back, and people study their life to try to figure out what they did right. They have a book called The 100 Most Successful People, and people want to go study, and say, what did they do right? Because look at the result. They're rich and famous.

God says, you know what? A lot of what you do in your spiritual life is taking bread. This is the process. You've processed the Word of God in your soul, and you've made a decision out of it.

You put that decision in a ship and send it away, and you won't see the result of that for many days. What does that mean? It's going to show at the judgment. God is going to say, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

I know you didn't see a return. The guy that evangelized Billy Graham died not long afterward had no concept that the guy that came to Christ in his revival has had the worldwide impact that he has had. John the Baptist had no idea.

He got imprisoned, and his head chopped off before Jesus' ministry was fully underway. John the Baptist was faithful unto death. He put his bread in the ships and sent it away.

He did his job, and to the world, he looked like a failure. To himself, the moment before the axe fell on his head, he might have thought, oh, God called me to be the forerunner and the Elijah for the Messiah, and look at me. I got myself locked up, and I'm getting my head cut off.

He might have been tempted to be discouraged. He sent messengers to Jesus, and he said, are you the one that should come, or did I mess this up? Should I be looking for someone else? Jesus sent back encouragement to him. He said, look, remember your word of God.

Remember the Bible. Look at what's happening, and you've got to have faith that that bread that you put on that ship and sent away is going to have a return after many days. This is what faith is.

Faith is the substance of things that you hope for, but you can't see. What kind of a Christianity would we have if it was like a good luck charm? It was like an Aladdin's lamp, and you just rub it day after tomorrow. Here comes your new washer and dryer, and here comes your success, and here comes your blessing.

Here comes the answers to all your problems. We would be like some kind of a Dale Carnegie outfit or a get-rich-quick scheme. Faith is something that can only be done in the power of God.

Human beings, and when we operate in human strength, we get discouraged, and we say, Saul, why are you disquieted in me? What happened to your hope? Because we want a return right now. We're like a child. I want that toy, and if I don't get that toy right now, my whole world unravels, and I forget that I'm in a great family with great parents, and I have a wonderful room, and I have a chest full of other toys.

A child just gets focused on the one thing they want at the moment, and they're oblivious to everything else, and their happiness or their sadness all depends on that. We want to be more mature than that, and faith says, send out your bread on the face of the waters, for in many days you will discover it. You will find that and more.

Give a portion to seven and also to eight, and what does this tell us? Don't invest all of your spiritual eggs in a single basket. Don't put all of your spiritual bread in one thing. We say, well, you know, I may have done a lot of other things wrong, but I always attended church, or I always heard a tape of God's Word, or I always did this out of the other.

We've got to look at many areas of our life. We've got to try to be consistent and faithful in our

family life, in our employee or employer life, in our friends and fellowship life, in our personal cultivation of relationship with God life. We want to have a complete spiritual investment.

We want to be examining ourselves to see if we're in the faith, not just in one area, and don't think that we rise or fall just in the area of being an employee, or just in the area of being a parent, or just in the area of being a spouse. Put a portion in every different area. Find all seven shifts and then find another one and put some in that as well.

Look for an opportunity to have that insurance ship to put these things in, because we might end up failing. Maybe we never do get a handle in some area of life. We never do conquer our besetting sin, or we never do get one or another thing figured out, but we didn't live or die on that one thing.

We had eight shifts that got sent out. Maybe one or two of them sunk, but look at these others that have come back in. And this is a reminder that we are not one-dimensional.

God doesn't judge us. We don't rise or fall on the basis of one area of success or failure, and sometimes we have a success in one area and we kind of let everything else slide. Put it in seven shifts and then get an extra ship.

You do not know what evil will be upon the earth. If the clouds are filled with rain on the earth, they will pour forth. If a tree falls in the south or in the north from the place where the tree falls, there it will be.

These are the uncontrollable forces. We are not always in control of things that are beyond our... in fact, we're never in control of things that are beyond our control. It's kind of the definition, isn't it? We can't decide how much rain is in the clouds and we can't decide which way the wind is going to blow.

You have no control over that, and if the wind blows down a tree or if it decides to rain... They tried to have a garage sale Friday morning in our yard and next door. Well, it came up all clouds and rain and all of the preparation of the week and people getting stuff and getting all ready. Well, here came the rain.

Nobody could do a thing about it. Well, if you watch the weather and say, oh, you know, they might be predicting rain, so I'm just not even going to get my stuff together. I won't even plan for the garage sale because they say it might rain.

Well, you'll never have a garage sale. He says the one observing the wind will not sow. The one watching the clouds will not reap.

If you say, you know, there's a possibility that this is going to fail, so I'm just not even going to try. This is pessimism, spiritual pessimism instead of spiritual optimism. You have to say, you know, God in his grace has given me his spirit.

He's given me his word. I'm going to try all of these different ships and some of them are bound to come in. I know that I fail.

I know that I'm weak, but soul, why are you despairing and why are you cast down? Hope in God. God saved me for some reason. God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die on the cross.

He must have thought there was some profit, that there was some return on his investment in me or he wouldn't have bothered. So, hope in God. Don't let that disquiet be like looking at the clouds and looking at the wind and saying, oh, that tree is going to fall and wreck my efforts.

That rain is going to fall and wreck my efforts. This is a call to spiritual optimism. God would not be doing what he's doing if he did not know that we're going to, some of our ships are going to come in.

Why would God save us unless at least one of those ships is going to come staggering back in with a profit and probably more? He says in verse five, according as there's no knowing for you, you're not going to know the way of the wind. Just like you don't know what goes on in the way the bones are weaved together in the womb of the pregnant woman. So, you don't know the work of God.

The things that you do, you may not see any return. You invest yourself in your job or your kids or in your marriage or whatever other area of life where you've really tried to invest yourself spiritually, you may not see any return. He said it's like the bones that are being formed inside the womb that goes on for nine months and all you see is a swelling of the tummy, but you don't see the bones.

You don't see any of the other. You can't tell if it's a boy or a girl. And he says you don't know the work of God who is making everything.

God is causing this profit and just because you can't see it, don't think it's not there. So, he says verse six, in the morning sow your seed and keep on sowing it until the evening. Don't let your hand rest.

It doesn't matter if the wind is blowing away some of your seed or if you see rain clouds coming up and some of your seed gets washed away by the rain. He says you just keep reaching into the bag and grabbing that seed and sowing it. There's no knowing for you which of these will be suitable, the sowing in the morning or the sowing in the evening or whether both of them will turn out good.

You never know. Maybe it's all for benefit and just because you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't there. He says sweet is the light and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.

It's just like this thing in the wall we have here. Whatsoever things are good and noble and lovely

and true and honorable and of good report, think on these things. We decide what it is we're going to think about.

He says look, the light is sweet, seeing the sun is good, being alive is good. The pastor I used to have used to say, if I am still alive, God still has a plan for my life. God has not given up until he takes my breath away.

That's when it's over. So, if you're still seeing the sun and you're still seeing the light, guess what? God thinks there's still the possibility of return on his investment. For if a man will live many years, in all of them let him rejoice and let him remember the days of darkness for they will be many.

All that is coming is vapor. Just remember the trials and tribulations of this life, the many days of darkness that come are transient, temporary. It's a short time compared to what's coming.

So he says while you've got the opportunity, while you're a vigorous man in your youth, rejoice. Cause your heart to be good in the days of your vigor. Cause your heart to be good.

How do you do that? We decide what we're going to think about. We decide if we're going to concentrate on the things that are good and noble and lovely and of good report or if we're going to look up at the clouds and we're going to look at the wind and say, you know, I know that tree is going to blow down and crush my house, so why patch the roof? Why fix the, why do anything? I'm not even going to arrange the furniture. That tree is going to blow down and crush my house.

Rain is going to fall and wash my seed away. All of my ships are going to sink. There's just no point.

The Bible says you can't do that. He says rejoice vigorous man, verse 9, in your youth and cause your heart to be good in the days of your vigor and advance in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes and know that upon all these things God will cause you to come into judgment. The thoughts and intents of the heart are reviewed by God.

Now, do we want to be a naysayer and a pessimist and a, the guy that said, Lord, I know you gave me this talent, but I knew that you're a hard man. You reap where you haven't sown and I just buried it in the ground. I just, I thought, you know, there isn't any point in doing anything with, I'm just going to bury it in the ground.

If he wants it back, he can come get it and God is unhappy with him. He says, look, you were supposed to take that and do something with it. Look at these other people and so he takes that talent away and gives it to the guy that had 10.

He says in verse 10, remove, and this is a hupheal, which is a causative in Hebrew. It says cause to turn aside vexation from your heart and put away evil from your flesh for youth and darkness, the ups and the downs are vapor. It's temporary.

You've only got a short time. So make the most of it while it's here. Well, now this is the background.

This is what we, this is what we studied last week. We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to get on into chapter 12.

And you remember this great picture of the onset of old age where you have these great symbols and he's going to continue in this vein. He's used an agricultural metaphor in chapter 11 to talk about the opportunity that we have. And he says, remember every day is an opportunity, whether you see any return in your faithfulness and in your spiritual optimism or not.

Just remember that this opportunity and any dark days that come are ephemeral. They're transient. They're temporary.

It's just like a vapor. Look at the steam coming out the kettle. It's here now, gone tomorrow.

Think about all the people that have lived and died. The grass withers and the flower fades. It's the word of God that lives and abides forever.

Remember who you are. Remember why you're here. Because it is no time until we will be standing before the throne of God and God will render an account.

Well, what did you do with the word? What did you do with the hope? Did you, I gave you these ships. Did you put any bread in them and send them out? Or did you look up at the sky and the wind and say, you know, a storm's coming. It's going to sink all my ships.

I'm not even going to bother. We decide that. We can cause our heart to be good.

We can cause vexation to turn aside from our heart. We can put away the evil from our flesh. This transient life that we live, remembering that this is just preparation.

This is the kindergarten before we get to the really wonderful time of fellowship with God in the future. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to launch into chapter 12.