

**Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes  
(Remember Now Thy Creator)  
- Sowing By Faith  
Ecclesiastes 11:1-6**

**1** Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. **2** Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. **3** If the clouds be full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. **4** He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. **5** As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. **6** In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

**OUTLINE**

- (1) Be Generous (v1-2)**
- (2) Be Diligent (v3-4)**
- (3) Be Content to Trust God (v5-6)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Jesus tells the parable of the sower who went forth to sow, Bridges tells the story this way, "the sower went forth to sow the precious bread-corn – the bread of life. Much of his toil seems to be in vain. Much disappointment arises from the world – often more from the Church. The soil is uncongenial - prospect for harvest precarious. But "*blessed are ye that sow beside all waters*" (Isaiah32:2). The promise is sure – Thou shalt find it after many days. He looks around. He "sees not his signs." It is as if his "prayers would return into his own bosoms."

**Psalm 35:13** *But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.*

But the promise is sure – "*My word shall not return unto me void.*"

**Isaiah 55:11** *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

It may be that some wanderer may have been brought back to the fold by the recollection of his teaching, even after his voice was silent in the grave. It may be that the seed has been re-sown again and again from one heart to another, and that some whom he had never known in the flesh may welcome him "at the presence of the Lord at his coming as his glory and joy." (1 Thess. 2:19-20).

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**1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

**John 4:36** *And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*

Briges further observed, "Thus also in respect to the after influence of instruction. The present sight seems as if the seed cast upon the waters had perished."

There seemed to not have any immediate benefits to the sowing. It seemed that is no real result forthcoming. Therefore, the sower is wont to be discouraged.

He applied, "How scanty the present practical influence from the instruction of the young! But the promise is above all uncertainty. Thou shalt find it – not the corn, but the harvest."

He remarked, "The scoffing world understand it not. "To what purpose?" But wait a while. God's time is best – many days. The season of confirmation – some moment of temptation – the hour of affliction - one or other of these seasons stir smothered conviction to life and reality. Go on then. Use the means. Generations unborn may reap the fruit (Gal. 6:9).

**Galatians 6:8-10** *For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

He highlighted well, "Once more – mark the trials of the Christian life – Outward circumstances are discouraging, as if the seed cast upon the waters had perished upon the wide waster – hindrances from the world without and Satan within. But sow thy seed whatever the discouragements. Thout prayer seems as if it died on your lipsm continue in it. Though thou haltest in the weary conflict – hold on. Thou shalt find it. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shalt doubtless" – come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psalm 126:5-6).

Three thoughts for our consideration:

- (1) Be Generous (v1-2)**
- (2) Be Diligent (v3-4)**
- (3) Be Content to Trust God (v5-6)**

**(1) Be Generous (v1-2)**

**1** *Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2* *Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*

Bridges said well, "Here Solomon adds another beneficence. Every day is an opportunity. How long it may last, who can tell? "As we have opportunity, let us do good." (Gal. 6:10) – large-hearted, and open-handed, "giving – not a pittance, but a portion." - not giving to one or two, or even to seven 0 as if we might stop there – but also to eight – the torrent flowing on, "As God hath prospered us." (1 Cor. 14:2).

**Luke 6:38** *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

Cheerful liberality is the burden of the rule: digging open the several springs of usefulness which, having once begun to flow, will spread into springs. "Spring up, O well." – The higher we rise to our standard, the brighter the atmosphere, the more fruitful our course of practical habits."

But a strange reason is given for this energy of love.<sup>1</sup> Our text says, "*Thou knowest now what evil shall be upon the earth.*"

Better to give than to hoard. Jesus says, "It is better to give than to receive."

The blessing of giving has to be experienced. How can we understand this truth except through the exercise of faith in our giving? We are to support the weak, those who are unable to return our favour, those who are truly in need. We have to take God at His Word to give and experience God's blessing. When we give, we lose what we have given, how can it be more blessed? We are to take Jesus at His Word, by faith, obey and behold His glory in our lives in our giving.

**Proverbs 11:24-26** *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.*

**Malachi 3:10** *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

**Proverbs 3:9-10** *Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

**Psalms 41:1-3** *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.*

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Bridges, Ecclesiastes, Banner of Truth Trust, 1992, 263-267.

Jesus said in the parable:

**Matthew 13:3-9** *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

**Matthew 13:18-23** *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

Picture a farmer went out to sow his seed. With his hand, he takes out the seed from his bag sling on his shoulders as he scatters the seed. Jesus likened God's Word to seeds that a farmer scatters on the ground. Seeds that fell on good ground brought forth fruit in its season—"some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred" (Mark 4:20).

Jesus said the seed that the hand scatters is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). *It's the only thing that has the power to change the human heart.* The sower is one who shares the word. The sower is to scatter the seed liberally. He must be diligent in sowing if there is any hope of a harvest. No seed, no harvest. Jesus compares God's Word to seed. We realize that seed has life in it just like God's Word. It is a living Word able to give spiritual life.

**1 Peter 1:23** *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

### **(2) Be Diligent (v3-4)**

**3** *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*

Swindoll said well, "The natural occurrences described by Solomon in these verses are both inevitable and unpredictable. We have no control over the rain - whether it will be a light mist or a violent storm. We have no way of determining when a tree may fall; we can only hope it doesn't fall on us!"

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Recently, we saw that a storm fell a tree in Botanical Gardens and injured and killed passers-by.

Swindoll further observed, "Because these events are unpredictable and in God's hands alone, we shouldn't base our plans on the "what ifs" of life."

Don't count your chickens before the eggs are hatched.

He analysed, "We should pursue life with faith rather than watching it pass by in fear. We should be working on things God has given us the ability to affect rather than worrying about those things over which we have no control."<sup>2</sup>

*4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap*

Be diligent and not be slothful. Be working to sow, work, in season and out of season.

**Matthew 9:35** *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

What was Jesus doing? He was doing the work of the sower. He was teaching and He was preaching the Word of God.

We see that this work was hard work. Jesus spared no effort. He went about all the cities and the villages.

**Proverbs 19:15** *Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.*

**Proverbs 20:4** *The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.*

**Proverbs 24:30-34** *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; 31 And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. 32 Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. 33 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 34 So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.*

**Proverbs 22:13** *The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.*

He finds ridiculous excuses for his idleness!

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<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook*, 2005, 217.

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Jesus says in **John 6:27** *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

He must use every possible means to make his work prosper, he spare no pains, be instant in season and out of season, not be deterred by difficulties and discouragements “he must not observe the winds while he sows” – we print tracts, we print invitation cards, we must patiently sow beside all waters and sow in “hope.” The work of the sower was to sow. He is to sow diligently and liberally.

But it’s possible to mistake busyness for godliness and activity without spirituality. *The only thing that produces lasting growth is the Word of God.* Preaching and programs in the church without the Word may produce quick growth but it won’t last. We need Word-centered ministry—and that must start from the pulpit every Lord’s Day is God’s method as we saw last week in our Reformation message concerning the biblical perspective of the centrality in God’s Word.

And He also must sow good seed if he wants to see good fruit. In Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church, we use the King James Bible because it is the most faithful and accurate translation of God’s Word in the English language. It is the translated word for word from the preserved God in the original language of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. We do not use modern versions of the Bible because as much as 9900 words are missing just in the New Testament equivalent to 1 and 2 Peter. We endeavour to sow the pure Word of God after the spirit of the Reformers not in the tradition of the Church or the doctrines of men which was the case with the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus time.

Without sowing good seed, the sower’s labour will be vain. He may go to and fro and seem to say much, and to do much, but there will be no harvest of souls in heaven, no living results and no conversions.

We acknowledge that the success of the sower does not solely depend upon his labour and diligence, although without labour and diligence success will not be obtained.

### **Honest Hard Work is God Honouring**

*- In the sweat of thy face...*

This came in the wake of man’s fall. God said to Adam:

**Genesis 3:17-18** *...Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; 18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;*

God sent the thorns and thistles as a result of the curse that God pronounced upon the ground that will manifest itself in the thorns and thistles that would

impede the growth of the herb of the field so that Adam has to spend time to weeding to have a good harvest.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote a similar thought applying Genesis 3:19:

**2 Thessalonians 3:12** *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

It is the will of God, the command and exhortation of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are to work and enjoy the fruit of our labour.

**2 Thessalonians 3:10** *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

- with their own hands, at their proper callings, and so support themselves, provide for their families, and have something to give to them that are in need; by which means they will live peaceable and quiet lives, in godliness and honesty, and not disturb the peace of neighbourhoods, churches, and families.

- and eat their own bread; got by their own labour, and bought with their money, and not the bread of others, or that of idleness. [Gill]

### **Be Not Slothful**

**Proverbs 21:25** The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.

**Proverbs 21:26** *He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.*

Instead of working, the sluggard daydreams. He is full of desire, full of craving for delight. Instead of working all day, he craves for more. He is never satisfied. People talk of dying from overwork, but there is a death that comes from not working enough. Instead of merely craving, they do something useful so that they may have something to share with those in need (Eph. 4:28).

**Ephesians 4:28** *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

The sluggard is like the Dead Sea, where nothing can live. He is constantly taking in as he craves for more and more. Like the Sea of Galilee, full of life, the righteous gives without sparing.

More than that, we are to do so to the honour and glory of God:

**Colossians 3:23** *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

**1 Corinthians 10:31** *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

We encourage our young men and women to develop a healthy attitude toward work. Honest productive work is the backbone of strong families and blessed nations. God put His heart into His work. He doesn't finish things just to get them over with. When He made the frog, He painted a frog's eyes gold. God adds distinct and beautiful touches to each thing He makes. His energy and creativity are without measure. They overflow into everything He does. Drudgery and bare minimums have not part in His work. Some things He makes are very simple. Yet even their simplicity is a work of art. [Bob Schultz, Created for Work]

### **(3) Be Content to Trust God (v5-6)**

*5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

David said in **Psalms 139:14** *I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.*

We but marvel at how a child grows in a mother's womb. How marvelous and yet how mysterious!

David further admits as he contemplates upon the mysterious care of God for his life, **Psalms 139:17-18** *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*

Swindoll said well, "There is no way we can know the work of God, who alone controls all things. If we wait for perfect knowledge before we launch a new project or attempt a challenging task, we'll stand frozen by ignorance as the world passes us by. Solomon rightly urged us to throw out the desire for certainty and be content with God's wisdom and a good dose of faith in His sovereignty. We simply don't know which earthly activities or investments will bring an abundant return, or which ones will be set aside by God's better plan. So let's just dig in and leave the results to God...We shouldn't let fear of the unknown or the lure of comfort and security dictate how we live, we must also be careful not to rush out unprepared in our zeal to plunge into life. While unbending rigidity may be a sign of becoming set in our ways, reckless abandon may be a sign of gross immaturity. Neither extremes is appropriate. Ecclesiastes calls us to discernment and balance."

The sower cannot give life. He can scatter the seed but he cannot command it to grow. We can offer the Word of truth to people, but we cannot make them receive it and bear fruit. To give life is God's responsibility. It is God's solemn prerogative.

Man's responsibility to live the life of faith involves trusting for the outcomes of life.



**Hebrews 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

It is the Spirit that quickeneth. Only God alone can give the increase. The sower must acknowledged.

The seeds of God's Word sown either thrive and bear fruit or wither and die without fruit. Jesus explains from verse 18-23 that whether the seed will bear fruit depends largely upon the soil in which it is planted.

Jesus explained that the soil represents the human heart. Indeed, man made from the earth. We see so far how God's Word is seed and our heart are soil, our heart responds to God's Word.

This does not mean the human heart is naturally spiritual.

**1 Corinthians 2:14** *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

But it does mean that with the seed and the soil together, germination takes place. Amazing truth. And there can be fruit or harvest.

The emphasis of this parable is really on the heart or the soil, the response of the heart to the Word of God.

Jesus explained that the world, ruled by Satan—the prince of this world, competes to nullify God's Word in the hearts of the hearers. Some seeds fell by the wayside and were devoured by the birds—there was no opportunity for them to germinate (Mark 4:15). Some fell on stony ground. The seeds grew into young plants but having no depth of root and not being able to withstand the scorching sun, they died. Although sunlight is paramount to the growth of the plant but if its roots fall on rocky soil, the plant has not strong root system.

These hearers may have a semblance of spiritual life but when affliction or persecution arises, they choose to reject the Word, having no true faith. The Bible says, "*they are offended*" (Mark 4:17).

Yet other seeds fell on thorny ground where weeds so deprived the young plants (that grow subsequently) of their nutrients, causing them to die. The verb "*choke*" means "to crowd out". The potency of the world to "suffocate" a man's heart is very real. The present tense of this verb in the original suggests a continual bondage that these thorns impose on the hearers to render them inept to receive the truth. And these thorns, Jesus told us, are the (1) cares of the world (worry) (2) deceitfulness of riches (greed) and (3) lust of other things. The repeated use (4 times) of the conjunction "and" in Mark 4:19 emphasizes the constant bombardment of these ungodly pursuits that prevent the hearer from receiving the Word of God and bearing fruit.

*6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

As such, let us be willing to sow generously and diligently although we may not be able to assess the outcome of our sowing. We ought to by faith trust God with the increase.

**Trust God concerning the Harvest – The Honest and Good Heart**

*23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

**Mark 4:20** *And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*

**Luke 8:15** *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

The fruitful heart is good ground, good soil. The heart is basically sinful. The heart that is sanctified by God's grace, produces fruit.

The Honest and Good Heart – In the origin both has the meaning of good but there is a shade of difference.

Honest - Healthy Sound and Fit

Good - The moral character of persons good, upright, worthy

It takes time to bring the harvest. Much watering, fertilizing, the rain, the sun, and when harvest come we see the increase.

The evidence of hearing the Word rightly is spiritual fruit.

The fruit here is spoken to refer to the fruit of the Spirit. Repentance toward God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and character, paryerfulness, humility, charity, spiritual-mindedness, these are the only satisfactory proofs that the seedn of God's Word is doing its proper work in our souls.

Without such fruit, our religion is vain. If a Christian neglects the cultivation of his heart, the soil will start to deteriorate. The good soil will become crowded soil. The weeds will sap the strength from the soil and it will become useless.

The secret of a fruitful heart is a listening ear. Jesus says He that hath an ear, let him hear.

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing the Word of God.

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**CONCLUSION**

May we sow in faith – generously, diligently and be content to trust God to provide the outcome. Amen.