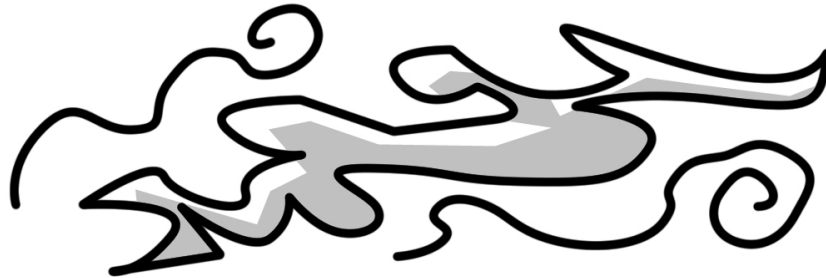


The Way (Path) of the Wind



SABBATH—MARCH 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ecclesiastes 11.

MEMORY VERSE: “You don’t [do not] know the path the wind takes. You don’t [do not] know how a baby is made inside its mother. So you can’t [cannot] understand how God works either. He made everything” (Ecclesiastes 11:5, NlrV).

THE EARLY GREEKS BELIEVED IN FATE.¹ The gods decided each person’s fate beforehand, and that was it. The best example of this is in Homer’s *Iliad*. The great Trojan soldier Hector was talking with his wife. She had been begging him not to go back to battle, because she feared he would surely die. He said, “No man will hurl [throw] me down to Death, against my fate. And fate? No man alive has escaped it, neither brave man nor coward.”—*Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 212.

But that is not what the Bible teaches. We are not helpless to cold fate. We have only one pre-decided end: eternal² life with Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:1-11). God’s plan was for all of us to find salvation in Him. That is why Jesus’ death was for the whole world. No one is left out.

That we all are not saved shows that our fate is not sealed beforehand. Our future is open. We have choices to make. Our choices will decide our future end. This week we look at more of Solomon’s wisdom about the choices we have as free humans who are sometimes swept up in events³ beyond our control. Maybe the events are not in our hands, but our responses to these events often are.

¹fate—pre-decided future end; doom.

²eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

³events—things that happen.

SUNDAY—MARCH 18**CASTING (GIVING AWAY) YOUR BREAD (Ecclesiastes 11:1)**

Ecclesiastes 11:1 has been a puzzle to many Bible students for hundreds of years. What does it mean to “cast your bread upon the waters”? Different interpretations have been offered. The long-time favorite interpretation says that this verse deals with charity. This makes sense, because the Old Testament puts an important focus on helping the poor and the needy. “Anyone who gives freely will be blessed. That’s [that is] because he shares his food [bread] with those who are poor” (Proverbs 22:9, NIV). “Share your food with hungry people. Provide homeless people with a place to stay. Give naked people clothes to wear. Provide for the needs of your own family” (Isaiah 58:7, NIV).

Ecclesiastes is full of useful wisdom. So it would be strange if Solomon had not said something about helping others.

Compare⁴ Deuteronomy 15:7-11 with Ecclesiastes 11:1.

Now read Ecclesiastes 11:2. This verse says what verse 1 says; we should help people who need it. There is so much need everywhere. We all should do as much as we can, because who knows what evil shall

come. So we should be ready to help when the chance arises. This is a Christian principle.⁵



Open your hands. Give freely (Deuteronomy 15:8).

What is your attitude⁶ toward those who are poorer and more needy than you? How willing are you to share whatever you have with those less fortunate?

MONDAY—MARCH 19**CLOUDS, RAIN, AND FATE (Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4)**

There are many different interpretations of Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4. If we read these verses just for what they say, Solomon is talking about the forces of nature. If a cloud gets full of rain, it pours out on the earth. If a tree falls, then where it falls is where it rests. What is the point?

⁴compare—show how things are the same.

⁵principle—a basic rule of life.

⁶attitude—how a person thinks and feels toward God, other people, or things.

What is in Ecclesiastes 11:4 that could help us better understand what is going on in verse 3?

Ecclesiastes 11:3 is talking about rain. Sometimes, too, in a rainstorm there is wind. Sometimes that wind knocks over trees. All these are forces much greater and stronger than humans are. If we today are often at the mercy⁷ of nature, how much more so back then? Solomon's point could be about how we deal with events and things that are beyond our control. We cannot control nature. So what can we do about it? Just stand there and watch? Let nature control us? Or do we trust in God and in His love for us? Do we try to be faithful to our jobs and duties, no matter if there are things that we cannot control?



We can do nothing about nature. So let us trust God and His love.

What are some things that we all face that are totally beyond our control?

There are many forces greater than us. But nothing in this world is greater than God. He upholds all things by His power (Hebrews 1:3). Are any of the forces you mentioned in your answer above beyond God's power? So it is important to remember that over and beyond them all is God. He is our Creator, who loves us and cares for us. We are not left to blind chance or cold fate. Storms may come. The wind may blow. There seems to be nothing we can do about these events. But we can remain faithful to God, no matter what happens.

What is Jesus saying in Matthew 6:25-34 that fits in with Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4? What is He saying that could give you hope to trust in God's love no matter what situation you are in?



Why should we worry about clothes (Matthew 6:28-34)?

⁷mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

TUESDAY—MARCH 20**THE WAY (PATH) OF THE WIND
(Ecclesiastes 11:5)**

Ecclesiastes 11:5 fits right in with the interpretation we gave to Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4. As humans, we just do not know many things. Everything—from the way of the wind and other parts of the physical world to the growth of a baby in the womb—is filled with wonder and mystery. (The word for “wind” is the same word for “Spirit.” This could add another idea to the meaning of Ecclesiastes 11:5.) Even today, with all we know about the growth of a baby in the womb, there is still so much beyond our knowledge.

Here is a point worth remembering: If there is so much about God’s work we do not understand, how much more of His work of salvation can we not understand? We can see in nature how deep God’s creative power and genius is. The simplest things are filled with mysteries science cannot explain. So we should not be surprised that there are parts of God’s salvation work we cannot understand. (Read Romans 11:33-36.)

How does Isaiah 55:6-13 relate to Ecclesiastes 11:5?

God’s ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. But we can at least know that His thoughts to us are “thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give [us] an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11). And that expected end is eternal life in a new heaven

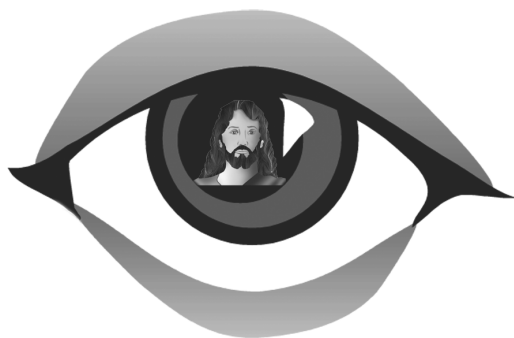
and a new earth. It will be a life without suffering, Satan, loss, and death. That is the promised end, the end Jesus has in mind for each of us when He died on the cross.

List the ways you have seen that God’s thoughts toward you are thoughts of peace. Praise and thank Him now for what He has done for you.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 21**LIGHT AND DARKNESS
(Ecclesiastes 11:7, 8)**

All through the Bible, we see the symbolism of light and darkness as being different from each other. *Light* means being good, and *darkness* means bad.

What do the following verses teach us about the difference between light and darkness? Isaiah 5:20; Luke 11:34; Acts 26:18; Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thesalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5.



Turn from darkness to light. Jesus is the Light (Acts 26:18).

Darkness is the absence of light. If you stood in a totally dark room and were asked “What do you see?,” you would answer “Nothing.” Or you would say, “I see total darkness.”

What message is Solomon giving about light and darkness in Ecclesiastes 11:7, 8?

God is the Giver of light, truth, goodness, joy, and hope. Darkness is the absence of these things. In darkness come lies, evil, suffering, and hopelessness. Solomon is saying that however God has blessed your life, there always will be days of darkness, pain, suffering, and hopelessness. Perhaps Solomon’s message simply is “Do not be too sure. Things might be going well today. But who knows what tomorrow will bring?” We should not worry. We should be praising God and thanking Him for all the good things we have, because we do not know what evil will come up.

What has made the difference between your days of light and days of darkness? What caused the days of darkness? What useful things can you do to help yourself live in the light that comes from God?

THURSDAY—MARCH 22

WHILE YOU ARE STILL YOUNG (Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10)

What is Solomon saying in

Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10?

Is God taking away with one hand what He offers to us with another? Have a good time, but just remember that God is going to judge you for it in the end? An old-time rabbi⁸ said these verses are like a child being told, “You might as well sin now, because you are going to be punished for everything anyway.”

Of course, as the rabbi knew, that is not the point of Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10. The point seems to be that life is a gift from God. Because it is from God, it is something good. He created us to enjoy our lives, to enjoy our bodies and the things He made. When we are young, we have energy, power, ambition, and hope, so we are to enjoy ourselves.

But we also can “enjoy” ourselves through “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrew 11:25). Or we can enjoy ourselves in the Lord. For example, we can enjoy the gifts God has given us in the way He plans for us to enjoy them. But so often, young people can easily be led to use these gifts from God for ungodly purposes or reasons (see Proverbs 7). One day they will have to answer to God in judgment for their actions.

How does Ecclesiastes 11:10 help us understand what Solomon is saying in verse 9?

Again, keep in mind all of the Bible. What Solomon is saying is, Enjoy the

⁸rabbi—a Jewish religious teacher.

gifts God has given you. But enjoy them as blessings, not as sin. Just remember to use good judgment, because one day your childhood and youth, even your life itself, will be over. Then you will have to answer for all you have done.

FRIDAY—MARCH 23

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 272; vol. 6, pp. 271, 272; *Welfare Ministry [Work]*, pp. 178–187.

“Remember that you will never reach a higher standard⁹ than you yourself set. Then set your mark high. Step by step, climb the whole length of the ladder of growth. It may mean self-denial or sacrifice. But do not let it stop you. Fate has not woven its webs about any human so strongly that he or she needs to remain helpless and uncertain. Problems and difficulties should make us more determined (set) to overcome them. The breaking down of one barrier will give greater ability and courage to go forward. Continue firmly in the right direction, and difficulties will be your helpers, not your blocks.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 331, 332.



“Some people do not have strong character. They are like putty and can be pressed into any shape. They have no strength, and are of no use in the world. This weakness must be overcome. There is a strength about true Christian character which cannot be influenced or overcome by difficult situations. People must have spiritual strength and honesty. They must not be flattered, influenced, bribed, or scared.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 297.

⁹standard—level of conduct.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ What is your church doing to help those who are very poor? What more can you do to help?

❷ As a class, talk about some events in your own community or nation that are out of your control but that still bother all of you. How have you each reacted to these events? How has the

church reacted? What can you do to help others learn to deal better with things they cannot control?

❸ George Bernard Shaw, a famous British writer, once joked, "Youth is wasted on the young." What can you do as a class to help your young people avoid making wrong decisions? What useful things can you do to lead them in the right direction?