

Ecclesiastes: Finding Joy Amidst Life's Enigmas

A Sermon on Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:1

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Introduction: A Preacher of Joy

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” (1:2). If ever you have read the questions, confessions, and exhortations in Ecclesiastes, you likely would echo Peter regarding Paul’s letters that “there are some things in them that are hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16). I have felt this way many times, but in this book I have also found amazing fuel for stoking fires of joy in my soul that have carried me through seasons of pleasure and deep pain. I believe the Preacher has a message for us today that is very practical regarding our pursuit of pleasures in God.

Perhaps more than any other voice in the Old Testament (OT), the speaker in Ecclesiastes was a “Preacher of Joy”:

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil (Eccl 2:24).

I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful (8:15).

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart.... Enjoy life with the wife whom you love (9:7–9).

Yet the Preacher of Joy was also a realist, who felt great evil and stood vexed and frustrated by his inability to understand all of God’s purposes.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one’s eyes see sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out (8:16–17).

And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow (2:17–18).

We live in a crooked world that we cannot by any level of effort make straight (1:15; 7:13). Unstable jobs, orphans, judicial corruption, blown tires, broken legs, sex-trafficking, leaky faucets, failed adoptions, monthly bills, envy, project deadlines, rainy vacations, broken marriages, chronic back pain, pride, pornography, slippery roads, severed relationships, selfishness, racism, bee stings, abortions, and the ever present death of loved ones. This is our world. This was the Preacher's world. Yet even in the midst of it, he could still call people to rejoice always in the pleasures of life and to do so recognizing them as a gift of God. I want to look today at the Preacher's call to rejoice and to consider how he thought joy was possible in this cursed, crooked, and confusing world.

Our primary text today is found Eccl 11:7–12:1. Follow along as I read the text....

Verses 7–8 introduce the idea of God-conscious joy, and then 11:9–12:1 and beyond unpack how to preserve God-conscious joy. That is my outline for today's message: 11:7–8 are about the importance of sustaining God-conscious joy, and 11:9–12:1 clarify a method for maintaining God-conscious joy.

The Importance of Sustaining God-Conscious Joy (11:7–8)

Asserting the sun's sweetness (11:7)

Verse 7 asserts, "Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun." In Ecclesiastes, to be "under the sun" is to be identified with the realm of human breath and toil and all the results of the curse. "Under the sun" is the sphere of what is universally true of all humanity, believer and non-believer alike, throughout all time since the fall of mankind (1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17–20; 3:16; 4:1; etc.). In our world, the Preacher says, "the sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises" (1:5). Morning light always triumphs over the darkness of night, and in the midst of the blackness, the sun is already hastening to the place where it will rise again. For those experiencing darkness in this crooked world, past delights in the light awaken fresh desires for dawn. Like the sweetness of sleep after a long day's work (5:12[11]), the sight of light is tasteful, beautiful, delightful.

The Preacher lived in the days of shepherds' fires and oil lamps, when the dark of night was really dark, and when travelers were often guided only by the light of the moon. In those days, the sun's sweetness came in the way it let people function, setting the rhythm of sleep and work and seasons and years and identifying times for both celebration and burials. In the first work week of

Genesis 1, the day did not end in the dark, for “There was evening and there was morning, day one” (Gen 1:5). According to God’s timing, light always wins, as dawn gives rise to noon.

This book uses “light” and “darkness” metaphorically. On the one hand, the Preacher associates darkness with both trials (5:17[18]) and death (6:4; 12:2). As noted in 12:2, in death “the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.” Life under the old creation all ends in death, and thus the Preacher could bemoan that, regardless of one’s toil, “there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (2:11).

Look with me for a moment back in 2:11–14. The Preacher says in 2:11, “Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” Because everything in the old, cursed creation ends in death, there is no real gain under the sun.

Nevertheless, when the Preacher considered the place of wisdom and madness and folly, he reasoned that “there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness” (2:13). Here he parallels wisdom with light and foolishness with darkness, and he claims that wisdom and light supply real gain. So how can there be nothing to gain in this age under the sun (2:11) and yet there be true gain in wisdom and light (2:13)? I suggest it must be that the gain in wisdom and light relates to a life beyond life under the sun.

Look now at 2:14: “The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.” Though the fool lives under the sun, he lives his life in darkness. For the fool it is ever night. Yet the wise have eyes to see light. So it is alone the wise who can say, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun” (11:7). Later, in 7:11–12 the sage writes, “Wisdom is . . . an advantage to those who see the sun. For . . . wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.” Seeing the sun helps wise people preserve their lives. Past sightings of light give hope for future sightings of light and help true saints to persevere when darkness comes. Look with me back at 11:8.

The reason for the sun’s sweetness (11:8)

The ESV opens v. 8 with the conjunction “So,” but I honestly struggle to see how this translation is possible. The Hebrew conjunction is the normal one for expressing the basis for something, and I think that v. 8 gives the reason for why v. 7 is true. The same Hebrew structure is found in 4:9–10, and there the ESV

translated the text accordingly. A statement is made: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.” Now a reason is provided with a condition: “For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.” Similarly, I propose we are supposed to read vv. 7–8 this way: “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. For if a person lives many years, he should rejoice in them all; and he should remember that the days of darkness will be many.”

Now what is the Preacher’s reasoning here? I think it is this: “It is good to see light, to see the sun, to savor God’s goodness, *because* (1) encounters with light help us sustain God-conscious joy all our days and (2) our memory of light nurtures hope for more light as we journey through darkness.

Notice first that, if God grants that we live many years, we are supposed to be a people who “rejoice in them all.” There is “a time to be born, and a time to die”; between these poles, the Preacher calls us to rejoice. In times of planting and plucking, killing and healing, weeping and laughing, the Preacher calls us to rejoice. In times of mourning and dancing, embracing and refraining, seeking and losing, the Preacher calls us to rejoice. In times of silence and speaking, loving and hating, war and peace, the Preacher calls us to rejoice. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the sun” (3:1). But in all our many years, come what may, we are called to rejoice.

Light is sweet because of the way it serves our progressive sanctification. Light helps us sustain God-conscious joy. Seeing the sun reminds us that light always wins, that morning always comes, that cold is not lasting. With every dawn comes the promise of fresh mercies, so light is sweet because with every glimpse of brilliant and warm grace we are pushed to heighten hope for something beyond the night. Past grace nurture hope in future grace.

The Preacher stresses also, “It is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun because ... every person should remember that the days of darkness will be many.” Here remembering is directed not to the past but toward the future. As the wise person journeys through life, he should expect extended suffering and trials. If one lives many years, many days of these years will be filled with darkness.

As I already noted, in this book darkness is associated with distress (5:16–17) and death (6:4; 12:2). Because “the days of darkness” are “many” in 11:8, it seems most likely that the Preacher means that in one’s lifetime a person should expect to experience much pain, whether through personal trial or through the death of others. Coughs and car accidents, miscarriage and cancer are the lot of believers and non-believers alike, yet a fuel God gives the wise is to recall past

sightings of light and to let them remind us that the sun will rise again. “The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises” (1:5). Like Ps 23 reminds us, “surely goodness and mercy” are pursuing us (Ps 23:6), and they will overcome. Our great Shepherd will make it happen.

What should be clear is that biblical joy is not bound to circumstances. If you can rejoice in the midst of dark trials, you are tapping into something that is beyond life under the sun. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes was not a pessimist. He was a realist and a godly sage. “The wise person has his eyes in his head” (2:14), and for this one, “Light is sweet” (11:7). Are you able to see the light of God’s goodness today? Are you enjoying God’s grace? If so, embrace it, remember it, for it will serve you when storms come. Or are you in darkness now? Perhaps you feel like you are standing on the edge of Lake Superior in the fog. You know the Lord is there in all his vastness, but you are struggling to see him. I encourage you, don’t be anxious. Recall the work of God in your past, and allow those memories to generate gratitude and hope. He is faithful and will not let you go.¹

The final statement in v. 8 is, “All that comes is vanity.” The ESV’s translation is drawn from the Latin Vulgate’s *vanitas*, which suggests all of life is in some way pointless or futile. The refrain in both 1:2 and 12:8 therefore reads, “Vanity of vanities, ... all is vanity.” I question, though, whether this accurately captures the Preacher’s meaning. He does not talk as if he believed life was vain. “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun” (v. 8). He says that the living can find hope (9:4) and that wisdom has advantage in the way it preserves life (7:12). These are not the words of someone who thought that life under the sun was pointless. Indeed, it is because it is *not* pointless that we can authentically rejoice.

¹ The logic of vv. 7–8 is paralleled in two other texts in Ecclesiastes. The first is in 5:19–20, where we read, “Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.” Taking pleasure in the things of earth as a gift of God is a means of divine grace, for the moments of delight keep us from being overwhelmed during the many days of darkness. Similarly, in 8:15 the Preacher asserts, “I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.” According to the Preacher, those living under the sun should embrace the divinely-given opportunities “to eat and drink and be joyful,” for they will serve as memorials of divine blessing that can then serve us as we move out of the days into the nights of life. As believers, we are to capture every moment of delight “for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.” Each encounter with brightness helps us hope for light when we walk through night. Our past delights generate fresh desire and hope. For the Preacher, “light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun” (11:7) because the sight of light, which represents all that God is for us, helps us fulfill our call to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4), to “rejoice in our sufferings” (Rom 5:3), and to “count it all joy ... when you meet trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2).

So how would I translate this term? The Hebrew word is **הַבֵּל**, which simply means “breath, vapor.” So the question is, “In what way are all things breath?” Rather than simply saying life is “pointless,” the NIV goes further to the left in asserting, “All is *meaningless*”—everything is empty, a big Zero. But if the Preacher believed that all was meaningless, why did he think that we should listen to his own words? Do they not have meaning? Not only this, if all was meaningless, why did he experience such deep griefs over the world’s brokenness and such pleasure in health and prosperity? Why did he call people to fear God and to pursue wisdom if indeed all is meaningless? For the Preacher, this life is filled with meaning—meaning that we must seek to grasp, if even incompletely.

I propose that when the Preacher opens and closes his book with the declaration, “All is breath,” he meant that all things in this world are enigmatic or mysterious. This is why six times he accompanies the term with the phrase, “striving after wind” or “a shepherding of wind.” “I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is enigma and a striving after wind” (1:14). “And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind” (1:17). Trying to get our minds around all that God is doing in this world is like trying to shepherd wind. Just when we think we’ve got it, it blows in a different direction. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (Rom 11:33). As finite creatures, we are not able to grasp all that God is doing in this world, and this is deeply grieving. All that has come and all that will be bears a level of enigma that only adds to life’s frustrations and pains. The Preacher says, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him” (7:14). Similarly, he writes, “When I applied my heart to know wisdom, . . . then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out” (8:16–17).

All of life is an enigma. Yet in such a context, we must pursue joy, grasping every opportunity we have to see the light of God and using the moments to sustain us through seasons of trial and pain. Life’s sweet moments keep us balanced, reminding us that not all is lost. If you can see light today, embrace it, savor it, celebrate it, and use it in your fight for sustained God-conscious joy. If you find yourself in one of the many dark days of this life, struggling to discern God’s

purposes, pause to recall past mercy, see it as a gift of God, and use it to instill heightened desire and hope for fresh mercies at dawn.²

A Method for Maintaining God-Conscious Joy (11:9–12:1)

Now, whereas 11:7–8 stressed the importance of sustaining God-conscious joy, I believe that 11:9–12:1 help clarify a method for maintaining God-conscious joy. The Preacher captures the process in four groupings of imperatives.

- Step 1: Choose joy (11:9ab).
- Step 2: Live wisely (11:9cd).
- Step 3: Cast away cares (11:10ab).
- Step 4: Remember your Creator (12:1a)

This is how we can maintain God-conscious joy in the midst of life’s enigmas. Let’s consider each of these.

Step 1: Choose Joy (11:9ab)

Step 1 in maintaining God-conscious joy is to choose it—“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth” (v. 9ab). Choosing to rejoice is easier when days are bright, but it’s much more difficult in the night when our baby will not be consoled, when we learn that our dad lost his job, or when melanoma reaches stage 4. Nevertheless, in this text the first step in experiencing God-conscious joy is to want it. Yet we must remember that our vv. 7–8 already identified that God gives grace to help us in our quest. Past encounters with his goodness stoke the fires of unrelenting joy when the shadows rise. We must choose to rejoice, but this choice is empowered and made possible in the context of grace.

Seven times in Ecclesiastes the Preacher calls his reader to pursue joy (2:24–25; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20; 7:14; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:7–12:1). When he says, “Rejoice!” what does he mean?

I am going to provide a short definition here and then expand it as we progress through the rest of this message. *To rejoice is to find heart-felt pleasure in God and his gifts amidst both prosperity and adversity.* Verses 7–8 already highlighted that we are to sustain joy through both seasons of pleasure and seasons of pain. What I am now arguing is that this joy, at its core, is a pleasing sense or

² For more on the overarching message of Ecclesiastes, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Shepherding Wind and One Wise Shepherd: Grasping for Breath in Ecclesiastes,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15.3 (2011): 4–25.

feeling in the heart. In Ecclesiastes the “heart” is both the seat of thought and of feeling. On the one hand, the Preacher can say in 1:17, “I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.” The heart can *know* things, and the knowledge we have needs ever to have God at its center. As the end of 11:9 says, as you pursue joy, “*Know* that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” It’s the heart that approaches the present in light of the future.

But joy is not merely a mental activity, for the heart is also the place of emotion. Look at the three occurrences of the word “heart” in vv. 9–10. The heart gladdens a person—“Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.” Next, the heart guides the wise person—“Walk in the ways of your heart.” Finally, the heart feels, and we must free ourselves from carrying troubles in order to maintain joy—“Remove vexation from you heart.” To rejoice is to find heart-felt pleasure, and the Preacher states that step 1 in maintaining God-conscious joy is to choose it—“Rejoice, ... and let your heart cheer you.”

Now if the nature of joy is heart-felt pleasure, the object of joy is God and his gifts. By “gifts” I mean the things of earth like pumpkin pie and sparkling cider. In 2:14 the Preacher asserts, “Everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man” (cf. 5:19). Here not only the eating and drinking but also the pleasure itself is a gift from God. The Preacher then says, “I perceived that whatever God does endures forever.... God has done it, so that people fear before him” (2:15). God gives gifts and the power to enjoy them so that we can in turn remember him. Eating and drinking is not simply about the object. It’s also about the source. We should eat and drink for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Our joy in a hot fudge sundae should lead us to remember our Creator (12:1). When we remember the giver, we turn our delights of sloppy joes, Dr. Pepper, houses, cars, and teaching positions into praise. Sipping a hot chocolate on a crisp morning, taking a walk at the park during the peak of fall colors, receiving a promotion with pay increase at work—all these are gifts from God, and we should savor them and celebrate them to the praise of the giver. We now can expand our definition and say that *to rejoice is to find God-given heart-felt pleasure in God and his gifts amidst both prosperity and adversity.*

Step 2: Live wisely (11:9cd)

Step 2 in maintaining God-conscious joy is found in the second half of v. 9: “Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” A preacher really has to know his audience if he is to tell them, “Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.” Back in the Pentateuch Moses characterized his audience as “stubborn,

unbelieving, and rebellious” (e.g., Num 14:11; Deut 9:6–7, 23), and because of this he charged them in Num 15:39 “not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes.”

Here, however, I suggest that the context is very different. The rest of Ecclesiastes strongly clarifies that the Preacher is by no means commending an unrestrained, worldly pursuit of pleasure. In 11:7–10, it’s important to note that the Preacher is addressing the wise and not the fool. He said in 11:8 that “it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun,” and in 2:14 he observed, “The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.” Only the wise see the sun as a manifestation of God’s goodness and grace (7:11–12). So what do we know about the wise in this book. 8:5 tells us, “The wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.” Similarly, 10:2 stresses: “A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left.” So if the wise person’s heart is bent godward, knowing the just way, it makes sense why the Preacher would call him to “walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes.” These will be the ways of God.³

If you are among the wise today, among those who have tasted and seen that God is good, do not hesitate to walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. In the words of 9:7, “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.” Paul told Timothy that requiring abstinence from marital sex or certain foods was a teaching of demons, “for everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:4). Similarly, the godly sage in this book frees us to have a merry heart, “for God has already approved what you do.”

Yet there is a stated caution. We must be sure to make every step, every decision, every click, every purchase, every glance knowing “that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (11:9).⁴ Because life and work is a gift (5:18–19[17–18]) and because God alone brings joy (2:24–25), we are accountable to how we engage it. Earlier in 3:16, the Preacher bemoaned, “I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.” But then in 3:17 he took solace knowing that “God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for

³ As for walking “in the sight of his eyes,” 6:9 states, “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite.” This suggests that the sage in 11:9 is urging the wise person to seek what is tangible and attainable rather than to give in to wandering, unhealthy desire of envy or covetousness.

⁴ “Awareness of divine judgment turns the pursuit of joy away from crossing over into sins” (Garrett, *Ecclesiastes*, 340).

every matter and for every work” (cf. 5:2). The Lord will hold us accountable for every word and every deed, and this fact must color how we pursue joy.

At the core, what the Preacher is calling for is a daily ethic grounded in the fear of God, and he was convinced that those who lived in fear would reap benefits beyond the grave. 8:12–13 really capture this well: “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God” (cf. 3:14; 5:7; 7:16–18; 12:13–14).

The kind of joy that the Preacher calls for is not only God-given; it is God-approved. Once you become a child of the King, he gives you freedom to delight in all that he owns, yet in a way that honors his goodness. As a believer who is growing in the fear of God, you must trust that “the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way” (8:5) and that “a wise man’s heart inclines him to the right” (10:2). Celebrating God as the great giver and knowing that he will hold you accountable, step out and follow the desires of your heart, “for God has already approved what you do” (9:7).

I am now ready to give my whole definition of joy in Ecclesiastes. For the Preacher, *to rejoice is to find God-given and God-approved heart-felt pleasure in God and his gifts amidst both prosperity and adversity*. Present joys supply a foretaste of eternal pleasures beyond judgment, and past joys help fuel hope for brighter days.

Step 3: Cast away cares (v. 10)

Step 3 in maintaining God-conscious joy is found in v. 10: “Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are an enigma.” The verbs to “remove” and to “put away” identify that finding joy at all times—even in the days of darkness (v. 8)—requires that we decide not to allow the burdens, confusions, vexations, and troubles of this life to wear us down. The Preacher is not calling us to act as though life is a party when in fact it’s pain. No, he recognizes that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (3:4). We don’t ignore human troubles, but we must not allow them to consume us.

Jesus said, “Do not be anxious about your life.... Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matt 6:34). Similarly, Paul asserted,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6). Knowing that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble,” Peter exhorted, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties upon him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:5–7). Because youth and the dawn of life are filled with confusion and enigma, “remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body” (Eccl 11:10). That is step 3 in how to maintain God-conscious joy.

Step 4: Remember your Creator (v. 11)

There is no higher way to keep our joy maintained than to remember our Creator (11:11). Look with me at 11:5: “As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.” Don’t think of God as someone who only created in the past but is now distant and separated. No, he is right now making ... right now upholding all things by the word of his power. Moment by moment by moment. If he stops speaking you and I stop living. We have a “God who makes *everything*.” And the Preacher meant, “Everything.”

Listen to 7:13–14: “Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: *God* has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.” We are ignorant; we are small. And God is in charge. His purposes are not being thwarted through your child’s chromosome disorder. He was on the throne before the cancer struck, and he is on the throne now!

And if all this power that we cannot contain and if all this power that we cannot explain is nevertheless working for us, we need not fear those who can only kill the body but cannot kill the soul. We need not falter in our faith when we fail and exam. For greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world. He is stronger; he is higher, and because of this we have hope.

The fear of God leads to the approval of God, and by this our Creator becomes also our Shepherd—the great protector and the great provider. Turn with me to 12:11: “The words of the wise are like goads [that guide], and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one *Shepherd*.” When life’s enigmas rise so that it feels like we are just shepherding wind, remember

your Creator. Remember that all authority in heaven and on earth was given to the one by whom all things exist, things “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). And Remember that this one who is working for his glory loves you and that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38–39).

Conclusion: Rejoicing amidst Life’s Enigmas

In conclusion, let me just summarize the main takeaways for our quest to sustain and maintain God-conscious joy, even amidst life’s enigmas.

1. Verses 7–8 call us to savor the sweetnesses of life—when God’s goodness and grace are like the warmth and brightness of the sun on a weary soul. Memorialize these moments, for they are God-given fuel for sustaining God-conscious joy even through our many days of trial. The delights we enjoy in the good times stoke fires of desire and hope in the darkness, as we rest confident that the God who causes the sun to rise and go down is hastening the sun to the place where it will rise again (1:5). If you are a suffering saint today, pause to ponder God’s goodness in your past, and let the gratitude that rises give you confidence that light will shine again on your weary heart.
2. Verses 9–11 teach us how to maintain God-conscious joy. We choose to rejoice in God and his gifts, we live wisely in the fear of God, we cast our burdens on God, knowing that he cares, and we remember our Creator. *To rejoice is to find God-given and God-approved heart-felt pleasure in God and his gifts amidst both prosperity and adversity as fuel for hope in brighter days and as a foretaste of eternal pleasures beyond judgment.* Rejoice today, remembering what God has done in your past and resting confident that he will work all good for you in the future. Rejoice today, trusting that the Lord guides the desires of all who fear him. Rejoice today, knowing that God is able to meet you in your pain and that he will let light shine in your life again. Rejoice today, knowing that your Creator is also your Shepherd, and he is even now hastening the sun to the place where it will rise again.

The orthodox sage in Ecclesiastes was a “Preacher of Joy,” but his was not a flimsy, circumstantial happiness. No, his was a “profound enjoyment”⁵ or, what we could call, a “serious joy.” His call is for us to stop striving against God’s providence and to start trusting the God who is in control and who is both willing and able to help all who fear him. The fear of God leads to the approval of God, which frees you and me to delight today in the gifts of God as we hope for the promise of God. If you are feeling the weight of the curse and the burden of life’s enigmas, I urge you to turn your eyes toward God in Christ, resting in his purposes and delighting whenever possible in him and in his beautiful, disfigured world. In this we will find lasting gain unto eternity.

⁵ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 211.

Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:1

Theme: Sustaining and maintaining God-conscious joy through life's enigmas.

Main Idea: The Preacher highlights the importance of sustaining and a method for maintaining God-conscious joy through life's enigmas.

- I. The Importance of Sustaining God-Conscious Joy (11:7–8)
 - A. Asserting the sun's sweetness (11:7)
 - B. The reason for the sun's sweetness: It's benefits for sustaining God-conscious joy even through many days of darkness (11:8)
- II. A Method for Maintaining God-Conscious Joy (11:9–12:1)
 - A. Choosing joy (11:9ab)
 - B. Living circumspectly (11:9cd)
 - C. Casting away cares (11:10ab)
 - D. Remembering your Creator (12:1)

John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, once wrote:

The day is now breaking: how beautiful its appearance! How welcome the expectation of the approaching sun! It is this thought makes the dawn agreeable, that it is the presage of a brighter light; otherwise, if we expect no more day than it is this minute, we should rather complain of darkness, than rejoice in the early beauties of the morning. Thus the life of grace is the dawn of immortality: beautiful beyond expression, if compared with the night and thick darkness which formerly covered us; yet faint, indistinct, and unsatisfying, in comparison of the glory which shall be revealed. (The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 319)

The words that follow are inspired by this quote.

*The sun breaks and beauty appears,
A daily reminder that all our fears
Of dread are passed, though pain persists—
The toil, the sorrow, a persistent mist
That will be burned away in course of time,
A hopeful rest when full glow shines.*

*The light of dawn is only agreeable
Because the light of noon is foreseeable.
If no hope existed for a brighter light,*

*Sustained shadows would be lingering night.
Yet darkness is passing; the true light glows—
A brightening sky overcoming sorrows.*

*The dawn of immortality is the life we tread,
A life of grace because Christ bled
Taking wrath we all deserve—
A gift of love to preserve
A people for himself into the age to come—
The curse abolished in the rise of the Son.*

—Jason S. DeRouchie

Remembering that our lives today are lived in the dawn, not at *night*, can help us remember that life is not as bad as it could be and that we have not received what we deserve. God is truly for us, shown in the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, the just for the ungodly.

Remembering that our lives today are lived in the dawn, not at *noon*, can help us overcome our own sin, knowing it has already been canceled, help us love the unlovable, knowing the day is nearing when all will give an account, and help us push through the present trials in hope for lasting, unrestrained, untainted joy. Come Lord Jesus!