INTRODUCTION
Chapter 11 of the book of Ecclesiastes begins a major new section of this book. It is a call for commitment to God. Having spent ten chapters relentlessly exposing the emptiness and utter futility of living a secular, God-denying lifestyle, his tone changes dramatically. He begins to exhort his readers to a life of faith and obedience to God. Yet he approaches this call in a somewhat oblique fashion. He uses homely illustrations to make his point.

LIVE BOLDLY (verses 1 & 2)
When we read verse 1 the picture that forms in our minds is probably of a couple standing on the walkway around Hamilton Lake throwing bread out to the waiting ducks. They flap wildly to grab the pieces before another duck can do so. If the bread makes it into the water they paddle quickly to scoop up the floating morsels. There is only one problem with this picture: it is not what the verse is talking about. The word cast should be translated as send. But also bread thrown into the water does not return to you after many days. In fact it begins to disintegrate. So the verse cannot mean what it seems to mean at first sight. What does it mean? There are a number of interpretations:
1. Many commentators think it means, “Give your bread, or your food, to those in need and eventually your generosity will mean that you yourself will be rewarded by the generosity of others.” So it about charitable giving, and Solomon is saying, “Be generous to others and in due course you will be rewarded.” But while this is good advice, it does not fit in with verses 3 and 4 or with the point of the book of Ecclesiastes.
2. Another possibility is that Solomon is thinking of a farmer sowing his seed in the flood plain of a river during its annual flooding. Charles Bridges argues that Solomon has in mind the regular flooding of the Nile River, “The time for sowing the seed, is just when the waters are going down, leaving a loamy bed, in which the seed apparently lost is deposited, and produces a most luxuriant harvest.” So the bread cast on the waters is found after many days as a harvest of grain. This makes sense, but would be relevant only to those who farmed along a river that flooded regularly and it is strange that Solomon talked of casting bread, rather than casting grain.
3. Yet another possibility is that the verse is talking about international trade. Solomon is saying “Send your bread (bread, or grain, being representative of the agricultural production of a primary producing country like Israel) on the sea and after many days your ship will return with your money or with goods purchased with your money. (e.g. 1 Kings 10:22) This is the most likely explanation of verse 1. If so Solomon is saying we should handle our spiritual business in the same way that an international trading venture had to be handled. What we invest in the work of the gospel – out time, our talents and our treasure – is never wasted. But we have to step out boldly in faith. This interpretation fits in with verse 2 and with the theme of the book. Verse 2 then means “Do not put all your eggs in one basket. Be wise. Send your exports on a number of ships in order to minimize your risk of loss.” The spiritual application would be: don’t put all your spiritual efforts into just one project or one person, it might fail.

TRUST IN GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY (verses 3-5)
We do not know what the future holds. As Christians we tend to be conservative people. But in Christian work we have to walk by faith, and not by sight. We have to trust in the sovereignty of God. Verses 3 tells us that God is in control of all events, and mostly we can do nothing about them. The person who worries overly about what might happen can be paralysed by fear and do nothing. (verse 4) Verse 5 drives his point home with an example from human development. We understand the mechanics of human reproduction, but we do not know how God creates a soul in the embryo. This is a mystery beyond our ability to investigate and comprehend. So it is in spiritual ministry. For example we can learn how to present the gospel, but we cannot learn how to create faith in the life of a sinner. We cannot make him experience the new birth. We have no control over these things. In the area of spiritual things we must trust in the sovereignty of God.
WORK DILIGENTLY  (verse 6)
We do not know what God is doing in terms of specifics, but we do know that he is building his church. (Matthew 16:18) This knowledge should motivate us to be busy in God’s work. The more hopeless and confused our world seems to be the busier we should be. If the times seem meaningless, we should labour to bring meaning to them. We are not to regard the seasons, but to be diligent in sowing the Word of God.

Philip Ryken relates the story of the conversion of a man named Luke Short. He became a Christian at the age of 103: “Shot was sitting under a hedge in Virginia when he happened to remember a sermon he had once heard preached by the famous Puritan John Flavel. As he recalled the sermon, Short asked God to forgive his sins right then and there, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He lived for three more years, and when he died, the following words were inscribed on his tombstone: “Here lies a babe in Christ, aged three years, who died according to nature, aged 106.” But here is the remarkable part of the story: the sermon that old Mr. Short remembered had been preached eighty-five years earlier, back in England! Nearly a century had passed between Flavel’s sermon and Short’s conversion, between the sowing and the reaping.”

Don’t give up. Never say never, “for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.”