

Ecclesiastes 11:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand—the Hebrew zera (זֶרַע, seed) functions both literally (agricultural seed) and metaphorically (works, investments, efforts). The command to sow both morning and evening creates a merism expressing continuous, diligent labor without hesitation. The rationale follows: **for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that** (כִּי אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ אִי זֶה יִכְשָׁר). Human beings cannot predict which efforts will succeed—the verb kasher (כָּשַׁר, prosper/succeed) indicates favorable outcome. This verse teaches industrious stewardship under uncertainty.

The Preacher's counsel balances wisdom and faith: work diligently because outcomes are unpredictable, not because success is guaranteed. This anticipates Jesus's parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23) where seed falls on various soils with different results. Paul echoes this: 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase' (1 Corinthians 3:6). Believers labor faithfully, trusting God's sovereignty over results. The verse forbids both presumptuous sloth (assuming effort is pointless) and anxious calculation (attempting to guarantee outcomes). Faithful stewardship sows generously despite uncertainty.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's agricultural economy made seed-sowing vivid imagery. Farmers sowed in both early rains (October-November, 'morning') and later rains (March-

April, 'evening'), maximizing harvest potential despite uncertain weather. Crop failure from drought, locusts, or disease was common, making diversified planting prudent. Solomon's wisdom literature frequently used agricultural metaphors (Proverbs 11:18, 22:8). The post-exilic community, rebuilding after Babylonian captivity, faced agricultural and economic uncertainty—Haggai rebuked those who withheld effort (Haggai 1:6-11). This verse provided wisdom for uncertain times: keep working faithfully despite unpredictable outcomes.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What 'seeds' (investments of time, energy, resources) are you hesitant to sow due to fear of failure or uncertain outcomes?
2. How does trusting God's sovereignty over results free you to work diligently without anxiety about which efforts will 'prosper'?

Interlinear Text

בֹּבֶ קָר	זָרַע ע	אֶת זָרַע בָּ	וְלַע רֶב	אֵל	תִּנֵּחַ
In the morning	sow	thy seed	and in the evening		withhold
H1242	H2232	H853 H2233	H6153	H408	H3240
יָד בָּ	כִּי	אֵינְךָ	יֹדַע	אֵי	זֶה
not thine hand			for thou knowest	not whether	shall prosper
H3027	H3588	H369	H3045	H335	H2088 H3787
הָזֶה	אוֹ	זֶה	וְאֵם	שְׁנֵיהֶם	כָּאֵד
H2088	H176	H2088	H518	either this or that or whether they both	shall be alike
				H8147	H259

טוֹבִים:

good
H2896

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 55:10 (Parallel theme): For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

Hosea 10:12 (Parallel theme): Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

2 Corinthians 9:6 (Parallel theme): But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

2 Timothy 4:2 (Parallel theme): Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 (Parallel theme): Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Ecclesiastes 9:1 (Parallel theme): For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.

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