In chapter 11, Solomon points out that we do not know what the future holds and that we should conduct our lives accordingly, not being timid but taking the appropriate precautions. He advises us to get done what we can while we are young for old age is coming and chapter 12 points out that old age brings troubles and trials and a diminished capacity and motivation for facing them.

Ecclesiastes 11

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.

Solomon appears to be giving us advice on investing in the future.
"Cast thy <u>bread</u> *[food; grain]* **upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days"** – We are advised to not be afraid to use our resources today for a future gain. Many commentators believe casting our "bread" upon the waters refers to the sowing of seed on marshy ground with the expectation of a future harvest. Solomon's point is that we may not see the fruit of our investment today but it will eventually come given enough time.
"Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what <u>evil</u> *[bad; displeasing; sad]* **shall be upon the earth"** – Solomon also advocates diversification. We should not "put all of our eggs in one basket" as the old expression says. We have no idea what kind of bad days might be ahead that might destroy our investment that was made in a particular area. To diversify insures that even if one investment fails, the others will likely be able to continue. A farmer will not be devastated by a destroyed grain harvest if he also has a vineyard, flocks and herds, etc. to sustain him.

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.

Solomon is pointing out how powerless we are to control what happens in the future. We can't stop a cloud that is full of rain from emptying its contents on the earth. If a tree falls (possibly due to the storm from the rain clouds), we are powerless to change where it fell. Obviously Solomon is speaking during a time before the technology and machinery existed for doing these things.

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

Solomon pictures a farmer who puts far too much weight on his observations of the wind and the clouds when deciding when to sow his fields. A farmer who is waiting for the "perfect" time when the weather is just right will never sow his seed and will never reap a harvest. The lesson to us is that we do not know the future and can never predict the perfect time to get married, buy a house, invest in the stock market, or any other countless things that depend on what will happen in the future.

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.

Solomon continues exploring the idea of mankind's limited knowledge of what God does. The Hebrew word for "spirit" refers to wind or breath, so he is either saying that we don't know the path of the wind or that we don't understand how God gives life. We also do not understand how a baby grows inside his/her mother's womb. By the same token, we do not understand how God does these things nor what He is doing in the world.

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.

Solomon advises us to not assume that some things will succeed without doing all we can to ensure their success. He uses the illustration of planting and working our field as an illustration. We should sow our seed and not "withhold our hand" (neglect) from doing everything we can to ensure that the seed will take root and grow. We should work like any or all of our ventures could fail because we don't know which of them will succeed, whether some, none or all.

7 Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes to behold the sun: 8 But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh *is* vanity.

"Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes to behold the sun" – Solomon seems to be using the light of the sun as a metaphor for the good days in our life, when God is allowing us to prosper and enjoy life.
"But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all" – We should rejoice in and appreciate the good days that God has given us and will give us in the future.
"yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many" – However, we should also remember that we also have had days of "darkness" (bad days) and that there will be more in the future. Solomon warns us that there will be many bad days.
"All that cometh *is* <u>vanity</u> *[vapor]***"** – Both the good days and the bad days that are still in our future are "vanity" (vapor). Perhaps Solomon is stressing that these days will be brief as a vapor or that it is pointless to try to avoid all of them.

9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment.

"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth" – Young men are to enjoy and use their youth, while they are full of energy and ambition.
"and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes" – Solomon encourages them to do what they know to be right in their heart according to the information that they can see with their eyes.
"but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment" – However, they need to govern their behavior because they are accountable to God for their actions.

10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity.

The Hebrew word translated "sorrow" can mean "grief; agitation; anger" and the word translated "evil" can mean "injury; distress; misery." Solomon recommends that we enjoy our lives both emotionally and physically while we can because our days of childhood and young adulthood will be over before we know it. They are as brief as "vanity" (vapor).

Ecclesiastes 12

1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" – We should start serving God when we are young and not wait until we are old. We can accomplish more for God when we still have our health and the energy of youth.
"while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh" – When we are young, the bad things that we may experience later in life (accidents, injuries, health problems, etc.) have not yet happened. Also, we can deal with physical challenges more easily before "the years draw nigh" (we have become old).
"when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" – The older we get, the less energy and motivation we have to do what needs to be done. We do not enjoy life as we once did in our youth because of the aches and pains we are experiencing.

2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: 3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, 4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

Continuing the idea of enjoying life while you can, Solomon uses figurative language to describe the troubles that come with old age. Do what you can while the sun, moon and stars are shining, before the clouds come back even after it has rained. The "keepers of the house" (guards) will eventually shake due to the weakness of old age, and the once strong soldiers who defend it will no longer be able to stand. The grinders of wheat into flour will cease their work because they are growing old. Those looking out of windows can no longer see what is outside because their vision has darkened. The "doors shut in the streets" refers to a man's lips doing little speaking in old age, and the sound of "grinding" (chewing) is low because of the lack of teeth. In old age a man may have trouble sleeping ("rising up at the voice of the bird") and he may not enjoy music like he once did.

5 Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

"Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way" – Solomon speaks of fears that come to the aged, such as the fear of heights and fears of what can happen to them on the streets/roads when they travel.
"and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail" – The almond tree "flourishing" (blooming) refers to the gray or white hair of old age, when even something as small as a grasshopper can be an annoyance (perhaps through its chirping). Sexual desire also fades with age.
"because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets" – A man's "long home" is where he will spend eternity (a "long" time). Solomon is speaking of the man's death when mourners travel the streets to attend the funeral.

6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Solomon seems to be using metaphors to describe the body failing at death. Some think the silver cord refers to the spine and the golden bowl to the skull or brain. The pitcher at the fountain refers to a container lowered into the well to collect water. Some wells used a wheel to make lowering the container easier. When these things are broken, it makes the water difficult or impossible to access. Perhaps Solomon is referring to the circulatory system of the body failing with age.

7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. 8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all *is* vanity.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was" – Once the body has failed, it will return to the dust of the earth (**Gen. 3:19** *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"*).
"and the <u>spirit</u> *[breath]* **shall return unto God who gave it"** – The life that God gave man will return to Him (**Gen. 2:7** *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"*). For without the life given by God, man is just a pile of dust.
"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all *is* vanity" – As Solomon ponders the end of a man's life outside of God, he concludes that it is not just "vanity" (vapor) but "vanity of vanities." Everything in a man's life becomes pointless when you are only considering what is accomplished in this life. It takes God's promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ to make life meaningful and worthwhile.