

Remembering God in Youth and Old Age

Ecclesiastes 11:7 - 12:8 Truly the light is sweet, And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; ⁸ ¶ But if a man lives many years And rejoices in them all, Yet let him remember the days of darkness, For they will be many. All that is coming is vanity. ⁹ ¶ Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. ¹⁰ ¶ Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity. ^{NKJ} **Ecclesiastes 12:1** Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them": ² While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain; ³ In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim; ⁴ When the doors are shut in the streets, And the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low; ⁵ Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets. ⁶ Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. ⁷ Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it. ⁸ "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity."

Recently, Josh McDowell stated that the results of four major studies done in the US show that there is really no difference between the average youth in a fundamental evangelical church and the average secular youth. There is no difference in their viewing habits, their listening habits, their sexual habits, their disciplines, their attitudes, and even their beliefs. I am not sure that is a failure of the youth. I think it's a failure of the church and a failure of parents. When the church and the church's families raise children and teens that do almost everything the world does, it points to a weak gospel, weak discipleship and weak church life. When the gospel is a folk cliché, when discipleship involves no cross-carrying, and when the church involves no covenant life, our youth believe the gospel of me-truth, are disciplined by entertainment, and belong to the covenant community of the world.

That shouldn't be the case.

As we approach the end of the book, Solomon is nailing down his conclusion. He is becoming more and more explicit. And in this section, he wants his readers to understand that the big conclusion of fearing God is not just for those who are about to die. It is for everyone. And particularly, he turns his attention to the young (v9, 10, 12:1) Who are the young? Well, that's not easy to answer. Obviously, it includes children and teenagers. Our world tends to see people in their twenties as youths. Biblically, you were considered a youth until you were forty years old. In fact, if you had met eighty-year-old Caleb, you would have considered him to be young. Youthfulness is virility and strength of mind and body. However you define it in terms of age, it refers to those who, from a human point of view, have most of their lives still ahead of them.

Why the young?

The young are the most likely to disagree with him. The young are the most likely to want to do exactly the opposite of what he is calling for. Youth is a time of great strength and great opportunity. Your body is healthy and virile. You can do almost anything to it and it bounces back. You can stay up to all hours and not be completely wiped out. You can eat hamburgers and milkshakes and extra dessert and it doesn't even show up on your body. You can even put harmful things into your body and it doesn't seem as detrimental. It makes you feel invincible. "I can do anything I want." You look handsome or beautiful. People admire you and notice you. It feels good. Your mind is quick and fertile. You can remember things well, and store a lot of information. People are interested in hiring you and paying you. You start to get money, you are at the peak of your powers, and it is not hard to reason, "Why should I limit what I can do with this time in my life? I won't be this strong and this good looking forever. I need to get out there, enjoy the world, experience life. I don't want to be one of those people who regrets not having enjoyed their youth. I don't want to

miss out. It's all very well these people telling me not to experience sin. But they did! They got to try it! Now they tell me they regret it! Well, if they can try it for themselves, so can I!"

So the young person is probably the most likely to say to the things in this book, "Maybe it's true, but it's too soon for me to commit. There will always be time to come back to God. But I won't be young forever."

The second reason that Solomon is targeting the young is that they have their whole lives ahead of them. Everything worth doing takes time. Learning the Word of God takes time. Unlearning sinful thoughts and ways take time. Learning to love what God loves takes time. Becoming like Christ takes time. And while God may mercifully save anyone at any age, the truth is, the more time you have ahead of you, the more potential there is for you to put off the old man, put on the new, become like Christ and love God.

Every now and then, I will meet people who are in some stage of senile dementia. And in that state, all kinds of things start coming out of their mouths and hearts. And while sometimes it is certainly due to a mental breakdown, perhaps some of it is the sinful nature of those persons that was never chastened or put to death. Now, as they lose what used to be a self-controlled handle on their conduct, what is in the heart and undealt with, starts coming out. My prayer is that I would so fight with my sin and so put it to death, that if I come to that place where I no longer have the same control over my mind as I used to, what remains in my heart will be pleasing to God.

But you see youth is exactly the time to make that decision. Anyone who came to Christ late in life will tell you it is not as simple as saying, OK, now I will commit to the Lord. The longer you have gone away from God, the more regret, the more pain, the more things to overcome. So Solomon wants the young person to hear his message.

According to M. R. de Haan, after the age of 35 only one person in 50,000 receives Christ; after 45 only one in 300,000; and after 75 only one in 700,000 is converted."

Solomon has two things to say to the young person, enjoy life, and remember your Creator. And on those two commands, he gives two reminders, judgement is coming, and difficult times are coming.

I. Rejoice in Life.

Truly the light is sweet, And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;

Light here refers to life. Life is to be enjoyed. It is pleasant to be alive, he says. In light of that, he goes on to say,

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes;

It is sad to think that many young people buy the idea that loving God is the death of their joy. In fact, here we have texts which explicitly say, young person, enjoy life. You will not always have the opportunities and potential you have now. So enjoy it. Make the most of it. You are right to want to enjoy the gifts and energy that come with being young.

Proverbs 20:29 *The glory of young men is their strength, And the splendor of old men is their gray head.*

And hasn't the book of Ecclesiastes continued to urge us to enjoy life under God?

Ecclesiastes 2:24 *Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.*

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 *I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, ¹³ and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor -- it is the gift of God.*

Ecclesiastes 5:18 *Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.*

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 *Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works. ⁸ ¶ Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil. ⁹ ¶ Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.*

By the way, God does not frown upon youth. God Himself enjoys the place of youth within His plan.

1 John 2:13-14 *write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.*

So the first command is to enjoy life and to make the most of it under God.

The second command is a different way of saying what has been said throughout the book: Fear God.

II. Remember Your Creator.

Remember your Creator. Why do you think Solomon uses the word 'Creator' instead of God?

Perhaps to remind us that He is our designer, and He knows what is best for us. We belong to Him. The word *remember* does not mean, recall now and then. It means to be committed to Him, to be in a fervent, wholehearted relationship with God, where He is at the centre of your life.

We know this because of how the Bible describes forgetting God.

Deuteronomy 32:16-18 *They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger. ¹⁷ They sacrificed to demons, not to God, To gods they did not know, To new gods, new arrivals That your fathers did not fear. ¹⁸ Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, And have forgotten the God who fathered you.*

Isaiah 17:10-11 *Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, And have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, Therefore you will plant pleasant plants And set out foreign seedlings; ¹¹ In the day you will make your plant to grow, And in the morning you will make your seed to flourish; But the harvest will be a heap of ruins In the day of grief and desperate sorrow.*

Jeremiah 2:32 *Can a virgin forget her ornaments, Or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.*

This kind of forgetting is not a momentary lapse. It is not a passive forgetting of information. It is deliberately rejecting the truth of God so that you can pursue your own desires. It is pretending not to acknowledge God so that you can go your own way.

Therefore, remembering God is the deliberate act of knowing and loving God. It is cultivating the awareness of God, so that you think about Him in what you do. The rejoicing that you are told to experience is a rejoicing done with your Creator firmly remembered.

You see, when a young person is in the middle of a sin, if he is present at an ungodly place, if he is involved in activities with the ungodly, do you think he or she is remembering God at that moment? No. If he is a Christian, he is doing everything in his power to forget God.

Remembering God is something you give yourself to. You cultivate a relationship with God by learning to pray and commit everything in your life to Him. You take in His Word in large amounts so that it shapes your thinking. You choose to befriend and walk with other believers, intent on

loving God. You expose your eyes and ears to what is wholesome and helpful and useful to loving God.

When Joseph, at a little older than seventeen, resisted the seduction of Potiphar's wife, he had given Himself to remembering his Creator. When David chose to stand up to someone who was blaspheming God, even though he could not have been much older than a teen, he was remembering His creator. When Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chose not to eat the king's food, and later, not to bow down before the image, they were remembering their Creator. But you don't do big things like that, unless you are learning to love and remember Him in the little things.

*Remember **now** your Creator in the days of your youth.*

Solomon now gives the young person two reasons why you should enjoy life, but enjoy it in a committed relationship with God.

I. You Will be Judged

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. ¹⁰ ¶ Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity.

Yes, rejoice, yes enjoy yourself, but remember, God will judge you. Therefore, remove from your life the things that you will regret and rue on the day of judgement. Childhood and youth are not that important in the grand scheme of things, they are empty, weightless, when you think about standing before God.

In fact, when you stand before God, you will not be young. You will be whatever age people look like at the resurrection. And there you will stand before God.

If you have not trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then this is the scene that awaits you:

Revelation 20:11-15 *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*

Can you imagine waiting to be judged, waiting your turn? You know that when it is your turn, you and you alone will be on trial. Finally, you are called up. No one stands with you. No one defends you. There is no one to blame, to laugh with, to crack a joke with. On the other side will be the Lord Jesus Christ, your Creator. As you look into His eyes, it is like they are looking through you and in you and exposing every evil thing you ever did. And as the books are brought out, you find that every idle word you ever spoke is recorded. Every evil thought is recorded. But most of all, it is recorded how you rejected Jesus Christ's offer to save you. Those eyes all at once have great anger that you spent your life, your God-breathed life on yourself, and great grief for you, that you made your choice and now you must spend eternity punished for not loving the One who is most lovely.

Solomon says, before you just jump into things, remember, this day is inevitably coming.

On the other hand, if you have truly trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then this is the judgement that awaits you.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

This is equally sobering. As a believer, you will arrive in the presence of God with your whole life's works covering you. And like someone who steps through one of those security scanners, in a moment, your whole life's work will be scanned and tested to see if it was built on love for Jesus Christ. There will be no time to make excuses, no time to bargain, the process will be quick and absolutely accurate. Everything you did and lived for that was sinful or worthless or apart from Christ will be stripped from you, like clothes you cannot wear. For some, according to these verses, they will be stripped almost naked.

On the other hand, everything you did for Jesus Christ out of true and ordinate love will as it were turn to jewellery upon your person – like seeing a beggar transformed into a prince in one moment. It doesn't matter what rationalisations I put on my life – why I do what I do – that day will declare it. Jesus knows.

Solomon says, young person, enjoy life. Flex your youthful muscles. Let your explosive energy and creativity and enthusiasm come out. But remember, nothing apart from love for Jesus Christ will count.

There is a second reason he gives you for making God the centre of the life you seek to enjoy.

II. Difficult Days Are Coming.

¶ But if a man lives many years And rejoices in them all, Yet let him remember the days of darkness, For they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.

Remember in your joy, difficult days are coming.

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":

Remember your Creator now, because the difficult days are coming, which you will not take pleasure in. What are these difficult days? They are the days of your old age. From verses 2 to 7, Solomon describes in perhaps the most beautiful poem of old age ever written, what it feels like. Notice that God dignifies old age with a beautiful poem, while giving you a very realistic picture of its pains. He is not shaming the elderly, or ridiculing; he is, in fact, honouring them with such language. But he is not sugar-coating it either. He says, young person, you are every day moving towards these days. This is what they are going to feel like. This is what they are going to be like. So, before these days come, love God.

What if those days have already come for you? Then remember, God's desire is that you finish well. Far better to start badly and finish well, than to get it the other way around.

What are these difficult days like?

While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain;

Life seems to lose its expectation. It seems to be dimming and losing its joys.

Some translations have the clouds returning after rain, which speaks of sorrows increasing with time.

³ *In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down;*

The keepers of the house are the arms and hands. They are your protectors, your keepers. But they begin to tremble and shake eg the strong men refers to the legs. They begin to bow down and lose their stability. Your steps begin to be shorter, and are more unsteady.

When the grinders cease because they are few,

This refers to the teeth. They have now become worn down or fallen out. In some cases, there are only gums that can barely chew.

And those that look through the windows grow dim;

This is the eyesight. It becomes harder to see, harder to read, to drive, to see at night, to recognise objects. When your vision is dimmed, your reactions and responses must be dimmed, because you simply cannot respond to what you cannot recognise.

⁴ *When the doors are shut in the streets,*

The doors probably refer to the hearing. The ears seem to shut, and it is hard to hear various sounds, especially low sounds.

And the sound of grinding is low;

This is the voice that was once strong, like the grinding of wheat which was done energetically and cheerfully by young people, but now is low and soft, closer to a whisper.

When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low;

Insomnia and light sleeping are part of old age, and when he or she does wake, the beautiful chirping of the birds seems hard to hear, and no longer as pleasant.

⁵ *Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way;*

There is a fear of climbing stairs, for fear of an unsteady foot. Terror in the way can be the many possible things that can make the elderly feel jittery or jumpy, the possibility of being knocked over, of being attacked, of falling...

When the almond tree blossoms,

The almond tree is white, so the reference here is to the dark hair turning gray and then white.

The grasshopper is a burden,

An old grasshopper hobbling awkwardly along pictures the difficulty in walking and moving and getting around.

And desire fails.

The appetites wane, one no longer tastes food like one used to, there is reduced sexual desire, and the desires fail.

And then, God gracefully describes the death of a human being.

For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets. ⁶ Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. ⁷ Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it. ⁸ "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity."

You have a golden lamp bowl suspended with a silver chain and a pitcher at a well, lowered or raised by a wheel. And the moment of death is where the cord is untied, the bowl and the pitcher drop and are broken. God describes human life as precious, but fragile. And at that point, the body returns to dust, and the spirit goes to God for judgement.

Solomon says, know young man, these days are coming for you. You cannot escape them. There will come a time when your eyes and ears and teeth and memory fail, when your arms and legs fail, when you are unsteady, unsure, and afraid. On that day, Solomon says, it will be very hard to begin remembering your Creator. Not impossible, but hard. So the call is, commit yourself to Him before those days come.

Once a young lady received some flowers as a gift. She looked at the card, and it was from an older lady, named Mrs Mack. The funny thing was that the flowers were wilted, and the petals were dropping off. The young lady thought that perhaps it had been delivered late, or there had been some mix-up. Later during that week, she saw Mrs Mack. She stopped her and said, "Thank you for the flowers." Mrs Mack said, "I'm glad you liked them. I cut them last Monday and enjoyed them in my house all week. When they started to wilt, I was reminded of you and so I sent them to you." Seeing the hurt and puzzled look on her face, Mrs Mack explained. "The other night I happened to be waiting in the car, while my husband ran into the shop to get something. You walked past our car, and I overheard you saying, 'I will commit myself to the Lord, but not now while I'm young. I want to have a good time first. How selfish! You want to give yourself to the Lord once all the charm, vigour, and beauty have faded. I thought these flowers would illustrate what you are giving the Lord.'"

Whatever stage of life you are in, there are two things you cannot avoid: the difficulty of old age, and the judgement seat of God. So then remember your Creator, and enjoy life under Him.