

Advice For Youth of All Ages

By Kevin Morkassel

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Salem

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

INTRODUCTION:

This morning, I would like for us to imagine that God handed us a piece of paper and said, **“Write down whatever you think will make your life happy, and I will give it to you.”**

- What would we write on that piece of paper?
- Would we choose wealth, or power, or fame, or maybe a long life?
- The Bible tells us of a young man who was given that opportunity.
- His name was Solomon, the third king of Israel, King David’s son.
- According to **1 Kings 3**, one night God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, **“Ask what you wish me to give you.”**
- Solomon was a young man, and Solomon asked for wisdom so that he could lead God’s people in the proper way. Please listen to God’s response in **1 Kings 3:11-14**...

11 God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice,

12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

13 “I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.

14 “If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.”

And so we see here that God gave Solomon a promise.

- Maybe we have heard the expression, **“The wisdom of Solomon.”**
- Solomon was the wisest man the world has ever known.
- Even in his wisdom, however, Solomon made some serious mistakes in his life.
- In **1 Kings 11**, we find that Solomon loved 1,000 pagan women, and was being pulled away from God in many directions—compromising his faith in God.
- As Solomon continued to live his life, we find that he experiments with wine, and wealth, and love and every other area of perceived pleasure.
- The Old Testament book of **Ecclesiastes** is Solomon’s inspired record of his research—it is his journal based on what he learned in this life of pleasure. He wrote it down for the next generation.
- Concerning all of the possible ways to have pleasure, his conclusion to the huge experiment, at the end of his life, is found in the last two verses of the entire book, in **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**, **“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”**

And that is the last line in the book of **Ecclesiastes**—as an old man at the end of life.

- Many Bible scholars agree that although Solomon left God very early on, that near the end of his life he returned and made things right with God once again.

This morning, as we think about our own children, and our teens, as they continue to learn by their own experience, I would like for us to back up to the middle of **Ecclesiastes 11**, and consider some very wise comments that King Solomon directed to those who are young.

Please read with me, **Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8**...

7 The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.

8 Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

9 Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.

10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

12:1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";

2 before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;

3 in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;

4 and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.

5 Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.

6 Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;

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!"

I. As we look back over this paragraph of Scripture, one of the first lessons Solomon passes along is: **ENJOY LIFE WHILE YOU ARE YOUNG** (and we see this in the first four verses we considered).

Right here at the beginning, perhaps we need to define what is meant by **"young"** (and this can be a dangerous thing to do)!

- Someone has tried to define old age with this statement: **Old age begins and Middle age ends, the day your descendants outnumber your friends.**
- I'm not so sure that is an accurate definition or not, however we will find out a little later in this morning's lesson, though, in many ways our youth is determined by our ability to function.
- Most of us here this morning can still see, and speak, and hear, and taste, and smell, and walk, and can at least think to one degree or another. ☺
- And so, in that sense, all of us have at least some youth left in us, otherwise we would not be here this morning; we would be either dead or in a nursing home.
- As we grow older, though, we start to lose those functions.
- Our eyesight fails, our hearing fades, and it is more difficult to get around.

Just a few days ago, Dick McKinzie was coming into the auditorium here and but I said something to the effect of... **"Isn't slower traffic supposed to stay to the right?"**

- And I can't remember exactly what he said but I think it was, **"When you get to my age this is about the most speed you can expect."**
- I know this was probably kind of mean of me to ask that question, but if you don't pick on him, he doesn't know you love him! ☺

I'm 39 years old and it seems like that's the age that everyone older than me wants to be, but everyone younger than me is concerned about... I'm sure there will be Black Balloons at my next birthday!

- Youth, therefore, is perhaps the time of life when we are at our peak condition, and yet even for those on the upper end of that scale, the lesson certainly still applies.
- Enjoy life while you are young.

Going back to **Ecclesiastes**, we see in **verse 9** that we are told to **"rejoice."**

- We are told to rejoice and **"let our hearts be pleasant"** in the days of our youth.
- **Verse 7** talks about how good it is to **"see the sun."**
- **Verse 8** refers to rejoicing in **"all"** of our years.
- We are told to enjoy our lives, because life itself is a gift from God.

Someone might say, “**But isn’t it dangerous to encourage our youth to have fun? Isn’t it dangerous to encourage them to enjoy life?**”

- And the answer is, “**Absolutely not!**”
- We need to remember that living the Christian life is NOT something that takes away our joy.
- The Christian faith does NOT take away the pleasure of living.
- The Lord does NOT want us to live a life that is boring or dull.
- But instead, He gives us a place in the church, He gives us a place in the world, and He tells us to enjoy it—especially when we are young.

Enjoy falling in love... because this too is a gift from God that you are allowed to enjoy.

- We remember Paul’s words to the young man, Timothy, in **1 Timothy 4:4**, “*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude.*”
- We can enjoy an evening out.
- We can enjoy good entertainment—knowing that at the end of such an evening we can thank God for that entertainment.
- We can enjoy the good things that God has given us in this life—especially while we are young.

We know that young people in our world today are forced to grow up too quickly and are not allowed to truly enjoy their younger years.

- Starting even in Kindergarten and First Grade, the pressure is on for academic achievement.
- Some time ago, I remember reading an article where many people have started timing the conception and birth of their children so that they would be the oldest students in their class.

Some children are forced to grow up too soon because of broken families—the children often have to take on adult responsibilities at home.

- Solomon, though, tells us to enjoy our lives when we are young.

Young people are generally happy people, but there is the danger of growing bitter, as we grow older.

- The writer of **Hebrews** warned about this in **Hebrews 12:14-15**, “*Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*”
- If you let bitterness take root in your life, it will make you miserable.
- It will isolate you from your parents. It will isolate you from the rest of your family.
- It will isolate you from the church.
- The only ones who will want to spend time with you are others who are bitter and rebellious like yourself.
- We are told, therefore, to be happy and enjoy the days of our youth.

Next time you go to a nursing home, make a close observation of the residents there.

- It truly is amazing to me how you can look at the residents in wheel chairs and almost immediately see if they have enjoyed life or not.
- Some will anxiously watch every visitor passing by hoping that they will have opportunity to smile at them and give a greeting.
- Others will sit in a corner with a very bitter look on their faces and hope that nobody speaks to them.
- And I know that sometimes a personality can change when a person is up in age, however, we are told to enjoy our youth.
- Too many people think that the Bible tells us to fold our hands, calm down, and to always be serious.
- But this is not what the Bible tells us to do!

We have a command from God to be happy!

- When you have an opportunity to have fun, thank God! When you fall in love, thank God!
- When you have a part-time job and have that ability to make money and have fun with it, thank God!
- When you enjoy having the freedom of driving your own car, thank God!
- We are to make the best of our younger years.

- In **1 Timothy 6:17**, Paul tells us that God is the one who *“richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”* We can thank God for that!

II. As we move on in **Ecclesiastes 11**, we find a second lesson, and that is, **AS WE ENJOY OUR YOUTH, YOUTH IS NO EXCUSE FOR SIN.**

This is not meant just to scare us, or to take away the joy of life, but it is a reminder that as Christians we are in a covenant relationship with God—a relationship we can appreciate and respect.

- We are to enjoy life, and yet we should keep in mind that we will give an account to God for the choices that we make.
- Even young people will face God in judgment.

Let’s not misunderstand what God is saying. This is not meant as a threat.

- God is not saying, **“Go ahead, enjoy yourself, but I’ll nail you in the end—just you watch! You think you’re having fun, but I’ll make you pay for it when this life is over.”**
- That is not what God is saying.
- But instead, God is saying that as we enjoy life, we should not forget that there is a life coming after this one.
- And in many ways, this is a comforting thought. As Christians, we have a purpose in life.
- We are living for a goal. We are reaching out for something greater than ourselves.
- We do not go through our younger years in the fog of alcohol, or drug abuse, or addiction—These things can do horrible permanent damage to us physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- We do not want to go through the rest of our lives with the horrible regrets of sin committed in our youth.

Someone has observed that, **“Many people spend the first half of life making the last half miserable.”**

- With that in mind, let’s do what we can to live in our youth so we can look back without having any regrets.
- It is my understanding that brother E. Claude Gardner, former president of Freed-Hardeman University used to always close his prayers in chapel with the request to God, **“Help us live each day so that we can look back without regret.”**
- What an important concept for college students to understand.

It may be tempting to think to ourselves that we can live a life of sin, knowing that we have many years to turn around and make things right with God.

- Unfortunately, not all people make it out of their youth.
- I know quite a few ministers that have performed funerals for some very young people.
- When an older Christian passes away there is at least some aspect of celebration as a mature Christian goes home.

But for those who are younger, there is often a sense of shock.

- We don’t expect those who are young to face God in judgment so quickly.
- Some people will be judged at 15, or 16, or 17, or 18-years old.
- These were their ages when they were taken by death.
- When we were living up in tiny village of Wildwood, there was a very severe car accident just a few blocks from our house.
- It was a teen age girl who hit another car head on and she was killed almost instantly.
- Another fatal car accident not too far from our home involved a 2nd grader who lost his twin brother.
- One of Traci’s fellow teachers had had the twins in her class, but only one returned.

In a book about the reason for living, Solomon here talks about death, and he seems to be saying that if you miss the importance of death, you have missed the real reason for living.

- First of all, therefore, we are to enjoy life while we are young, and secondly, we are to remember that youth is no excuse for sin—there is a Judgment Day coming.

III. There is a third lesson we should consider from this paragraph of Scripture. It is found in the first **8 verses** of **Ecclesiastes 12**, and the lesson is (regardless of our age), that we should **SERVE GOD WHILE WE STILL HAVE THE ABILITY TO DO SO.**

There is a time coming for most of us when we will no longer be able to live for God as we can right now.

- How many times have we seen an older person be buried in the waters of baptism?
- From our own experience, we know that it does not happen very often.

There is a good reason why military recruiters visit the high schools and not the nursing homes!

- We think of young David's courage in fighting Goliath.
- Those who were older, even those in the army, were scared.
- But David, in his youth, had the courage, and fearlessness, and faith, to take on that giant.
- You might remember that David didn't even take Saul's armor.
- He wouldn't take Saul's sword, but David had some youthful qualities of his own that God used in a big way.

We need to remember God before we lose our youthful ambition and courage.

- To remember God... means to keep Him in mind and to be guided by His will in our lives.
- Paul told Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:12**, *"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."*

There is a time coming for many of us when old age will catch up to us and life will no longer be fun.

- If we do not believe this, we simply need to stop in at a nursing home.
- There are people there who need constant care.
- There are some who can't see, others can't hear, they can't feed themselves or bathe themselves.
- Some do not have control of their own bodies.
- Others can't think, or can't walk, or can't sleep, or even digest their food properly.
- Solomon tells us to remember God before those days come.

In our society, we hate to admit that those days are coming.

- We have glasses, and dentures, and wigs, and artificial limbs...and yet all of these props might be compared to turning back the mileage on a car.
- The miles are still there, and the car is still worn out.
- ☺ Someone has said that to watch some people go to bed must be like watching the demolition of a house—as the glasses are removed, the teeth are taken out, and as all of these other props are dismantled. ☺

We notice starting in **verse 2** a series of illustrations of what it is like to grow old, and it is not a pretty picture.

- Solomon is writing in a figurative sense, and so there may be some uncertainty involved in translating this from one culture to another, but notice in **verse 2** he refers to, *"the sun, the light, the moon and the stars"* being darkened.
- Many believe that he is referring to our mental faculties—that we sometimes lose it a little as we age.

In **verse 3**, he refers to the *"watchmen of the house"* trembling.

- Many believe that he is referring here to the hands—that our hands will tremble and that we will no longer be able to do the things we do now.
- The *"mighty men stoop"*—a possible reference to our backs slowly hunching over with time.
- In **verse 3** he also refers to the *"grinding ones"* standing idle because they are *"few."*
- Not only do we lose our teeth, but he also says in **verse 3** that *"those who look through the windows grow dim."* We lose our eyesight as well.

In **verse 4**, we find that the *"doors of the street are shut"*—a possible reference to our friends passing away, and the loss of communication and loneliness that accompanies those losses.

- One will *"arise at the sound of the bird"*—we are restless and wake up at the crack of dawn for no real reason.
- In **verse 4**, we also find that the *"daughters of song will sing softly."* We lose our hearing as we age.

In **verse 5** we see that as we age, we get more cautious—we are scared to go out and do things that we once had no problem doing.

- The *“almond tree blossoms”*—our hair loses its color.
- The *“grasshopper pulls himself along”*—looking very much like an old man with a cane.
- The *“caperberry”* is ineffective. Some translations refer here to the fact that *“desire no longer is stirred.”*
- According to my most trusted Bible encyclopedia, the *“caperberry”* was prized in the ancient world as a *“sexual stimulant”*—ancient Viagra!
- It may be a comfort to some, coming from a man who was in love with 1000 women, that this desire was the last to go...because...at the end of **verse 5** there appears to be a reference to death.
- **Verse 6** continues the picture. The *“silver cord”* is a possible reference to the spinal cord.
- The *“golden bowl”* is a possible reference to the skull.
- And all of these things are *“broken”* or *“crushed.”*

Solomon, then, is telling us to obey the Lord and *“remember our Creator”* before all of these things happen.

- Serve the Lord while our backs are strong, while our eyes are sharp, and while our hearing is precise.

SUMMARY:

This morning, we have listened to the advice of the wisest man in history—a man who was inspired by God, and a man who learned from his own mistakes.

- King Solomon started by telling us to enjoy life while we are young—we need to thank God for the blessing of youth. We are to rejoice during our childhood and be pleasant during our younger years.
- King Solomon went on with a reminder that even though we should enjoy life, we should remember that youth itself is not an excuse for sin—there is a Judgment Day coming.
- King Solomon continued by encouraging us to serve God and obey God while we still have the ability to do so. We are to give the best years of our lives to God—before our bodies fall apart and we lose our motivation to live.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

For all of us, at any age, there is a passage in **Isaiah 40** that applies very well as we close this morning’s study—**Isaiah 40:30-31**—*“Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”*

There may be someone here this morning who would like to become a New Testament Christian.

- The Bible teaches that Jesus died for our sins.
- In response to His sacrifice, the Bible teaches that we must put our trust in God, that we must change our lives, and that we must be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.
- If you have any questions, you can speak with one of our members after the service, but if you are ready to obey God right now, you can come to the front and be seated.
- Let’s stand and sing together...