

“Live While You Are Dying” (Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8)

Wednesday, January 9, 2008 is a day I will never forget. I left my house at 5:30am for an early morning appointment. It was dark and cold. I thought there might be ice on the road so I drove carefully for the first couple of miles. Once I reached Johnson Point Road, I accelerated up to the 50 M.P.H. speed limit. As I was driving down a hill, I hit a patch of black ice and completely lost control of my car. My 1986 Honda Accord veered down a “slip and slide” of a road. In those few seconds, my life quickly passed before my eyes. I thought I was going to die or at least be seriously injured. My car slid across the center line, did a 180, and slammed into a mud bank. Not only did I survive this potentially fatal crash, I walked away from it with no injuries. By God’s grace, my car wasn’t totaled or even slightly damaged. I just had to spend the next several weeks picking mud, rocks, and grass out of the grill.

As I drove off to my appointment, I was shaking like a leaf. If my car had slid at any other point on the road it would have rolled off, to one side or the other. If another car had been traveling the opposite direction when I crossed the center line, there would have been a fatal head-on collision. Not only would I have died, but so would the person that was driving the other car. Furthermore, the place where I had my accident was approximately thirty feet from the memorial site for a teen from North Thurston High School who died coming home one night from a party. All of these factors caused me to realize that the Lord spared my life for a purpose. This was another reminder that God is not finished with me yet. I was also reminded that I need to invest well in the relationships that matter most.

Since that time, Eccl 11:7-12:8 has taken on great meaning.¹ In this passage, I believe Solomon says, “*Live while you are dying.*” If you know country music, this may sound a lot like Tim McGraw’s song, “Live Like You Were Dying.”² The notable revisions are the words “while” and “are”—live *while* you *are* dying. By modifying this statement, I have chosen to focus on the biblical truth that *all* people are appointed to die.³ Thus, you don’t have to live *like* you *were* dying because your body is actually dying at this very moment. It is, therefore, more accurate to say you need to “live *while* you *are* dying.” In this memorable passage, Solomon shares two exhortations that will enable us to live while we’re dying.

1. Rejoice now while you can (11:7-10).⁴ In this first section, Solomon focuses on the importance of living our lives to the fullest before we grow too old.⁵ In 11:7 he writes, “**The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.**” In Scripture, “light” is often a synonym for “life”⁶ and the word translated “pleasant” is often used in reference to honey.⁷ I have always liked peanut butter and honey sandwiches and *Honey Bunches of Oats* cereal. I even like honey in my coffee. The point is that life is “sweet” and should be savored like honey.⁸ Thus, the phrase “light is pleasant/sweet” means “it’s good to be alive.”⁹ So feel free right now to rock your head back and say, “Ahhh.” In 11:7, Solomon continues and makes use of a truism of life—that seeing the sun typically brings delight. We often say things like, “What a beautiful day it is!” “Don’t you just love these sunny days?” Solomon references those days when you wake up and everything works. You know, those days when you wake up five minutes before your alarm goes off and you can breathe through both of your nostrils. Your bum back is not hurting, your legs aren’t hurting, and your relationships are working. We’ve all had days when the music sounded better and we just wanted to roll down our car windows and enjoy life because everything worked.¹⁰ Solomon says, “Enjoy life because there are some amazing days.” Feel free to let out a big, “YEOW?!” Or maybe a little James Brown, “I feel good.”

Now before we get too carried away, we will see why Solomon is not a guy most people would choose to have over for Sunday lunch. He moves from “Life is sweet” to “I will ramble on about death for the rest of my time with you.” In 11:8 he puts it like this: “**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.**”

Solomon exhorts us to “rejoice” in all of the days that we are fortunate to live. Notice that three letter word “all.” Even if we live to be a ripe old age, we are to rejoice in all of our years. Yep, that’s right...even the seventies, eighties, and nineties. A simple way we can do this is by enjoying the ordinary nature of life. A great deal of what we do every day may seem mundane and even trivial, but that is where the will of God begins for you and me. Blessed is that man who enjoys the routine, blessed is that woman who delights in the mundane, for they shall discover that God is in the details of life.¹¹ As we age, we need to learn to be thankful just to be alive. The older we get the more thankful and content we should become.

As it turns out, the golden years may really be golden after all. Recent research suggests that older Americans are not only the happiest Americans, but they are also much more socially active than expected. Although many older individuals face health problems, they are generally more content with what they have than younger Americans. The research found that the odds of being happy increased by five percent for every ten years of age. Else, an 84-year-old retired nurse says, ‘Contentment as far as I’m concerned comes with old age ... because you accept things the way they are. You know that nothing is perfect.’ Although aging is often looked at negatively in our society, age brings many benefits, including a greater likelihood of contentment. Christians can also look at aging as bringing us one step closer to heaven and eternity with God.¹²

With that said, it is critical for us to recognize that when it comes to years of life, it is still a matter of quality over quantity. It is better to add life to your years than to add years to your life. We need to live life fully every day. In the movie *Braveheart*, William Wallace (as portrayed by Mel Gibson) said, “Every man dies but not every man really lives.”¹³ This is a rather biblical assessment of life. The Bible declares that we will all die, yet many of us miss out on the abundant life that God offers us.¹⁴ Don’t let that happen to you. *Live while you are dying.*

At this point in the context, Solomon begins to talk about the different opportunities and problems that regularly occur during the different stages of life: childhood, youth, young adult, and old age. In 11:9 Solomon writes, **“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 judgment¹⁵ for all these things.”** Here Solomon writes specifically to young people and commands young men and women to rejoice during their childhood and teenage years. Now this doesn’t mean party-hearty and sow your wild oats. This advice refers to the natural human instincts of young people: be with friends, enjoy life at social events, see the world, find one’s vocation, and desire a family and children. Enjoy your life. Don’t put tremendous pressure upon yourself when making significant decisions. Remember the words of Ps 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.” If you are delighting yourself in the Lord, His desires will naturally become your desires. This means you don’t have to find God’s will, you just need to find God. Or, as Augustine and Luther have said, “Love God and do whatever you please.” Christians ought to have more fun than anyone, but we should be pure and blameless before our on-looking world. The reason for this is that we are responsible for our acts (cf. 12:14).¹⁶ God will judge us for what we do even in our youth.

The Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), once said, “Youth is such a wonderful thing. It’s a shame to waste it on young people.” Shaw was right. Young people are typically either driven to a fault or lazy to a fault. It is rare to find a balance in children and teens. Consequently, it is easy for young people to squander their youth and fail to rejoice during their formative years. When I was in middle school, I wanted to be in high school. When I was in high school, I wanted to be in college. When I was in college, I wanted to be in seminary. When I was a seminarian, I wanted to be an associate pastor. When I was an associate pastor, I wanted to be a senior pastor. When I was single, I wanted to be married. And so on and so forth. One of the most difficult issues in life is contentment. Young people, enjoy your life. I command you, the Bible commands you, “REJOICE!” Rejoice now while you can.

In 11:10, Solomon exhorts young people with these words: **“So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.”**¹⁷ Young people, you are commanded to actively and intentionally “remove” three entities from your life: grief, anger, and pain. Practically speaking this means: As far as possible the problems that beset heart and mind are to be resisted. Quit being a worrywart. Guard yourself from being stressed out by school, sports, and relationships. There will be plenty of time to really worry when you get older. Just kidding! Worry is a sin, so avoid it at all times. Don’t develop a root of bitterness. If your parents have divorced, forgive them. If your best friend gossiped about you, let it go. Don’t bring pain upon your body through alcohol, drugs, and sex. It’s just not worth it.

I have to also wonder if the phrase “put away pain from your body” has the application: Stop complaining about your health problems. Recently, two children in our congregation have battled severe health challenges. Logan Myrick has struggled with a brain tumor and Allison Vincent now has severe heart problems. Yet, if you look into the faces of each of these precious children, you sure wouldn’t know it. They are true heroes and examples. Here is a principle, young people: If you want to avoid being an older crabby person...don’t be a young crabby person. I have a hunch the adults that I know who never complain about their cancer, migraines, and general health issues are those who learned to not complain as young people. And always remember this: “When we complain, 90 percent of the people don’t care and don’t want to hear it; the other 10 percent probably feel a secret satisfaction that we are getting what we deserve.”¹⁸ So it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to complain.

Solomon says we are to remove grief, anger, and pain because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting. The phrase “the prime of life” literally refers to “blackness” of hair as opposed to grey hair.¹⁹ This has great meaning to me. Recently, I have noticed a few grey hairs in my otherwise black hair. When you have black hair, a grey hair really stands out. At first, I was like, “What is this?” I thought I had a few more years before greyness. I guess I’ve been under too much stress. Initially, it was disappointing to me. But now I find this a helpful motivation. My black hair is going to quickly turn into grey. This should not discourage me; rather it ought to remind me that my time is short. Youth is “fleeting” (*hebel*) just like our “breath.”²⁰ We need to enjoy life now. We need to live for Christ now.

In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams plays a poetry teacher for an old, established all-boys school. On the first day of class, he takes his students downstairs to a hall filled with old photos of past classes. Some of the photographs are fifty to seventy-five years old. Most of the men in the photos have lived and died. They are nothing but worm food and daisy fertilizer. The pictures portray them in their youth and vitality, but that was in the past and now they are dead. As the boys gaze on these long-forgotten portraits of youth, they hear the words *Carpe Deum*—“Seize the Day!” Life is short. All too soon they will be nothing more than a faded photograph on a wall. So seize the day—make each day count. Live purposefully and meaningfully. Do great things while there is time for greatness. Don’t put happiness on hold. Enjoy what you have. *Live while you are dying.*

I developed a greater appreciation for this section this past week. Two weeks ago, my family and I enjoyed a glorious vacation. We played tennis, went walking and canoeing, and worked out. We were refreshed and renewed. It was hard to come back to “the real world.” Yet, I was excited to get back to work. Unfortunately, I was only able to work one day this past week before I was stricken with the flu. The day that I recovered from the flu, I took my dilapidated body next door and my neighbor and I moved all of his possessions out of his 2400 square foot home. The move took from 9:30am to 10:30pm. I then spent Saturday recovering. Needless to say, the Lord really brought this passage alive for me. My week of vacation represents the joys of youth; my week of the flu and the move represents old age.

[Why should we rejoice now while we can? Because old age is coming. Thus, we should live life to the glory of God. Solomon also exhorts us to...]

2. Remember now while you can (12:1-8). Three times in this section (12:1, 2, 6) Solomon uses the word “before.”²¹ His clarion call is for you and me to live life to the fullest *before* old age and death comes. In 12:1, Solomon summarizes what he will say in 12:2-7, namely that we will have no delight in old age and death.²² He writes, **“Remember also your Creator²³ in the days of your youth,²⁴ before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight²⁵ in them.’”**²⁶ To “remember” doesn’t mean to jog one’s memory. Rather, the verb “to remember” (*zakar*) is a command that involves a wholehearted commitment to love, serve, and fear God.²⁷ God’s expectation is that “remembering” Him translates into action. We must live as stewards who will give an account to our Creator.²⁸ The phrase “evil days” refers to sickness, sorrow, senility, and eventually dying.²⁹ God commands us to remember Him in our youth because He wants the best days of our lives.

Young people, one of the worst moves you can make is to forget your Creator in the days of your youth. This leads to bad choices that can forever affect your life. If you don’t walk with God in your high school and college years, the choices you make in a college, a spouse, and a vocation may not be the ones God wants you to make. If you don’t believe me, ask Solomon. Initially, Solomon loved God. He was the son of David and the builder of the temple. He asked for wisdom above any other gift. He started well but got off track. He eventually refused to remember his Creator in the days of his youth. Gradually, over the course of time, he made little compromises that resulted in disaster. He cultivated relationships with ungodly women and these ungodly women led him into idolatry. Even though he had everything this world has to offer (i.e., wine, wealth, wisdom, women, and work), he was miserable. It was all *hebel*.³⁰

But if you “remember your Creator in the days of your youth” you will be set up for decades to come and into eternity. You will abstain from sexual immorality and marry a godly spouse. You will select the right college for you to attend. You will choose the vocation that God has created for you to do. You will make the right financial decisions. You will not have to overcome various vices and addictions. You will have a love and a commitment to the local church.

Some people have insinuated that our church focuses too much on children and youth. Whenever I hear this, I strive to tell folks that this is indeed what we are attempting to do. We prioritize children and young adults because we want to be preventative. We believe that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It’s not that we don’t love adults, but many adults are set in their ways. They have the broken marriages, addictions, and bad attitudes. Our goal is to keep these things from happening to our young people. We are thinking of the church of the 21st century.

However, you may be saying, “I have wasted my youth. Is there any hope for me?” The answer is, “YES...if you begin to remember the Lord TODAY!” It is a grave mistake to say, “I’m going to wait until I get older to begin serving the Lord.” Relatively few people turn to the Lord in their old age. I understand there’s a sign on the Trans-Alaska Highway that says, “Choose your rut carefully; you’ll be in it for the next 200 miles!”³¹ So today you must choose whether or not you’re going to remain in your rut. God will give you a new lease on life if you say, “I want to remember you.” Of course, you can’t turn back the hands of time, but you can *live while you are dying*.

In 12:2-7, Solomon describes the advance of old age in the imagery of a decaying house.³² He is not saying that all of these things happen to everybody. But it is an allegory that fittingly describes what we can expect in old age; and it should motivate us to serve God in our youth, whether our “youth” means our teens and twenties, or the “youth” of whatever years are left.³³ But before I launch in I must remind you that I’m just the mailman, not the writer of the mail. So please don’t be offended by what you are about to read. Solomon is an old man who is living out the waning years of his life. He is likely a little crotchety. So he is going to tell things the way they are. When you are an old man sometimes you don’t hold back and watch your p’s and q’s. You just speak things the way they are. You could say that is one of the privileges that comes with age.

In 12:2 Solomon says that we are to remember God **“before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain.”** This refers to the fading capacity for joy and excitement. It also points to the repetitive gloom faced by the elderly.³⁴

In 12:3 Solomon says that the **“the watchmen of the house tremble.”** This means that the arms and hands shake and become feeble. When he says that the **“mighty men stoop,”** he is referring to the shoulders, legs, and back slumping and becoming feeble. Your knees buckle when your belt won't! Your back goes out more than you. **“The grinding ones stand idle because they are few”** speaks to the scarcity of teeth. You sink your teeth into a steak and they stay there. The phrase **“those who look through windows grow dim”** means vision suffers.³⁵ Or if you prefer, your arms aren't long enough to hold reading material.

In 12:4 Solomon says, **“and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low.”** This refers to the loss of hearing. To make matters worse, Solomon writes, **“and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.”** These two phrases mean that as we age we will struggle to sleep and we will wake up early. Furthermore, our voices will quiver and weaken. We will be hard to hear.

In 12:5 Solomon says, **“Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road.”** This refers to fear of injury due to frailty. The following phrases are rather picturesque: **“the almond tree blossoms”**³⁶ refers to our hair turning white. The phrase **“the grasshopper drags himself along”** speaks of the halting walk of the elderly (“grasslimpers”).³⁷ The phrase **“the caperberry”**³⁸ [desire] is **ineffective** refers to a decrease in the appetites of life (e.g., food and sex). In other words, you turn out the light for economic rather than romantic reasons. And tragically, even though you eat less and less you tend to gain more and more as you age. This begins in your twenties. The final phrase in 12:5 is, **“For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.”** The point being, man dies and life goes on.

In 12:6 Solomon writes, **“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.”** All of the items mentioned in 12:6 are associated with a well. Throughout Scripture, a well is a metaphor for life. But this one is no longer being used for drawing water. Someday your body is going to wear out. You will be nothing but a dry shell of your former self. The four verbs emphasize the finality of life. You and I are going to die! As bad as this sounds, remember, Art Linkletter once said that it's better to be over the hill than under it. Whatever life is for us, wherever we find ourselves in age or stage, every moment is a gift of God—brightly wrapped, waiting to be opened, admired, and delighted in. The bittersweet nature of loss makes the present more precious; knowing that the silver cord will one day slip away, we cherish it all the more while it is in our hands.³⁹

It has been said, “Growing old is not for sissies.” These verses prove it! Yet, the humbling thing is I am sprinting headlong into old age. It's been said that our body begins to suffer the negative effects of aging in our teenage years. We could say, “Its downhill from there,” so to speak.

According to an old fable, a man made an unusual agreement with Death. He told the Grim Reaper that he would willingly accompany him when it came time to die, but only on one condition—that Death would send a messenger well in advance to warn him. Weeks winged away into months, and months into years. Then one bitter winter evening, as the man sat thinking about all his possessions, Death suddenly entered the room and tapped him on the shoulder. Startled, the man cried out, “You're here so soon and without warning! I thought we had an agreement.” Death replied, “I've more than kept my part. I've sent you many messengers. Look in the mirror and you'll see some of them.”

As the man complied, Death whispered, “Notice your hair! Once it was full and black, now it is thin and white. Look at the way you cock your head to listen to me because you can’t hear very well. Observe how close to the mirror you must stand to see yourself clearly. Yes, I’ve sent many messengers through the years. I’m sorry you’re not ready, but the time has come to leave.”⁴⁰ May we learn to pay attention to the messengers.

In 12:7, Solomon abandons imagery and states, **“then the dust will return to the earth as it was,⁴¹ and the spirit⁴² will return to God who gave it.”** Death is the returning of the body to the dust. This verse is very similar to what God said to Adam, “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). The spirit’s returning “to God who gave it” reminds us of the source of our life (Gen 2:7). Solomon’s point throughout all his allegorizing is crystal clear: Old age will not be a time of strenuous service for the Lord. Does that mean old age cannot be glorious? Of course not! If you’re a believer in Jesus Christ on your way to your “eternal home,” you can be ecstatic! You can spend your time drawing near to God, knowing that your life has counted for Him. We will all face the above realities unless we die young or Christ returns. Therefore, it is critical that we set goals and *live while we are dying*. We can live the rest of our life “young at heart.” We must recognize that we are not really old until we abandon our purpose and mission in life. A perfect example is Caleb. Ask God for a mountain. You’re not ready to live until you’re ready to die. Settle eternal issues and throw yourself into life.

This passage concludes in 12:8 with familiar words: **“‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘all is vanity!’”** The book of Ecclesiastes is characterized by two phrases: “vanity of vanities” (1:2) and “under the sun” (1:3). By utilizing these phrases Solomon uses satire, irony, and tongue-in-cheek statements as a way to force fallen humanity to come to grips with the fleeting frailty and hopelessness of life without God. Yet, in spite of the brevity of life and its disappointing nature apart from God, life is good and is meant to be enjoyed *with* God.

This sermon concludes with a powerful testimony from Duane Crouse. Four years ago, Duane left his home for hockey practice. He did not kiss his pregnant wife or his three children goodbye. He was in a hurry to get out the door. In the middle of hockey practice, Duane collapsed on the ice stricken with a heart attack. He was “dead” for an unheard-of ten minutes. The medics used the paddles four times and finally brought him back to life. He remained in a coma for four days. Miraculously, God spared Duane’s life. Unfortunately, he lost the best job of his life and his wife left him during this especially dramatic season. Duane came to recognize the fleeting nature of life. He made a commitment that he would never leave his home without telling his children he loves them. This past year Duane became a Christian through the ministry of our church. He has also fallen in love with a wonderful Christian woman who has three children. Together they will become a godly family of nine. As Duane grows as a new creation in Christ, it is refreshing to see how seriously he takes his relationships with others. He understands that today could be his last day on earth. He is an inspiration to me and countless others.

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Scripture References

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

Romans 12:1-2; 14:10

2 Corinthians 7:1

2 Timothy 2:22

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

Job 1:20-21

1 John 3:1-3

Study Questions

1. Do I genuinely enjoy life (11:7-8)? What evidence can I provide to substantiate this? What would my spouse and children say? What about my coworkers, neighbors, and fellow church members? Would those who know me best say that I am content and joyful? Or would they say that I am constantly stressed and consumed with work, ministry, and various challenges?
2. Did I make the most of my childhood and young adult years (11:9-10)? What memories can I share that demonstrate this? How and when did I fail to truly enjoy my youth? Did I try to grow up too fast? If so, what mistakes did I make along the way? What regrets do I have? How can I share the errors of my ways with my own children and grandchildren to prevent them from making my same mistakes? It may be best to ask the question: If I could live my childhood and youth all over again, what would I do differently?
3. What does it mean to “remember” the Lord (12:1)? In what ways did I strive to do this in my youth? How am I seeking to remember the Lord today? What role does a future judgment (11:9) play in remembering the Lord? How should this motivate me today?
4. How have I experienced my age catching up with me (12:2-7)? What bodily weaknesses have discouraged me the most? Have I shared my disappointments with others and experienced their comfort and empathy? How does the realization that I am deteriorating draw me closer to my Creator?
5. Why is life described as “vanity” (12:8; cf. 1:2)? How have I recently experienced the fleeting and frustrating nature of life? What has been my response? How has the book of Ecclesiastes changed my perspective? What can I do to not merely survive but thrive in the midst of life?

Notes

¹ I strongly recommend the work of my mentor Barry C. Davis, “Ecclesiastes 12:1-8—Death, an Impetus for Life,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991): 298-318.

² This is a country music classic that chronicles the life of a cancer patient who has been given six months to live. The lyrics are available at <http://www.anysonglyrics.com/lyrics/t/timmcgraw/live-like-you-were-dying-lyrics.htm> and the music video can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mHaFMqde6A>.

³ See Rom 6:23a; Heb 9:27a.

⁴ Regarding 11:7-10, but more specifically about 11:7-8, Kidner offers the following reminder: “Candid as ever, these verses match the delight of existence with the seriousness of it. Each joy here is confronted by its opposite or its complement; there is no softening of the colours on either side. The bliss of being alive is captured in the lovely sentence which opens with the saying, *Light is sweet...* (7); and this youthful radiance may last, as verse 8a points out, to the end. But not beyond. The author has not gone back on his insistence that, by themselves, time and all things temporal will disappoint us, who have eternity in our hearts (cf. 3:11). Their light must give way to *the days of darkness* and the undoing of everything under the sun; and we must face the fact or be shattered by it.” Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 98-99.

⁵ In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson translates these verses in a helpful manner: “Oh, how sweet the light of day, and how wonderful to live in the sunshine! Even if you live a long time, don’t take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, remembering that there will also be many dark days and that most of what comes your way is smoke.”

⁶ The term “light” (*haor*) is used figuratively (metonymy of association) in reference to “life” (e.g., Job 3:20; 33:30; Ps 56:14). By contrast, death is described as “darkness” (e.g., Job 10:21-22; 17:13; 18:18; cf. Eccl 11:8; 12:6-7).

⁷ See Judges 14:14, 18; Ps 19:10; Prov 16:24; 24:13; 27:7; Ezek 3:3. The only other usages of *mathoq* in the OT that don’t explicitly describe honey are Eccl 5:11; 11:7; Song of Sol 2:3; and Isa 5:20 [2x].

⁸ See NET translation and study notes.

⁹ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*: New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1993). Cf. Eccl 2:24-26; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 8:15.

¹⁰ Matt Chandler, “To the Young and To the Old” (Eccl 11:7-12:14):

<http://www.thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons.html>.

¹¹ Ray Pritchard, *Something New Under the Sun: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Living* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 283.

¹² “Oldest Americans the Happiest”: <http://www.sermonnews.com/MembersOnlyStory.asp?ID=1491>.

¹³ This movie is rated R for violence; however, this movie is familiar to most of my listeners. While I may not be comfortable showing a video clip, I find this quote to be insightful.

¹⁴ See Rom 5:12-21; 6:23; 1 Cor 15:22; John 10:10.

¹⁵ The definite article is used (*the* judgment) referring to a specific future event.

¹⁶ Cf. Eccl 3:17; 12:1; 14; Matt 25-26; Rom 2:16; 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 6:7; Rev 20.

¹⁷ In 11:9a and 10 Solomon urges us to enjoy life. In 11:9b, he reminds us that we will be judged for our actions.

The way that Solomon has packaged these verses is called a chiasm or bookends. If nothing else, this chiasmic structure indicates that God’s judgment is NOT intended to ruin the true enjoyment / the true pleasures of this earthly life that we live. Barry C. Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class notes.

¹⁸ Stanley C. Baldwin, *A Funny Thing Happened on My Way to Old Age* from Preaching Now 4.24: 7/12/05.

¹⁹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*,

²⁰ See Eccl 6:12; 7:15; 9:9; Job 7:16; Ps 39:5, 11; 62:9; 78:33; 144:4.

²¹ Interestingly, the only other place in Ecclesiastes where the word “before” appears is in 2:3b—a verse that begins a section on seeking the meaning of life before it is too late: “until [‘before’] I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.” Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*.

²² Davis, “Ecclesiastes” 12:1-8, 305.

²³ “Creator” is a form of the Hebrew verb *bara* (Gen 1:1). It is exclusively used to describe God as the One who creates. It is interesting that the participle is plural (cf. Job 35:10; Ps 149:2; Isa 54:5), which relates to (1) the “us” passages in Genesis (cf. 1:26-27; 3:22; 11:7) and (2) the general name for God as creator, *Elohim*, found throughout Genesis 1-2:3. Bob Utley, “Notes on Ecclesiastes”: unpublished notes.

²⁴ The phrase “in the days of your youth” is a chronological beginning point (i.e., young person still at home, pre-marriage). In Judaism a person is not responsible to the law until a period of training and personal commitment (i.e.,

bar mitzvah, bath mitzvah). From this time forward believers are responsible to God for their actions.

²⁵ Davis states, “In Scripture, the words translated by NASB as “no delight” (*ayin chephets*) appear in combination only seven times, as follows: of a dowry that is not desired (1 Sam 18:25), of a vessel that is not desired (Jer 22:28; 48:38; Hos 8:8), of worship that does not please God (Mal 1:10; Eccl 5:4), and of old age (Eccl 12:1). Considering only these verses, we discover that that which does not delight is that which is insufficient, not special, of no significant value, unacceptable, or that which is accompanied by misery and is incapable of producing any real or lasting joy.” Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*.

²⁶ In Hebrew, Eccl 12:1b leads into a single sentence containing a picturesque description of old age and death.

²⁷ Christianity is a religion of remembrance. In the Old Testament, the primary feast of the Jews was the Passover. This was a feast of remembrance that remembered two aspects concerning the Lord. It remembered that He is the Creator and the Redeemer. In the New Testament, we also have a celebration of remembrance called the Lord’s Supper. In partaking of this ordinance, we remember the same two aspects of God as the Creator of the New Creation and that He is the Redeemer. John Stevenson, “Before It’s Too Late” (Eccl 12:1-8).

²⁸ Cf. Eccl 3:17; 12:14; Matt 10:26; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 4:5.

²⁹ Solomon uses the Hebrew phrase translated “evil days” (*yom raah*) in Eccl 7:14 where the NASB renders it “the day of adversity” (i.e., the singular form of the word “day”). But in this context, Solomon intends his readers to interpret the phrase *yom raah* as referencing the difficulties of life. He does so, in that verse, by contrasting “the day of adversity” to “the day of prosperity.”

³⁰ Being a wise man, Solomon knows that when we are young we have the strength and resilience to overcome trouble. He also knows that in our old age, we will need every bit of strength we can find just to survive. We will not be able to offer very much to the Lord, we will be in a survival mode. Many of us know people who do not live, they just exist. In those years of our lives, we can certainly represent Christ and point others to Him, but we will never be able to serve the Lord in the capacity that we would have liked.

³¹ Michael P. Andrus, “Go For It...But Remember” (Eccl 11:7-12:14): unpublished sermon notes.

³² There have been other views: (1) each phrase refers to a different organ of the body; (2) they refer to a storm; (3) they refer to the gradual decay of an estate; and (4) each phrase must be taken separately, some literally, some figuratively. See Robert Gordis, *Koheleth, The Man and His World, A Study of Ecclesiastes* (), 341.

³³ Robert S. Ricker with Ron Pitkin, *Soul Search: Hope for 21st Century Living from Ecclesiastes* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 145.

³⁴ Kidner comments, “The clouds will always gather again, and time will no longer heal, but kill.” Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, 102.

³⁵ The verb *chashak* (“to grow dim”) is used elsewhere in reference to failing eyesight (e.g., Ps 69:24; Lam 5:17). Therefore, the phrase “those who look through the windows” is probably a figurative description of the eyes, picturing failing eyesight at the onset of old age. See NET study notes.

³⁶ Almond blossoms change in color from pink to white and then soon fall to the ground as white snowflakes. A lesser-held view is derived from the similarity of the Hebrew noun for almond tree (*shaqed*) to that of the Hebrew verb “to be watchful” (*saphah*). Those who hold this view do so on the basis that the almond tree is understood to be a symbol of watchfulness—a characteristic of older people. Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*.

³⁷ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 298.

³⁸ Some scholars hold that caperberries were used to stimulate one’s appetite and sexual desire. Hence, various versions translate the word as “desire” (i.e., NKJV, NRSV, TEV, NIV).

³⁹ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 299.

⁴⁰ http://preceptaustin.org/ecclesiastes_illustrations_ii.htm#11.

⁴¹ Man was made of dust (e.g., Eccl 3:20; Gen 2:7; 3:19; Job 4:19; 8:19; 10:9; 34:15; Ps 90:3; 103:14; 104:29; 146:4).

⁴² The Hebrew word (*ruach*) can mean “spirit,” “wind” (cf. Eccl 11:5), or “the breath” (cf. 3:2 1; Gen 2:7; Num 16:22; 27:16; Isa 57:16; Zech 12:1).