

Young and Old Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:14

So we have spent several weeks looking at this book of wisdom.

Famous leaders often publish books that describe how they became successful. They share their story, lessons learned, and so on.

- **A few years back I read *Shoe Dog* by Phil Knight – the Creator of Nike.**
- **He describes how he solved his own problem: running shoes!**

This is Solomon's look back on things – a very powerful, wealthy king.

He has been addressing his own problems: life under the sun, unpredictability, the inevitability of death, the search for meaning and joy, etc. We have covered the following:

1. Introduction: Vanity (1:1-11)
2. Despair and Joy (1:12-2:26)
3. Time and Eternity (3:1-22)
4. Hardship and Companionship (4:1-16)
5. Reverence and Awe (5:1-7)
6. Greed and God (5:8-6:9)
7. Mortality and Adversity (6:10-7:14)
8. Reality and Redemption (7:15-29)
9. Wisdom and Joy (8:1-9:10)
10. Wisdom and Folly (9:11-10:20) ... and now...
11. Young and Old (11-12)

We said in the beginning we will see these two themes over and over: Fear God in every way; enjoy God in the little things.

The **summary of fearing God** is where this book ends (12:13-14); and along the way there is another point made about **enjoying life** (11:7ff).

In these two chapters, the need to fear God and enjoy God are applied with reference to the aging process.

The Preacher **speaks to both the young and old about the kind of life that we should live.**

It seems that everyone wants to be young, and no one wants to be old.

- **Not long ago the pics were going around from that aging app that showed what you'd look like in like in like 30-40 years. We got a great chuckle out of that.**
- **I've always loved the meme about aging ministers, "I'm 35 and feeling great" (looks 85). [Some of you may feel like that during Corona Virus!]**
- **Surgeons perform literally millions of plastic surgeries per year, and the vast majority are not necessary.**
- **Millions are consumed with their physical appearance. Many don't want to look old.**

But this desire to look youthful can turn into obsession and idolatry.

Whatever your age (young, old, or in between), The Teacher wants you to experience life rightly in every season. Here is what he shares with us:

1. Life is an Adventure – Live by Faith (11:1-6)
2. Life is a Gift – Enjoy it and live it for God’s glory (11:7-12:8)
3. Life is Hard – Get Wisdom (12:9-12)
4. Life is Short – Revere God (12:13-14)

#1: Life Is an Adventure – Live by faith (11:1-6)

The Teacher gives wise counsel regarding the uncertainty of life here with two analogies: (1) the Merchant and (2) the Farmer.

A. The Merchant (1-2)

- 1:** This speaks to the **venture of faith**. “casting bread on the waters... find it after many days.”
- **It’s most likely a reference to ancient shipping business.**
 - Trust and adventure (*Cast*),
 - Total commitment (for *your bread* is used in the sense of ‘goods’, livelihood’, cf., Deut. 8:3; Prov. 31:14),
 - A forward look to it (*you will find*), a reward
 - This requires patience (*after many days*).
 - **Cast your bread on the waters could be paraphrased: “Send out your goods in ships.”**
 - Solomon himself was involved in trade, so the illustration makes sense (**1 Ki 10:15, 22**).
 - **“Once every three years” from all over... this required faith and patience.**
- 2:** Spread your wealth out; diversify your investments.
- **Don’t put all your stock in one place. “Don’t put all of your eggs in one basket.”**
 - **Send out your goods in seven or eight ships because some of them are bound to bring back a good return.**
 - **True faith is not presumption, but requires wisdom.**

Wisdom teaches us that “**we do not know** what disaster will happen on earth.” (11:2b)

- **Faith is required in life because we never know what might happen!**
 - **Anything could happen to your ship: hit a reef, crash in a storm, or be robbed by Jack Sparrow.**
 - Notice repetition: “**you never know**” (v 2, 5, 6)

How do we live in a world that is unpredictable? By wisdom, yes. By faith, yes.

- **This is not about gambling, taking foolish chances.**
- **It’s about planning in view of unpredictability, and living by faith in the midst of uncertainty.**
- **The unpredictability of life should not make us neither careless nor paralyzed by fear.**
- **We walk by faith and wisdom.**
- **We must not let the uncertainties keep us from being bold in faith.**
- **Now is the time for courage through Christ, not a life of fear.**

If we broaden this application out to the world of ministry in the kingdom, Ryken says:

Rather than holding on to what we have, hoarding it all for ourselves—which is the error that the man with one talent made in a parable that Jesus told (Matthew 25:24–28)—God invites us to be venture capitalists for the kingdom of God.... **It is about having the holy boldness to do seven (or even eight) things to spread the gospel and then waiting for God’s ship to come in. Some of the things that we attempt may fail (or at least seem to fail at the time)—some of the ministries we start, for example, or the churches we plant, or the efforts we make to share the good news of the cross and the empty tomb. But we should never stop investing with the gospel in as many places as we can.** Whenever we engage in kingdom enterprises, we offer the Holy Spirit something he can and often will use to save people’s souls.

Yes, we want to cast the gospel in as many places as we can, in as many ways that we can, trusting in God to bring the ships to come in.

- Gospel movements historically have happened through the renewal of gospel preaching and through creative mission (use of printing press, various types of evangelism, campus revivals etc). **Martin Luther was not just a great theologian; he knew business, culture, he used the printing press, the arts, and more. He was savvy.** He invested in various ways.
- This is why we support work outside our own local church (IMB, Acts 29, IGP, 127) and care about churches outside of our church.
- Write, blog, podcast, video, preach far and wide, train pastors, plant churches, serve the poor locally and globally...
- **Spread the gospel and trust God to bring results. The word of God doesn’t return void.**
- **This is great time to be a spiritual entrepreneur; to start something new; to sow the word of God in as many ways as we can and trust God to bring the ships in. (Ryken”**
- **Jesus Christ is the Lord of the harvest and he is gathering a people for himself.**

B. The Farmer (3-6)

Farming is hard work and unpredictable work (we cannot control the weather).

These verses really apply verses 1-2 with a changing of metaphor.

We must act in faith even when the circumstances are not great.

3: A contrast with **clouds** and **trees**.

- **Clouds change, trees are permanent (they are in one place unless they fall somehow and then they stay there and rot).**

4: But we should **not** wait for an absolutely perfect time.

- **We can always find an excuse for doing nothing** (for not sowing or reaping).
- What he’s saying is that life is a venture of faith – the circumstances may stink, but we act.
 - Kidner, “it is better to fail in launching out than in hugging one’s resources to oneself.”
- We must invest generously and faithfully even when the weather of life is bad.
- We can’t control things, but what we can control is **sowing and reaping faithfully**.
- **Are you hoping for better conditions, doing nothing, or being faithful in the current time?**
 - **Family devotions? Prayer? Bible? Neighbor love?**
 - **We may be in quarantine, but we’re in quarantine with Jesus.**

- Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress from prison; many of Paul's epistles from there
- Great songs have been written in times of trial: "Mighty Fortress"
- There is much good we can do in every season.
- "Don't grow weary in well doing ... in due season we will reap if we do not lose heart..."

Two wrong responses for Christians right now:

1. **Fear.**
2. **Procrastination**

Don't spend so much time pondering the tree and the clouds (that is, the circumstances) that you began to be fearful or passive. Live faithfully in the present moment.

And whatever you can do, do it!

- Start a friendship with your neighbor.
- Pray for an hour a day. **Prayer in 1660's preceded revival.**
- "Make the best use of the time for the days are evil" (Eph 5:16)
- Work - eye toward mission

5: The Mystery of **Providence.**

We have little knowledge when compared to God!

- He alludes to the mystery of giving birth (**5a**)... (notice a child in the womb)
- We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God.
- The giving birth is a glorious mystery, isn't it?

He then speaks of all creation: "God who makes everything" (**5b**)

- We live by faith with a settled confidence because this our Father's world.
- We don't know everything, but we live by faith trusting his providence.

6: The call to **stay humble and work hard.**

- Get up and sow your seed, and work until the evening – and through it all, trust God to bless some of the work you've done.

Sometimes we grow weary when we don't see immediate results.

- We live by patient faith.
- Sow the seed and trust God.
- Send out the ships and trust God.

To illustrate, consider the conversion of Luke Short.

- He was converted at the tender age of 103.
- He was sitting under a hedge in Virginia when he happened to remember a sermon John Flavel once preached.
- Short asked God to save him there.
- He lived for three more years.

- This is on his tombstone: “Here lies a babe in grace, aged three years, who died according to nature, aged 106.”
- Here’s the remarkable part of the story: the sermon he remembered had been preached *eighty-five* years earlier, back in England!
- That’s a long tim between the sowing and the reaping, between sending out the ships and seeing the return (Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence*).

Sow your seed, send out your ships – and trust God.

#2: Life Is a Gift – Enjoy it and live it for God’s glory (11:7-12:8)

Three calls for enjoying life...

A. Rejoice (11:7-9)

7: He is talking about enjoying the pleasures of life.

- Many things in life are “sweet” (v. 7) (**food, recreation, companionship, sunlight**)
- Many things are “bright” (sunshine, water, etc)
- There are many sweet and bright things in life.
- Living long means that we can invest a long time in the kingdom of God (point 1), and we also get to enjoy the goodness of God a lot.

8: Reality: There are many dark days (**v. 8**)

- We will face disappointment, trials, disease, etc.
- Don’t let the dark days rob of the joy of life.
- Don’t take life for granted.
- Believe every day, “this is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it.”

9: Young people are urged to have a cheerful heart.

- The future is full of opportunities and their hearts are usually more cheerful and less anxious.
- **Example: Walking in the neighborhood – two guys having a blast playing basketball with music blaring, “It’s the final countdown.” Not a care in the world.**

But often joy is missed because of lack of gratitude.

- Notice the focus: “**your heart.**”
 - “eyes” are the instrument of the heart; the Bible links the two a lot.
- Our eyes can lead us to sin, but that can also lead us to delight — depending on what we are looking at and how we view the world!

It’s amazing how often we are told to enjoy the little things in life in this bok.

- Again here it is a commandment!
- It’s not permitted, but *commanded* as an essential part of godliness!
- God holds us to account if we fail to live without joy.
 - It shows that we have failed to understand the goodness of God.
 - It is living in denial of who God really is.

- It is to be like the ungrateful child that doesn't get excited over a gift that you worked hard to give them.
- We won't live joyfully if we do not understand grace; if we are not grateful people.
- Story of John Stott, "I'm not worthy..." when receiving 4:30pm coffee. "You don't have your theology of grace right....I'm just the thin edge of the wedge."
- Gibson: "When we are not grateful for the little things, it is only a very short step to no longer being grateful for anything. When we do not enjoy and savor and love and laugh and delight in the little things, then we are heading toward losing our delight in anything."

So enjoy life... it's an urgent call because life passes quickly.

- **Balanced: There is a judgment, young person. (9b)**
- **You will be held to an account.**
- "God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Romans 2:16).
- **Be prepared for judgment by first trusting in Christ as Savior, and then live for his glory in your youth.**
 - How you work matters
 - How you spend money matters
 - How you spend your time matters
 - Who you hang with matters
 - There is something more important than Instagram and whether or not someone thinks your cute: namely Jesus Christ, the righteous one.
 - Rejoice, yes. But rejoice with God. Rejoice by doing the kinds of things that bring glory to God.

B. Remove (11:10)

If we are to rejoice, then we must come to know Jesus (v. 9), and then we need to cast our cares upon him.

Here's a good word for us today.

- "**vexation**" – A problem that causes anxiety and creates anger or grief.
 - Remove it from your "heart"
- Life is full of "**pain**" – in body and in the heart.
- So he's not denying that we will have many troubles; he is saying do what you can to remove them.
- Matt 6:24ff; Phil 4:6-7 – These are great texts to consider

C. Remember (12:1-8)

1: This call to remembrance is given to the young.

- The point is simple: **Make God your number 1 priority in life.**
- Enjoy the blessings of God now while you can.
- Don't wait to take your faith seriously.
- Start now because you may have a long life of service to God rather than our brother who only had three.
- You will soon be old.

- “Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened.” (Pratchett)
- “**Creator**” — remember this good God who rules the world with fatherly sovereignty.

2: The trouble of old age compared to a storm, but it’s also echoes of creation; only it’s de-creation.

- The good order is reversed.
- Death is the unmaking of a person.

3-5: images of aging.

3: “the keepers of the house” – an old person’s arms tremble

- “strong men” – legs that are bent with age
- “the grinders” – teeth (many are missing)
- “windows” – eyes that are dim

4: “doors shut” – refers to ears that have trouble hearing

- “rising up at the sound of a bird” – trouble sleeping, up early
- “daughters of song” – vocal chords that struggle sing like before

5: “afraid...” – afraid of falling or attack or illness that leads to death

- “almond tree blossoms” represent white hair, since almond trees are pale in the springtime.
- “grasshopper drags itself along” – instead of jumping around with a lot of energy it’s slow
- “desire fails” – this includes diminished sexual desire but includes more than that

5b-7: Eventually the old person dies.

- Live for God’s glory because this is our destiny in due time.

5b: “our eternal home” We will not live here forever.

- Sooner or later, the “mourners” will carry our bodies out for burial.

6a: Death is like the snapping “a silver cord” and shattering “a golden bowl.”

- That which is beautiful and valuable is destroyed.

6b: Or it is like a broken wheel or a broken jar.

7: Finally, he says about death that it’s about us returning to dust.

- From dust we were created, and to dust we return.
- But the story doesn’t end there for the saint. “Spirit returns to God”
 - To be absent in body is to be present with the Lord.

8: He ends with vanity because he is viewing it from this under the sun perspective mainly.

- But because Jesus is alive, life is not vanity!
- Because Jesus is alive our labor is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

- Because Jesus is alive we are people of hope.
- Because Jesus is alive – we too will live and have a new body!

So let's see that life is a gift and enjoy it and spend it for God's glory.

To the Young: Right now, live for God's glory while you are fully of strength and energy!

To the Old: Growing old is painful, but look at how beautiful and careful the author is here; this care is to express dignity to the elderly.

- "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).
- But the aging of the saints is also precious in the sight of the Lord.
- You are loved by God, elderly saint.
- And you can still bear fruit in old age, as the Psalmist says.
- "Though outwardly you may be wasting away, inwardly you are being renewed day by day."
- And one day you will receive a glorified body and your eternal reward for your faithfulness.

#3: Life Is Hard – Get Wisdom (12:9-12)

Throughout the book, the challenges/hardships of life have been made clear to us.

- Now, the Teacher says this is why I wrote the book! I want you to learn wisdom!
- (This could be an editor commenting on the Teacher's work).
- He says several things about his teaching (these are especially helpful for all who are teachers)

7 Lessons on preaching from The Preacher

1. Wise Exposition (9)

- Solomon was renowned for his wisdom (1 Kings 3:3–28).
- He was wise because God blessed him.
- He was wise because he studied!
- Good expositors take truth to struggle; they give wisdom for navigating the challenges of life.

2. Orderly Exposition (9)

His content was carefully arranged.

- After an opening statement of theme (Ecclesiastes 1:1–11),
- The quest to find meaning in life (Ecclesiastes 1:12–6:12).
- A large section on wisdom and folly (Ecclesiastes 7–11).
- He ended, by talking again about death and dying (Ecclesiastes 12:1–7), before restating the theme –the vanity of all vanity and fearing God (12:8-14)

We must admit that at times these verses have been difficult to interpret, but there is an orderly aspect to the book as a whole, particularly as it relates to re-occurring themes.

Good teaching has order and a theme. (Luke 1, “an orderly account”)

3. Artistic Exposition (10a) ‘words of delight’

- He said things well.
- What we say is more important than how we say it, but how we say it matters.
- He has used so many poetic phrases:
 - “striving after the wind” (1:14)
 - to everything there is a season” (3:1)
 - “eternity in the hearts of men” (3:11)
 - “Better is a handful of quietness than two handfuls of toil” (4:6)
 - “A living dog is better than a dead lion” (9:4)
 - This whole section of ch. 11: “cast your bread upon the waters” (11:1)
 - “the almond tree blossoms” (Ecclesiastes 12:5), and
 - “man does not know his time” (Ecclesiastes 9:12)
- It’s a truly beautiful book.
- Good teachers/writers/preachers say things well (eg, Rom 8.31-39)

4. Upright Exposition.

- It contained intellectual integrity; he wrote truthfully.
- 2 Corinthians 4. “We renounce disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word” (v. 2).

5. Provoking Exposition (11a)

- That’s the idea of “goads.”
- A stick used on stubborn animals that won’t move.
- Could teachers prod, inspire and motivate hearers.
- A good teacher’s words may hurt a bit, as the truth pricks our conscious.
- They may kindle affection in heart.
- They spur people on to faith and good works.
- That’s the Teacher in this book: he makes us think deeply about life, meaning, joy, death and judgment – all for our good.

6. Memorable Exposition (11b)

- See the image of nails. “Nailed it”
- It has the idea of permanence.
- He nailed down things for us so that we could remember them.
- Truth has been driven into our minds and hearts.
- So many truths have been nailed in our minds.
 - Two are better than one ... a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12),
 - “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ... but time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

7. Redemptive Exposition.

- It came from “One Shepherd”

- This is a reference to God himself. (Ps 23, Ps 80)
- This is why we've been studying the book!
- The Lord is our Shepherd – and He has given us a book to learn and apply!
- One of the titles of the Savior is “Shepherd” (Jn 10, Heb 13, 1 Pet 5)
- And it through this book that we learn about Jesus, the embodiment of wisdom, the one who conquered death for us.
- Our Shepherd speaks to us; the Good Shepherd has redeemed us.
- The Bible tells this beautiful story of redemption; of Paradise restored.

12: He emphasizes the need to study God's Word.

- It's fine to study other books, and people will exhaust themselves making them, but they are to not be more important than God's Word.
- Paul warned about people who are “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7)
- Arrive at truth by embracing God's Word, by embracing Christ, the way, the truth and the life.

#4: Life Is Short – Revere God (12:13-14)

A. Revere God (13)

- Ecclesiastes ends where the Book of Proverbs begins (Prov. 1:7 Wiesbe)
- Fear him in adversity and prosperity (7:14-18)
- If we fear him it will go well with us (8:12)
- We worship the God is a consuming fire, so let us revere him (Heb 12).
- We fear God by viewing him as being most important and central in our lives.
- We fear God by trusting him, not ourselves.
- We fear God by delighting in his word (Ps 112:1)
- We fear God by treasuring his forgiveness (Ps 130)
- When we fear God all other fears are put in proper perspective (Ps 112)
 - “He [the man who fear God] is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.” (Ps 112:7-8)
 - We aren't afraid of bad news when we have a relationship with God. We can trust and be steady in the midst of trials.
- We fear God by keeping his commandments...

B. Keep His commandments (13)

- This means we obey him.
- Otherwise any notion of “fearing God” is fake.

“the whole duty of man” – this is the purpose of man.

Our lives are to be lived unto God.

C. Prepare for final judgment (v. 14)

- On the one hand this is a warning – be ready!

- But it is also an important truth regarding the meaning of life.
- Because there is a judgment, all of life matters!

God will bring every deed into judgment – live to his glory.

Illustration: My sewing class.

- One day God will expose our thoughts and actions.
- Every last deed and thought will be brought to judgment (see Matthew 12:36).
- He “will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Corinthians 4:5).
 - How we use our time matters.
 - How we spend money matters.
 - What we’ve done with our bodies matters.
 - What we say about people matters.
 - What we do for those in need matters.

Ryken: “The final message of Ecclesiastes is not that nothing matters (hebel) but that everything does. What we did, how we did it, and why we did it will all have eternal significance. The reason everything matters is because everything in the universe is subject to the final verdict of a righteous God who knows every secret.”

- So what matters today is that you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ.
- This final warning points us to the need for Christ, and that is a gift of grace.
- Jesus has made a way to avoid God’s wrath, and to be in fellowship with God, giving our lives to the glory of God.

He did it by coming into this world under the sun.

- He suffered in this frustrating world; this complex world.
- But he never committed one foolish act.
- He was the best of all preachers — faithful exposition; artistic, orderly and redemptive.
- He showed us what it looks like to honor the Father and keep his commandments.
- Then he died on behalf of those who broke the commandments;
- the truth was nailed to the cross.
- And at just the right time, the Good Shepherd died for the ungodly.
- He was buried. But he didn’t stay there long.
- And on the third day, he stepped out into the sunlight as the vindicated the victorious Son of God.
- Jesus Christ is alive and because of that, life is not vanity, because of this our labor is not in vain, because of this we have power to revere God and obey him, and because we have a glorious future!

