

Ecc 11:9-12:8 Rejoice and Remember

“Scripture characterises youth as a time of vigour and strength. It speaks, too, of the pressures and expectations of youth, warns about the temptations facing young people, and instructs the young about what is expected of them.”¹

Proverbs presents a wonderful poetic contrast between young and old:

[Pro 20:29 NKJV] 29 The glory of young men [is] their strength,
And the splendor of old men [is] their gray head.

Scripture is full of examples of important moments in the lives of young people - who, perhaps like Jeremiah, may have thought, “I am only a youth.” (Jer 1:6)

Maybe young Samuel as God calls him into the prophetic office in
1 Sam 3

Maybe a young David standing up to Goliath in 1 Sam 17

Naaman’s captive servant girl from 2 Kings 5:1-4

Maybe a young man trying to follow Jesus in Mark 14:51-52

¹ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

Maybe Timothy felt this way when Paul wrote that famous exhortation 1 Tim 4:12 -- “Let no man despise your youth...”

From all of these examples we get the sense that the Bible is not restricted in its view of humanity to only stuffy old people with nothing better to do but sit around and fuss about theology -- BUT that God is uniquely concerned in the affairs of His creation from their beginnings, through their vibrant youthful years, all the way to the grave.

There’s yet another youth addressed by Scripture - a typical young person, instructed by a man referred to as -- “the preacher.”

The sense we get from Ecclesiastes, a poetic book classified as wisdom literature, is that this man, having lived so opulently, was searching for the meaning of life, and had come away with a few observations.² As he aged, and as he searched, he grew philosophical, speculative, and some would even say pessimistic.³

² Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 16–17.

³ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 391.

It is traditionally believed that the Preacher was none other than King Solomon, son of David, author of the lion's share of Proverbs.

It was that very same Solomon who expressed his own feelings of inadequacy as a youth when he cried out to God, “[1Ki 3:7 NLT] 7 "Now, O LORD my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around.”

Having advanced in years, in wisdom, in wounds and scar tissue, Solomon looks back and contemplates life -- where things have gone wrong, and where things have gone right. His thoughts on that are recorded for us in Ecclesiastes.

Interestingly enough, among the many themes of the book -- living life well, indulgence, work, time, money, the seeming randomness of life, societal injustice, etc., -- our man, the Preacher, concludes his discourse by issuing some final reflective instructions TO YOUNG PEOPLE, who have their lives in front of them, and are bound to learn many of the same lessons that he has learned. His encouragement to them is to live life well - unto God.

11:9 - This is a great verse. How could it not be, it starts off with the imperative, the command, to REJOICE! It seems to be encouraging right out of the gate. This is exactly something anybody would feel blessed to share with others in any kind of context -- REJOICE! Oh, young man, in your youth!

Now, ladies, don't feel left out. "Although the form is singular [young man] it carries a collective meaning, including all young persons likely to read the book."⁴ So then, take this encouragement and grasp ahold of it as something you are supposed to do: "enjoy life while you are young."⁵

This is followed up by some additional instruction to be happy, to follow your heart, and to do what seems good in your sight.

What a message! It's quite a popular message for our time - as it has been from the beginning -- follow your heart!

BUT WAIT...before we take ahold of this and make it our life verse we need to mark the rest of the author's word --

"But KNOW that for all these

⁴ Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 411.

⁵ Ibid, 411.

God will bring you into judgment.” [SHARE MEME]

WAIT...what? That doesn't sound fun OR ENCOURAGING!

I thought we are supposed to live life, be happy, follow our hearts, but, like...not really?

Hang with me, the intention of the text is not to play some weird emotional game with youths saying “do what you want,” but you better watch out!

Inasmuch as our hearts desire to venture into the realm of sin we come back to the words of the weeping prophet, Jeremiah on the condition of the human heart: [Jer 17:9 NKJV] 9 "The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

The intention of the text here is to reframe our understanding of rejoicing, following our hearts, and doing those things that are good in our sight, within God's own judgment of what is good, joyful, and brings about life. Our desires ought to align with God's desires for us because that is the way to true life.

This speaks to the concept of having a relationship with our Creator; that we ought to be mindful of His ways as we pursue the desires of our hearts. Or, rather that we ought to let His ways shape the desires of our hearts. (Cf. Ps 37:4)

11:10 When our attitudes and actions are all framed by God's Word and who He is, then we are able to let go of those harmful things that perhaps our hearts have convinced us are good but that are really harmful to us.

But what do we make of these last words -- childhood and youth are vanity?

If we accept that the smart and biblical thing to do is rid ourselves of those things that kill us on the inside, that cause depression, anxiety, and sorrow then what do we make of this seeming backhanded comment on youth?

How do we reconcile the idea that we are supposed to rejoice in our youth but also that very thing we are supposed to rejoice in is meaningless? Can that be the meaning -- that this is all meaningless?

The NASB presents an admirable translation to help us understand the full range of meaning here. Where the NKJV reads “childhood and youth are vanity” the NASB says that, “childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.” A more literal translation could read “childhood and youth are VAPOR.”⁶

This is a common theme throughout Ecclesiastes. The Preacher presents the idea of vanity 36 times throughout the book - far more times than any other book of the Bible - that what he has observed on earth is vanity, breath, vapor, smoke. It's passing away.

“Vanity cannot possibly mean that these years are meaningless and empty...For the Preacher these are the crucial years when important decisions of life are made.”⁷

So then, the idea we are to grasp is that the substance of our lives, the substance of and our cause for rejoicing ISN'T WRAPPED UP here on earth or simply one season of our existence that is passing away!

⁶ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 237.

⁷ Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 414.

What we find then v.9-10 is this perspective of balance -- live your lives full out, happily, not engaging in harmful behaviors or thoughts, with the understanding that we are God's people, destined to live before Him in this life and to stand before Him in the next life.

So then we ought to approach the vexing issues of life, in our youth, with a consideration of how it all lines up with God's desire for us.

And the time to do that is now...not later. So many people resist the call to holiness, to true happiness and contentment, in their youth by convincing themselves that they have the rest of their lives ahead of them.

Walking with the Lord, rejoicing in the Lordy, remembering the Lord, is sometimes considered just another "problem to be solved later."

In the following verses the Preacher presents a different reality - a reality that we all have to walk through as we age.

12:1-8

What we find here, in grand poetic form, with all sorts of figurative language, is a description of aging until, “the dust returns to the earth as it was, And the spirit returns to God who gave it,” -- until death.

This contrast between youth and old age is not necessarily unique to Ecclesiastes. Many of the poems in the Bible deal in contrasts, in order to provoke the reader to consider both sides of the coin, as it were. In this way we get a truly informed view of the human condition.

The reality that is presented in our text is one that certainly brings its own set of challenges as the author describes what it's like to get older.

People become frail, sleepless, uncoordinated, they lose their teeth, and their hearing, and eyesight. They even lose their desires, eventually culminating in death.

Unfortunately, the reality is that as those problems of age begin to appear - people continue to forestall the call to “Rejoice and to remember the Lord.”

As a matter of fact, as life becomes more difficult it sometimes drives people further into their own isolation and sadness. Having never taken the invitation to Remember the Lord seriously, many find themselves to be only a distant acquaintance of a God that they heard loved them once upon a time in their youth.

And that is eternally true the Lord DOES LOVE YOU. The Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of David, and of Jeremiah, and all the prophets; and of the Preacher -- He loves you and wants you to know that and rejoice in it right now! And, as you enter into that realm of life where you start falling apart - He wants you to carry that joy with you and remember Him in all of your ways. And He wants you to do that right now in your youth!

The point isn't to say, "Enjoy life while you're young because man it's going to be the worst when you get old." But, rather to remind us that youth is a gift in itself, it is something to be rejoiced in and a time to draw close to God while you have all of your faculties and can still go on grand adventures with the Author of all creation -- before it slips through our fingers...like smoke.

“[A 2004] Barna study indicates that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their savior do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%), and that two out of three born again Christians (64%) made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday.”⁸

Right now is your time to **Rejoice** and **Remember** before you get old and the good message, the Gospel, becomes just something you’ll get around to.

Solomon’s life is a tragedy of sorts. Like Jeremiah he expressed that deep seated thought that many feel - “I’m only a youth...” and in his humility and honest assessment of his own youthful inexperience God worked greatly through him BUT...AS HE GOT OLDER HE FELL APART!

[1Ki 11:1-10 NKJV] 1 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, [and] Hittites-- 2 from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to

⁸ <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>

these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as [was] the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as [did] his father David. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that [is] east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. 8 And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. 9 So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.

Ecclesiastes is likely the product of Solomon's experience.

Ultimately, after experiencing so much disappointment in his own walk with God, he came away with some advice for young people -- Rejoice and remember. I wonder if he looked back at his

youthful dependence upon God with some longing. It certainly appears so. Why else would he wrap up this book by focusing on youth?

Solomon offers us some perspective from an older man who has been through the spiritual wringer, who has made HUGE mistakes in his relationship with God, and has pursued every form of pleasure available.

What he presents in light of his mistakes isn't an endorsement of a party-animal lifestyle. Rather the advice that he presents to young people, like a wise old Dad is that -- life is good, and enjoyable, especially when lived in a way that remembers God and keeps the Lord at the center of our ambitions.

Yes, you're going to get old. Yes, life is also full of pain. It is certainly likely that many of you will try many of the same things that Solomon did to try and find some form of happiness. BUT now is the time to rejoice in your youth, and Remember your Creator, before it's too late.