

A Practical Study of ECCLESIASTES

“Where Your Heart and Treasure Meet”

Study Number Eight – Go for It Because the Grave Is Coming: I’m Growing Older! – Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:14

Go for It Because the Grave Is Coming and I’m Growing Older!

Probably one of the best books on the subject of physical death, as far as an illustration is concerned, is Philip Yancey’s book called *Where Is God When It Hurts?* This is what he says about physical death:

(Where Is God When It Hurts? by Philip Yancey)

Ironically the one event which probably causes more emotional suffering than any other, death, is in reality a translation. It’s a time of great joy when Christ’s victory will be appropriated to each of us. Describing the effect of His own death, Jesus used the simile of a woman in travail, full of pain and agony until the moment of childbirth when all is replaced by ecstasy (John 16:21).

Each of our individual deaths can be seen as a birth. Imagine what it would be like if you had full consciousness as a fetus and could now remember those sensations:

[And this is the way he described it.]

Your world is dark, it's safe, it's secure. You are bathed in warm liquid, cushioned from shock. You do nothing for yourself; you are fed automatically, and a murmuring heartbeat assures you that someone larger than you fills all your needs. Your life consists of simple waiting—you're not sure what to wait for, but any change seems far away and scary. You meet no sharp objects, no pain, no threatening adventures. It's a fine existence.

One day you feel a tug. The walls are falling in on you. Those soft cushions are now pulsing and beating against you, crushing you downwards. Your body is bent double, your limbs twisted and wrenched. You're falling, upside down. For the first time in your life, you feel pain. You're in a sea of rolling matter. There is more pressure, almost too intense to bear. Your head is squeezed flat, you are pushed harder, and harder into a dark tunnel. Oh, the pain. Noise. More pressure.

You hurt all over. You hear a groaning sound and an awful, sudden fear rushes in on you. It is happening—your work is collapsing. You're sure it's the end. You see a piercing, blinding light. Cold, rough hands pull at you. A painful slap. Waaaahhhhh!

Congratulations, you have just been born.

[And then he goes on to say this:]

Death is like that. On this end of the birth canal, it seems fiercesome, portentous, and full of pain. Death is a scary tunnel and we are being sucked toward it by a powerful force. None of us looks forward to it. We're afraid. It's full of pressure, and pain, and darkness...the unknown. But beyond the darkness and the pain there's a whole new world outside. When we wake up after death in that bright new world, our tears and hurts will be mere memories. And though the new world is so much better than this one, we have no categories to really understand what it will be like. The best the Bible writers can tell us is that then, instead of the silence of God, we will have a presence of God and see Him face to face. At that time we will be given a stone, and upon it will be written a new name, which no one else knows. Our birth into new creatures will be total and complete (Rev. 2:17).
(source unknown)

Ray Stedman in his *Secrets of the Spirit* tells the story about Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse when his wife died and they were driving home together with the children. And he was trying to console the family. And as they were driving along, all of a sudden a big moving van came flying down the road and it cast a shadow over the car. Dr. Barnhouse says:

Kids would you rather be run over by the truck or by its shadow? And the kids said, "Well, Daddy, of course by the shadow." And he says "Well, the truck of physical death ran over Jesus Christ so that only the shadow touches us. We go through the shadow, the valley of the shadow of death."

(source unknown)

And so it's wrong for us as believers to really look on death as a dreaded summons.

One fellow was asked, "How old are you?" And he says "I'm on the right side of 60." And the guy says "Well, I thought you were probably more than 60." And he says "I am. I'm on the right side because the way I'm going leads to home and to heaven and to Him. And that's where I want to be."

One fellow died and as he was preparing for physical death—he'd had a heart attack—the last words he could say to his wife as she came running into the room is "I am called home."

You know, that brings great comfort. That brings peace to realize that as a believer even death itself is not a dreaded something—not something tragic. It's not something that we need to resist but recognize that's God's plan for taking us home.

I think probably one of the most touching experiences I had in recent years was being in Canada up in St. John New Brunswick doing a week of meetings, a little over a year ago in the month of March. And while I was there, Terry Fox was very near physical death. And there were a lot of articles in the paper about Terry.

If you know the story of Terry, he was a young man who in his 20's had to have his left leg amputated at the knee because of

cancer. And he decided that he was going to do something for the cause of cancer rather than just fold up and die. And so he hit on the idea of a marathon of hope—that is, running across Canada in a marathon with an Adidas shoe on a wooden peg and the other good leg he trained.

And the dear guy ran 3,339 miles across Canada before he was finally stricken again with cancer. And he became a national hero and he was laying very near physical death while I was up there. And on December 5th, when he found out that he had been stricken again and he was probably going to die, this is what he said about physical death. I thought it was very courageous as a young man only in his late 20's:

Terry revealed that doctors had given him a 10% chance to live. And in a quiet halting voice he said: “If it comes to the point where I’m told I am going to die of cancer, I’ve got to be able to face death and accept it...If I am able to beat it and get back to Thunder Bay”—[that’s where he left off in his race]—“well that’ll be great. But if it doesn’t work out that way, I’ve got to be able to accept it. And I think that by having some faith that God is right there...that you know, believing in heaven...will relieve me of all of that loneliness.”
(source unknown)

In the mid-life crisis Jim Conway in the book (*Men in Mid-Life Crisis*) points out that every time we face physical death, we face 4 emotional, or 5 emotional levels that we go through in the process of trying to come out of it again back to reality.

1. First of he says we face DENIAL. We say “it’s not me—it’s not true!”
2. Secondly we face ANGER—“why me?”
3. Then third we face BARGAINING—“God, can’t we postpone this?”
3. Then four we face DEPRESSION—“All is lost.”
4. And then five we face ACCEPTANCE—“I’m really ready.”
(source unknown)

And you know, in essence, those five things are part of the mid-life crisis, if you stop and think about it.

1. First of all DENIAL—“It’s not me.”
2. Secondly ANGER—“Why me? Why do I have to go through this?”
3. BARGAINING—“Can’t we postpone it?”
4. DEPRESSION—we found him in the pit. “All is lost.”

And then finally:

5. ACCEPTANCE—“I’m ready.”

And so we’re talking about the whole subject of physical death

because in the mid-life crisis it becomes a critical point

You see, every day you now live you have less days than you've already lived and you find yourself playing in the second half and it's very, very painful.

There was an excellent article in helping men beat the after-40 blues in *This Week* magazine a couple of years ago and I clipped it out because it relates to the whole study for today.

It says:

(Article in *Family Weekly*, December 7, 1980 by Michael E. McGill, Ph.D.)

These men are candidates for crisis, particularly in five key areas.

The Goal Gap. Career paths are typically well set by mid-life, and a man has a clear picture of what the remaining 10 to 30 years of his work life will be like. Often the middle-aged man realizes he will not attain the career goals he has long sought [after] and for which he has sacrificed. When work has been his sole source of identity and his way of relating to others, realization of his work reality often throws a man into crisis.

Vanity-Virility. Some men, like Dan, seem obsessed with the vitality and virility that are associated with youth. As their bodies change in mid-life, and particularly as they experience changes in their own sexual performance, their

sense of self is shattered. In a desperate, vain attempt to stay young, they change their personalities and behavior.

Empty Nest. As a man reaches middle age, his children may be grown and beginning families of their own. At the same time, in today's world, his wife may be returning to work or school. With children and spouse shifting their interests away from home and from him, a middle-aged man who has valued his role as father/husband wonders what to do with his life now that he is not needed in the ways [like] he once was.

And then the next one is the big one:

Meeting [his own] Mortality. Every middle-aged man must deal firsthand with death. An elderly, ill parent succumbs, a neighbor or work associate suffers a fatal heart attack. Each of these incidents reminds the middle-aged man of his own mortality, his declining years. There is a sense of urgency about life and with it some unusual behavior.

I quote all of this because that's where we are. We come to the final part of the mid-life crisis and Solomon now is going to talk and deal with the subject of death.

Where have we been in the weeks that we've had our time together?

First of all, he says "Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless."

1. There is no gain in what I'm doing.

2. there's nothing new under the sun, and
3. nobody's going to remember what I do anyway.

That set the stage for the crisis.

In episode #2 he tried projects, he tried pleasure, and he only acquired a whole lot of things that he had to leave to others.

In study #3 he found that he was fighting against the sovereign purpose of God every time he turned around because God had a “time and a season for every activity under the sun.”

He found out that he was going to be held accountable too for his life and that bothered him.

In chapter 4, in study #4 we found the man fighting against the corporate squeeze. He was fighting against oppression. He was fighting against the power of that which was over him and it was unjustly exercised. And he also warns us don't ever make religious decisions when you're under that kind of stress.

In the next episode, we call it the Misfortunes of making a Fortune. When a man views life selfishly, rather than socially, he sees the grave as the end and he sees life as apart from God, he will live for material goals.

And naturally a man in mid-life crisis can become a workaholic because he's trying to accumulate more and more material things so that he can have a good time with the rest of his life as he rules God out of it.

In episode #6 we see the problem of depression and how to think through trauma.

And then in last week's study we talked about the common destiny of us all. And he says "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

And now we come to one of the real critical areas of the mid-life crisis and that's the graying of the hair and the growing older.

I saw a cute cartoon the other day of the little woman, she's standing in the vitamin shop, and she's saying to her lady friend: "The doctor recommended something to improve my memory but I can't remember what it was."

This little poem has always been so touching. In fact, the lady last night in one of my classes said "Would you please get that poem for me." I said "Yes, I know where it is. It's in this week's study."

I like my Bifocals,
My Dentures fit me fine
My Hearing Aid is perfect,
But Lord, how I miss my MIND!

(source unknown)

And Jerry Smith is responsible for the following 36 characteristics of old age. So if you like them, great. And if you don't, pick on him.

1. Aging is when everything hurts, and what doesn't hurt doesn't work.
2. The gleam in your eyes is from the sun hitting your bifocals.
3. You feel like the night after and you haven't been anywhere.
4. Your little black book contains only names ending in MD.
5. You get winded playing chess.
6. Your children begin to look middle-aged.
7. You finally reach the top of the ladder and find it leaning against the wrong wall.
8. You join a health club and you don't go.
9. You outlive your enthusiasm.
10. You decide to procrastinate but never get around to it.

11. You're still chasing women but you can't remember why.
12. Your mind makes contracts your body can't meet.
13. A dripping faucet causes an uncontrollable bladder urge.
14. You know all the answers but nobody's asking the questions.
15. You look forward to a dull evening at home.
16. You walk with your head held high, trying to get used to your new bifocals.
17. Your favorite part of the newspaper is "25 years ago today..."
18. You turn out the light for economic rather than romantic reasons.
19. You sit in a rocking chair and you can't get it going.
20. Your knees buckle and your belt won't.
21. You regret all those mistakes resisting temptation.
22. You're 17 around the neck, 42 around the waist and 96 around the golf course.
23. You stop looking forward to your next birthday.

24. After painting the town red, you have to take a long rest before a second coat.
25. Dialing long distance wears you out.
26. You're startled the first time you are addressed as an old timer.
27. You just can't stand people who are intolerant.
28. The best part of your day is over when your alarm clock goes off.
29. You burn the midnight oil until 9:30.
30. Your back goes out more often than you do.
31. A fortune teller offers to read your face.
32. Your pacemaker makes the garage door go up and down when a pretty girl goes by.
33. The little gray-haired lady you help across the street is your wife.
34. You get your exercise acting as a pall bearer to your friends who exercised.
35. You have too much room in the house and not enough in the medicine cabinet.

And then this last one's great.

36. You sink your teeth into a steak and they stay there.

Woohoo! All signs of old age.

Chapter 11, verse 1. Let's just get it before us and see what he's got to say in these two concluding chapters.

v. 1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.

He's saying as you begin to face old age, reach out to others. Start doing things for others because if you continue to be selfish, you continue to be ingrown, you're going to get bitter and resentful.

The people you really love the most in old age are the people who are always serving others, and doing things for others.

He says throw it on the water! Get it out there! Because as you sow, you're going to reap—Galatians 6:7.

Have patience. That which is apparently lost is deposited. And “let us not cave in, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9)

Patience—waiting. That's the course and the Lord will bring it about.

[Ecclesiastes] 3:11

He makes all things beautiful in His time.

I put Luke 6:38 here:

Luke 6:38

Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return.

v. 2 Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

He says don't just pick out one or two. Have a bunch. And spread out the blessing of it so that when you hit a disaster and you've got a problem, you've got lots of people to come and surround you and support you and sustain you in the time of your need.

v. 3 If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie.

In other words, before you make commitments, before you make decisions, settle down. Be sure because once it's put in concrete, you're obligated.

In Luke chapter 14 Jesus tells a story about a guy who's got 10,000 men and he's going out to do battle against 20,000 men.

Then he tells a story about a guy who takes his money and he's going to build a tower but he only gets it half built and then he has to quit because he ran out of funds.

What he's saying is, sit down and consider your assets and liabilities before you go to war. Sit down and consider the cost before you start to build because people are going to call you a fool for not planning well.

And in essence he's saying, consider the cost before you make a commitment. Because when the commitment is made, then there is no altering that commitment. It is tough to change after you've made a beginning.

v. 4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

You know, I looked at that verse and I tried to figure out in my mind how does that fit to old age? And you know, I have had conversations with so many people who, when they are on beds of illness or they hear they've got a disease, or even maybe they just said it, "You know, I've really got to do something significant for God—either with my money or my possessions—because I don't have very long."

You know how many of those people that I have talked to who

did something before they died? Zip.

I mean, they talk about it, they think about it, but I'm telling you, they died without doing anything about it.

And I've been very close to a lot of individuals who have died recently. And talking to them, they always when they think about death, when they think about "this is going to happen," just never seem to get around to it.

I think I'm going to get me a pocket of round tuits and just start handing them out.

You've heard Zig Ziglar speak I'm sure. You know, he's a hyper-ventilated, super positive attitude, motivator. And when he gets up to speak, he always talks about getting after it.

And he's got a classic. He talks about a project and he says:

Well, after the holidays, I'm going to do that. Let's say it's I'm going to jog, okay. I'm going to get on a running program. I'm going to start taking care of my body because it's gone to pot, literally. Ok. Well, it's a little cold right now and it's busy. After the holidays I'm going to do that. And then you see him after the holidays and they say "Oh gosh it's cold. I've got to wait until it warms up!" And then it warms up and you see him in the spring and they say "Well, I've got to wait until the kids get out of school! I mean, running carpools and all this stuff and PTA and everything." And then you see him at the

beginning of the summer and he says “Oh, it’s so hot now. I’ve got to wait until after summer’s over.” And then they say “Well, school started and I’m going to wait until the holidays.” And then you see him at the holidays and he says “I’m going to wait until after the holidays.”

And he describes it so classic. He taught us about going over to Maud’s house to have some biscuits. And Maude’s biscuits ended up little tiny rocks. He said “Maude, what happened to your biscuits?” She said “Well, my biscuits squatted to rise and they got cooked in the squat.”
(source unknown)

And what he’s saying here is, that:

2 Corinthians 9:7

Every man according as he purposed within his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

If you’re going to do it, do it! And don’t wait until the wind quits blowing and don’t wait until you’ve got to perfectly cloudless day or you’re never going to get the thing sown and you’re never going to accomplish anything.

The waiting for perfect conditions will result in failure and the task won’t be done because you’ll never find a favorable time to do it.

I have a poem. I use it in every funeral:

What shall I think when I am called to die?
Shall I not find too soon my life has ended?
The years too quickly have hastened by
with so little done of all that I've intended.
There were so many things I'd meant to try,
So many contests I'd hoped to win.
And lo the end approaches,
just as I was thinking of preparing to begin.

(source unknown)

And that's the way it is. We're just not prepared because we're looking for the favorable circumstances come blowing our way to do it.

And Jesus said:

John 4:35

Don't say, "There are four months, and then cometh harvest." Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look.

What about salvation? King Agrippa:

Acts 26:28

...Almost you persuade me to become a Christian.

Some of you are sitting here and you're thinking "Boy, one of these days I'm going to get my act together with God. He and I are going to get on the same wave length."

2 Corinthians 6:2 says:

2 Corinthians 6:2

Now is the accepted time...now is the day of salvation.

This is all you got.

Proverbs 27:1 gives you a warning:

Proverbs 27:1

Boast yourself of tomorrow, for you don't know what a day brings forth.

James 4:14

Your life is like a vapor. It appears for a little time, then passes away.

Here today and gone tomorrow.

You know, there's a great warning four times in Hebrews chapter 3 and 4. It's the same warning. He says "don't harden your hearts in the day of conviction." He says "today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart."

In essence what Solomon is saying is go for it now! Favorable or unfavorable, make the decisions and do it so you don't have to live with regrets or die with a task unfinished!

v. 5 As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

Jesus said that very same thing in John 3:8. He says:

John 3:8

The wind blows where it desires to blow, and you can hear it and you don't know where it comes from and you don't know where it goes.

But you can see what it does.

“...you cannot understand the works of God, who is the Maker of all things.”

He does it exceeding abundant. He'll meet your needs. You can't understand it, but God is in the process of bringing blessing out of it. Leave it in His hands and watch Him begin to really work.

Verse 6.

v. 6 Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

What he's saying is, when you get into the stock market, use diversification. Don't put all your eggs in one basket because you don't know what the Lord's going to bless and what He isn't going to bless.

I remember Jeff Wells and John Lodwick were training for the 1980 Olympics—students at Dallas Seminary. And they both were musing over the fact that the boycott had destroyed their dreams. And John just simply said “I'm glad I didn't have all my eggs in one basket.” Because he said the guys who were just running for this are totally devastated and depressed. And it's going to be difficult for them to continue, because everything was lived for that one thing.

You know, I got to thinking about this verse and I thought about the blessing of the formation of our ministry.

Ten years ago when this ministry was formed, we picked three things. We had to. You've got to have 3 reasons for incorporating to have a non-profit corporation. So I like to camp, I like to counsel, and I like to teach Bible classes.

So we put them all three down. You know why I had it in that order? We're going to get our camp and we're going to go for it because I'd been 10 years in it and I love camp. I mean with a

whistle around my neck and tennis shoes and shorts, I can go for bananas. I mean, that's just me. Sitting on a stool and teaching a Bible class is the furthest thing from my mind.

And I had camping up there, number one. And then counseling number two because in a counselor-centered camp, you get tons of opportunities to talk to people and relate to them and help them.

And oh I'll teach a few Bible classes to keep bread on the table but basically, you know, that's way down there on the end. I'll just do that just in order to make the rest of it go.

I didn't know what was going to succeed. And I frankly didn't want to go sit on a stool and teach Bible classes but every time I did, God blessed it. And I'm still not convinced that I got the gift of doing it, but God just keeps saying "Do it and here's the opportunity! And keep doing it until I tell you not to do it!" And He chooses to bless that and we still don't have a camp.

And I hardly ever get a chance to counsel because I'm so busy teaching the Bible classes, you know. So my priorities were all out of whack in the thing, as far as from God's perspective. But I threw three things out there that I like to do. And He chose the one He wanted and I'm happy when I'm doing what He told me to do. And I'm not very happy when I try to do what He, you know, doesn't want me to do.

And he's saying here, you know, just don't put them all in one basket. Have lots of diversification in your life so God can

choose to bless you with these many diversified activities and things that you're involved in.

v. 7 Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

v. 8 However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.

He's saying, enjoy those good days. There's going to be some days when God's going to pull the shades and it's going to get a little dark. And it's going to get a little old. And you can get just a tad bit depressed and down when you think about it.

It's kind of like a guy that never parachuted before. He was scared to death. And the guy said "Now listen, this is really easy." He says "All you do is jump out." He says "You pull the rip cord and the main chute will open and you'll just float down to the ground." He says "Now in case that doesn't, there's an emergency chute. You just reach over and pull that and it'll pop out and you'll float down to the ground. And there'll be a truck down there, waiting to pick you up and take you back to the base."

Well the guy gets shoved out of the plane and he pulls number one and nothing happens. And then he pulls number two and nothing happens. And the last words he said is "And I suppose the truck won't be there either."

That's the way sometimes we look at it, isn't it?

In the *Small Society* there's a cute little statement. This guy is sitting, he's totally depressed, on the bench and he says...he's afraid he's going to die. And this guy's got ahold of his shirt and he's lecturing him. And he says "Well, just live each day as if it were your last! And someday you'll be right!"
(source unknown)

Did you read Bob Hope's statement of his musings at 79 in Sunday's *This Week* magazine? He says:

At the age of 79 I am in the springtime of my senility.
(source unknown)

Now, that is a guy who is flat facing old age in the right way. It is inevitable. It is going to come.

v. 9 Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

Some people take that verse and they really preach it to their kids. "Just go ahead and live it up! But God's going to write the finale baby! And the opera ain't over until the fat lady sings so be careful."

And that's the way a lot of people interpret that ninth verse.

God gets to say the last!

That's not what he's saying. He's saying while you're young, enjoy it to the fullest. God gave it to you. When you're walking with God, follow the ways of your heart. And what your eyes see, enjoy it. But know these things, that for all the inconsistencies, for all of the oppression, for all of the things you can't explain that came into your life to bring you tragedy and difficulty and suffering and brings on death, God's going to make that alright. God's going to explain that all to you later on when He brings that into judgment.

So all the ironies, all the enigmas, all of the things you tried to figure out about:

Why die? Why suffer? Why this?

God's going to make that all clear. He's not going to leave you alone. He's going to show you at that day of judgment that's going to come.

v.10 So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

It's always wrong to worry.

I'm teaching the Sermon on the Mount and in chapter 6 of the

Sermon on the Mount, the Lord says three times “Don’t worry, don’t worry, don’t worry.”

And after He finishes saying that three times, I have told those who have listened to that exposition, that if they are worrying, there are two things they’re guilty of:

1. They don’t believe the Father can handle it. Boy, that’s dangerous.
2. They haven’t turned it over to the Lord yet.

And he’s saying, “Look! God’s going to handle physical death when it comes. And God’s going to take care of you and He’s going to fulfil His promises so He can handle it. So don’t be afraid of it!”

“...cast off the troubles of your body...”

And realize there’s some pretty exciting things ahead for you in the days that remain.

Chapter 12 and verse 1.

12:v. 1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—

He's saying in light of this, while you're young give your heart to the Lord. Give it to Him now. Don't wait until later.

(Taken from *The Art of Staying Off Dead-End Streets* by Richard DeHaan)

Did you hear the story about an elderly Christian lady whose husband had gone into the drugstore and she was sitting in the car and she heard these two young girls go by. And this one young lady says "You know, I'm still going to have a good time yet before I give my life to the Lord."

And Mrs. Mack thought, you know, I'm going to teach that girl a lesson. She got herself a dozen roses and she enjoyed them for the whole week and when they were wilting and the petals started to fall off, she put them in a box and she mailed them to this girl.

The girl saw Mrs. Mack on the street shortly thereafter and she thought maybe the flowers had been delayed in their delivery and all and so she didn't think anything about it. But she was a little bit bewildered.

She saw Mrs. Mack on the street and thanked her for the flowers. And this is what Mrs. Mack said, it's classic.

She said "I'm glad you liked them. I cut them last Monday and enjoyed them all week but this morning when I noticed they were beginning to get old and faded I thought of you and had them delivered to your door."

Seeing the puzzled and hurt look on the girl's face she continued: "The other evening I was sitting in the car while my husband was in the drugstore and as you walked by I heard you telling someone that you were going to become a Christian later, not while you're still young. You said you wanted to have a good time first. How selfish. You wish to give the Lord your life after the beauty and the charm and the vigor have faded and you've become old and wrinkled. I thought these roses would illustrate what you're doing to the Lord by waiting."

The girl learned her lesson and gave her heart to Jesus Christ (source unknown)

That's what Solomon is saying. He says give it to Him early so God can take what's there and use it! Don't give Him all the left-overs.

Oh, these next verses are fantastic! From verse 2 to verse 8, you've got 15 characteristics of old age under symbolism—poetic symbolism—so I'm going to describe them for you. You're going to believe that Solomon is living today as you read these.

v. 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;

Old age is when the lights grow dim, right? Both physically and emotionally. The days become dreary and the nights become long and gloom and depression begin to settle in. And the moon doesn't quite look like it used to look. The lights kind of go out.

Pains are many and the pleasures are few, in essence.

1. "before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark..."

And then he says:

2. "and the clouds return after the rain."

It just kind of seems like it's raining all the time. You go from one little physical problem to the next little physical problem and then another one and another one. And the old boy just starts falling apart. I mean you got a pain here and a pain there and you get well from this one and you fall into another one and another one. You go through the syndrome of just growing older.

It seems like it's raining all the time—one wave right after another.

v. 3 when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;

I was listening to KRLD radio going home and they've got those oldies on there from my generation that they're playing at night. And they always sing "This old house is getting shaky. This old house is getting old." Pretty soon you see an angel peeking through a broken window pane, you know, that's kind of the picture that's described here.

It's a house that's getting shaky.

3. "when the keepers of the house tremble..."—what's that? That's the arms and the legs. They're getting a little shaky and they were once strong and active and now they're wrinkled and gnarled and they tremble just a little bit.
4. "...and the strong men stoop..."—that's the shoulders. They start to roll forward and you get stooped.
5. "...when the grinders cease because they are few..."—you know what that one is, don't you? Man, they're just flat ain't much left in the uppers and the lowers anymore.

Our teeth are like stars. They come out at night.

That's kind the feeling of the whole thing.

What is that one guy says?

I put my eyes on the table and my teeth in the glass, my hearing aid in the drawer and I say "Lord what else has to

come off or be put up before I can go to sleep?”

6. “...and those looking through the windows grow dim”—that’s the eyes. Bifocals, trifocals, surgery for cataracts and then magnifying glasses.

Last night I was in the home of a couple and we’re eating dinner. And bless her heart, we had this dear elderly lady in her late 70s eating dinner with us and she was putting sugar on her lettuce. I mean, she thought she had the salad dressing. She just couldn’t see anything around the table at all. She just, you know, took it and it looked white. She was sprinkling it all over and she had awful sweet lettuce for supper. Just couldn’t see anything anymore. Eyes going bad.

v. 4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;

7. “when the doors to the street are closed”—that’s the ears. You get a little bit hard of hearing.

“What’s that you say there boy? Speak a little louder because I can’t hear you. I’ve been listening to my kids music too long.”

8. “...and the sound of grinding fades...”—that’s the outside loud noises. You’re no longer able to discern and to hear because of being hard of hearing.

Conversation is difficult. You begin to read lips a little bit and

you turn your head to the one good ear you got so you can hear.

9. “...when men rise up at the sound of birds...”—I always want to be put in the quiet motel room. I always want to be put somewhere where noise will not disturb you and the chirping of the bird wakens you in the morning. And when you were young, even an alarm going off ten times could not shake you out of the sack. And now, just the sound of the birds gets you up.
10. “...but all their songs grow faint”—this is when you got the little old lady that wants to continue to sing in the soprano in the choir and her voice crackles and breaks like crazy and you just feel so sorry for her. She’s lost her song. She’s lost her voice and her song grows faint because the vocal chords have been seriously impaired by old age.

v. 5 when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

11. “when men are afraid of heights...”—you know. Don’t get up on the ladder!

I keep telling my dad when I'm up there. He's always doing everything. I said "Dad, don't get up on the ladder. Stay off of that." He gets up on the roof.

They won't fly in an airplane though. I mean, you know boy, that's too much! And going up the elevator in a tall building, that gets kind of scary in high places.

12. "...and of dangers in the streets..."—boy my mom and dad won't drive at night anymore. I mean, man, that's when the people come out. And that's when the accidents happen. And you flat can't see so good no more and you don't drive those chariots around the street late at night.
13. "...when the almond tree blossoms"—what's that? Almond tree gets real white and then the blossoms fall off. And that's the hair. It gets white and then it all falls out. Nothing left up there.
14. "...and the grasshopper drags himself along..."—there's a lot of...I really had a hard time about that. It could be that even the slightest burden is a burden. I mean, as you're older you're not able to carry heavy loads anymore. It could be "drags himself along" like using a cane because he's unable to walk and to move like he used to or to walk with a walker because of hip problems.

And then of course the last one is easy:

15. "...and the desire no longer is stirred"—I mean, doesn't want to eat anymore, doesn't like to work anymore, doesn't enjoy drinking anymore, doesn't enjoy sex anymore. The desire is gone for all of these things and it's the loss of that which once was deemed good.

And then finally:

"Then man goes to his eternal home"—and would you look at that please?

Even Solomon says that the man doesn't sleep. He goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

Now that accords with New Testament truth Philippians 1:21

Philippians 1:21, 23

For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.
I'm having a hard time desiring to depart to be with
Christ, for that is a lot better.

2 Corinthians 5:8

We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be
absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord.

One of the hardest things you have to do when you face
physical death is to disassociate the person from the worn out
garment that's been thrown aside.

That person is no longer there. At the moment of that physical demise, that person has stepped into the presence of the Lord for new assignments. They are freer. They are happier. Suffering and tears and pain are only a memory that has been past. They are now, forever with the Lord.

And that's what he's saying.

The old body falls apart and all these things happen to it. That's just the way of man. That's the curse of sin. Physical death is that!

And sure there's suffering involved, but then it's past, and you're with the Lord.

v. 6 Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well,

Now that's the list of the organs that all have to function in order to have life.

1. First of all, the “silver cord” is the SPINAL CORD. That's got to be intact.
2. “the golden bowl” is the HEAD. The “bowl” is the brain.
3. “the pitcher” is the LUNGS.

4. “the wheel” is the HEART.

Life cannot be sustained without the functioning of these major organs.

v. 7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

He leaves the house and the old worn out garment becomes dust.

v. 8 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

Now isn't that something?

He comes right back to where we started 8 weeks ago. He's back to chapter 1, verse 2:

“Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.”

And when he comes to death, that's just what he says. Life is empty when you live it for here and now. You'll just have ashes and eyes filled with tears but there'll come a time when you'll go be with Him.

When as a child, I laughed and wept; and time crept.
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked; time walked.
When I became a full grown man, time ran.

When older still I daily grew, time flew.
Soon I shall find in traveling on, time is gone.
(source unknown)

And that's the way we face it when we come to verse 8.

The remaining verses are the solution and they're beautiful.

**v. 9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he
imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered
and searched out and set in order many proverbs.**

And we've seen that.

**v.10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words,
and what he wrote was upright and true.**

And we've seen that.

**v.11 The words of the wise are like goads, their
collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given
by one Shepherd.**

**v.12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to
them. Of making many books there is no end, and
much study wearies the body.**

Lots of kids love that verse.

v.13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

“Now all has been heard;”—the sermon’s over. This is what I’m going to say to you—“here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.”

v.14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Alright now, I took those three verses and I hung three things on them. Because in those verses—verses 13 and 14—I see the solution to the mid-life crisis today. I never saw this until just day before yesterday while I was working on this again for this session.

These are the solutions to the mid-life crisis:

1. SURRENDER to the sovereign purpose of God.

He says “fear God.” That means, I respect You. I believe You. You know that’s right. I’m surrendering myself to Your sovereign purpose.

I fear God.

2. And I am keeping His commandments. That is SUBMISSION to His Word.

Not only do I surrender, I submit to His Word. I'm obedient to it by my submission.

3. I know I'm going to STAND in judgment so I'm going to live it to the fullest. I know I'm going to stand in judgment.

If I'm not a believer, I'm going to stand at the Great White Throne Judgment and be condemned.

If I am a believer, I'm going to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ and be examined for the good and the evil—whatever that might be in my life.

In John 3:19-21, Jesus when He's talking to Nicodemus and He ends His message He says:

John 3:19

This is the condemnation, light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light; because their deeds were evil.

And what he's saying is, judgment's going to come. You've got a choice. You can just route your own course, live your own life, fight against the principles of the Word of God, and you'll end up a loser.

The key to the whole problem and the solution to all of the difficulty is, first of all, to be a person who will:

SURRENDER to His sovereignty, and

SUBMIT to His Word.

You know, what I thought of tonight was William Cowper's poem called "The Stricken Deer" because, in essence, it's the description of a guy going through a mid-life crisis. Listen to what he writes:

I was a stricken deer that left the herd long since
With many an arrow deep infixed.
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
Thee was I found by one who had himself
Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.
I see that all are wanderers, gone astray
Each in his own delusions; they are lost
In chase of fancied happiness, still wooed
And never won. Dream after dream ensues;
And still they dream that they shall still succeed.
And still they are disappointed. Rings the world
With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind
And add two-thirds of the remaining half,

And find the total of their hopes and fears
Just dreams, empty dreams.
(source unknown)

Solomon says the solution to the mid-life crisis is to surrender to God's sovereign purpose.

And the ultimate of His sovereign purpose is to save your soul through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

That's the beginning of a solution.

And if you've gone through this crisis in your life and you've faced these difficulties and God has had a purpose in it—to bring you to the foot of the Cross. To cause you to realize He's the only one who can bring about the solution.

As a believer the same thing's true. God's got a plan for your life and as long as you fight it, you're going to be frustrated. But as you surrender, you're going to find the joy.

Submit to His word because He knows what's best. He made you the way you are. And one day you're going to stand in judgment and be held accountable for the way you live it and you don't want to be ashamed on that occasion.

LESSON #1: Our giving will be met with our Lord's supply of our every need.

LESSON #2: Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

LESSON #3: We are all going to continue to grow older.

LESSON #4: Each of us has an appointment with the grave unless the Lord comes before that time.

LESSON #5: To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

LESSON #6: Fear God and keep His commandments.

LESSON #7: God will bring every deed into judgment.

Father, as we come to the end of this study, we thank You so much for the reminder that all of our needs will be met as we give. We have been challenged to remember our Creator in the days of our youth. Lord, we also accept the fact that we're going to grow older. Each of us has an appointment with the grave. We're going to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. Father, I would pray today that as we walked with Solomon through these experiences, we'd maybe forget a lot of the experiences and remember this last piece of advice as he brings to conclusion the whole matter. And Lord if there's someone here today who really needs to surrender, to give up, to yield, to quit fighting a losing battle, that they'd

turn it over to You—coming to Calvary to receive the Christ, experiencing salvation in that very moment. And Lord, we know that that salvation will be expressed in a submission to Your Word with an obedient heart, knowing that we’re going to be held accountable and stand one day before the Judgment Seat of Christ. How we praise You for Your love and grace and Your patience with each of us and the work You’re doing in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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Study Number Eight – Go for It Because the Grave Is Coming: I’m Growing Older! – Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:14

NOTES

v. 1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.

v. 2 Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

v. 3 If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie.

v. 4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

v. 5 As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

v. 6 Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

v. 7 Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

v. 8 However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.

v. 9 Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

v. 10 So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

12:v. 1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—

NOTES

v. 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;

v. 3 when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;

v. 4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;

v. 5 when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

v. 6 Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well,

v. 7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

v. 8 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

v. 9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.

v.10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

v.11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.

v.12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

v.13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

v.14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:14 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What are we commanded to do in chapter 11:1?

3. What is the key phrase in verse 5?

4. What are we told to do in verse 8?

5. What are the young men supposed to do, according to verse 9, and what is Solomon's warning?

6. Find the fifteen characteristics of old age in chapter 12:2-5.

7. How are the words of the wise described in verse 11?

8. State the conclusion of the matter in verses 13 & 14.

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Our giving will be met with our Lord's supply of our every need.

LESSON #2: Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

LESSON #3: We are all going to continue to grow older.

LESSON #4: Each of us has an appointment with the grave unless the Lord comes before that time.

LESSON #5: To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

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