

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES “THE MID-LIFE CRISIS”

STUDY NUMBER EIGHT – Go for It Because the Grave Is Coming: I’m Growing Older!

TEXT: 11:1 – 12: 14

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” –

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.

Philip Yancey in his book, Where is God When It Hurts? Makes the following statement, “Ironically, the one event which probably causes more emotional suffering than any other, death, is in reality a translation, a time for 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 had full consciousness as a fetus and could now remember those sensations:

“Your world is dark, safe, 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. 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 bod 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, and you are pushed harder, 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 world is collapsing. You’re sure it’s the end. You see a piercing, blinding light. Cold, rough hands pull at you. A painful slap. Waaaahhhh!

“Congratulations, you have just been born.

“Death is like that. On this end of the birth canal. It seems fierce some, 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, pain, 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 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 the 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 complete (Rev. 2:17).

Ray Stedman in his book Secrets of the Spirit says, “So many Christians seem to echo the fear and pessimism and despair of the world when they think of death as a somber, gloomy occasion. Rather, it ought to be a time of triumph and of joy because a believer has gone home to be with the Lord. I remember listening years ago to a radio broadcast of the ‘Bible Study Hour’ when Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, pastor of a church in Philadelphia, was the speaker. I’ll never forget his telling of the occasion when his first wife had died. After the funeral service, as he was driving his motherless children home, they were naturally overcome with grief at the parting. Dr. Barnhouse said that as he was trying to think of some word of comfort to give them, a huge moving van passed them and the shadow of the truck swept over the car. As the truck pulled on in front of them, an inspiration came to Dr. Barnhouse. He said, “Would you rather be run over by a truck, or by its shadow?” The children said, “Well, of course, Dad, we’d much rather be run over by the shadow! That can’t hurt us at all.” Dr. Barnhouse said, “Did you know that two thousand years ago the truck of death ran over the Lord Jesus in order that only its shadow might run over us?” And he went on to explain how David has said in the Twenty-Third Psalm: ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me.’ This is the promise which every believer has from the lips of Jesus himself: I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

My knowledge of that life is small;
The eye of faith is dim;
But it’s enough that Christ knows all;
And I shall be with Him.

A man who was asked how old he was replied, “I’m on the right side of 60,” at which his friend said, “I should have thought you were over 60.” To this the answer was, “So I am. That is the right side of 60, “nearer the end of the road. What an end it

will be! For the way leads to home and to heaven and to Him. “In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you...where I am.” Have you ever heard it said that “home’s where Mother is”? Well, heaven’s where Jesus is. What a lovely welcome home it will be to find Him there waiting for us at our death, or coming to fetch us at His advent. My dear reader, don’t miss that welcome on any account. If you are not already ‘in’ the Way, get in quick – lest you find it too late.

It is a mistake to look on death as a dread summons. Instead we should look on it as a door, or gate through which we enter into the beautiful Home that has been prepared for us by our loving Savior, who does not leave us to go through the portal alone, but who comes Himself for us.

A bereaved widow said that she was away when her husband had a heart attack. She just got home an hour before he died. He was only able to say, “I am called Home.” Only able to utter four words, but those four words left unspeakable comfort with his wife and children. Death to the Christian is simply going home to be forever with the One who died for him.

Jim Conway in his book Men in Mid-Life Crisis points out that, “Kubler-Ross outlines five emotional stages through which a person goes as he prepares for death:

1. Denial – it’s not me – it’s not true!”
2. Anger – “Why me?”
3. Bargaining – “Can’t we postpone this?”
4. Depression – “All is lost.”
5. Acceptance – “I’m ready.”

With only minor modification, these stages can be adapted to the man going through mid-life. They may be very short periods of time or extend over years. Some may overlap and some run concurrently. From my observation, for a man to make it through the mid-life crisis successfully, he needs to move progressively through these stages and effectively deal with each one.”

An infant is born with a clenched fist but an old man dies with an open hand. Life has a way of prying loose our grasp on all that seems so important.

We come now to our final study in the Mid-Life crisis. In study #1 we heard Salomon say, “Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.” This is asking the question, “Is that all there is?” And we have the foundation for the mid-life crisis. The reason Solomon is in this condition is because he can see: no gain from his labor. He can see nothing new under the sun and nobody’s going to remember him after he dies anyway.

In study #2 we have seen him being caught up in the success syndrome. He tries first pleasure and then pours himself into projects, only to find frustration here, in that pleasure was meaningless and the projects acquired wealth that he was going to have to leave to someone else who would not appreciate it.

In quiet desperation and frustration every time he turns around to produce a solution to his problem, he finds himself bumping into the sovereign purpose of God – “Whatever will be, will be.”

In study #4 we have seen Solomon caught up in the corporate squeeze. We have seen him speak of the oppression and the power of the oppressors and the tears of the oppressed.

Next, we find because of selfishness in the mid-life crisis, it is easy to be snared by materialism, “The More and More Money Madness.” Solomon speaks of this when he says, “Whoever loves money, never has money enough.”

In study #6 we dealt with the problem of depression and how to think through trauma in our lives.

In study #7 Solomon speaks of a common destiny for us all, that we need to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. It is living for the present only.

In our last episode we now see one of the real critical areas that produces a mid-life crisis, and that is, the graying of the hair and the growing older.

Aging is when everything hurts, and what doesn't hurt doesn't work. The gleam in your eyes is from the sun hitting your bifocals. You feel like the night after and you haven't been anywhere. Your little black book contains only names ending in M.D. You get winded playing chess. Your children begin to look middle-age. You finally reach the top of the ladder and find it leaning against the wrong wall. You join a health club and don't go. You begin to outlive enthusiasm. You decide to procrastinate but never get around to it. You're still chasing women but can't remember why. Your mind makes contracts your body can't meet. A dripping faucet causes an uncontrollable bladder urge. You know all the answers but nobody asks the questions. You look forward to dull evenings. You walk with your head high, trying to get used to your bifocals. Your favorite part of the newspaper is '25 years ago today.' You turn out the light for economic rather than romantic reasons. You sit in a rocking chair and can't get it going. Your knees buckle and your belt won't. You regret all those mistakes resisting temptation. You're 17 around the neck, 42 around the waist and 96 around the golf course. You stop looking forward to your next birthday. After painting the town red, you have to take a long rest before a second coat. Dialing long distance wears you out. You're startled the first time you are addressed as “an old-timer.” You just can't stand people who are

intolerant. The best part of your day is over when your alarm clock goes off. You burn the midnight oil until 9:30 p.m. Your back goes out more often than you do. A fortune teller offers to read your face. Your pacemaker makes the garage door go up when you watch a pretty girl go by. The little gray-haired lady you help across the street is your wife. You get your exercise acting as a pall bearer to your friends who exercised. You have too much room in the house and not enough room in the medicine cabinet. You sink your teeth into a steak and they stay there.

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

Veldey says, "Sow seeds of good deeds and leave the results to God. As one throws seeds on the water of irrigated land, so we should do acts of kindness, even where a return is least to be expected. A blessing will return, though it may take a long time. We should not be stingy or too prudent in doing favors for others, for the day may come when we ourselves shall need kindness and help."

Foster points out, "Have patience. That which is apparently lost is deposited. And in God's own good time it will produce a most luxuriant harvest after many days. Paul cast his bread upon the waters of many oceans, seas, continents and capital cities. Two thousand years later he continues to reap. 'Let us not cave in, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not' (Galatians 6:9). Happy, fortunate, and to be envied are you who cast your bread upon the waters. When the river overflows its banks, for the seed will sink into the mud; and when the waters subside, will spring up. You will find it after many days in an abundant harvest" (Isaiah 32:20).

Leupold says, "Let the bread of charity go out as ships do that venture to take their precious cargo over the face of the waters. That is the equivalent of saying, 'Do your charity upon a venture. There will indeed be a reward.' Let the reward encourage you but remember that as vessels must oftentimes be waited for long before the profit of the venture is received. So, you may be obliged to wait a good while before the reward of your investment comes back to you, but come back it will. The emphasis lies upon the certainty of reward as well as upon the fact that this certain reward will not be received at once. Patient waiting is the right course to follow in this matter."

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.

J. Vernon McGee points out, "When you are doing good, be sure to help more than one person. Help quite a few people because you may get in trouble yourself at

some later time and there will be many people who will be willing to help you. The Lord Jesus told a parable along this line and it is recorded in Luke 16: There was an unjust steward who was really a crook. He made friends for himself by reducing their debts to his master so that when he lost his job, he could go to them for help.”

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.

McGee points out, “If rain is predicted, you had better carry an umbrella. After a big redwood tree falls, it is hard to move it. What is he saying here? It is best to have a clear understanding of a situation at the very beginning before you launch a venture. Because after it begins it is very difficult to make any change.”

Luke 14:25 – 33 “Now great multitudes were going along with him: and he turned, and said to them, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel, whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So, therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”

Jesus in this parable is telling us to consider the cost before we make a commitment.

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

II Corinthians 9:7 “Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Leupold points out, “Reasonable caution with reference to undertakings on a major scale is naturally dictated by common sense. These men are going to be only cautious and undertake nothing. They will be like unto the farmer that is about to sow but observes a strong wind that might blow away some of his seed and so puts off the sowing until the time when the wind is entirely suitable. Such a one may never get his sowing done. He is also like unto one who because there is no promise of any absolutely clear day or days for harvesting, watches the clouds until they seem to promise a succession of such days as he desires. Such a one may never

harvest if he wants the surest guarantees of a successful outcome. So, in all works of our calling of charity, of the church the prospect is not entirely favorable. The waiting for perfect conditions will result in failure to get the necessary tasks done – a very suitable suggestion from every point of view.”

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.

John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

The key phrase here is the phrase, “so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.”

Philippians 4:19 “And my God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 3:20 “Now to him who is able to do exceeding abundantly, beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.”

How God does it we do not know. We cannot understand the work of God. We do know that he is called the Maker of all things, which could well give us a clue.

Colossians 1:16 “For in him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or rulers, or authorities: all things have been created through him, and for him.”

John 1:3 “All things came into being through him and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

We cannot understand how he could take five loaves and a couple of fish and feed five thousand people. But the sovereign of the universe has no limitations. There is nothing too difficult for him.

A.T. Pierson in his book Godly Self-Control says, “If there be any pleasure that is greater than unselfish giving, it has never yet been discovered. No form of indulgence which ends upon self can compare with the gratification which is found in ministering to the wants and woes of others. John Howard never missed a chance to make others happier, and his yearning for this kind of pleasure promoted what Burke called his ‘circum-navigation of charity.’ The Arab proverb reads: ‘The water you pour on the roots of the coconut tree comes back to you sweetened in milk of the nut, which drops from the branches.’”

A missionary, after studying the lives of the original disciples prior to their being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost says, “They had given up a good deal to follow Jesus; fishing nets, boats, parents, homes, occupation, everything except themselves. They had never really surrendered the citadel, the center. They gave the marginal things but not the center.”

Ralph Cushman has a poem called “I Have a Stewardship”:

*Ah, when I look up at the cross
Where God's great steward suffered loss.
Yea, loss of life and blood for me,
A trifling thing it seems to be
To pay the tithe dear Lord to thee.
Of time or talent, wealth or store,
Full well I know I owe thee more.
A million times I owe thee more.
But that is just the reason why
I lift my heart to God on high
And pledge thee by this portion small
My life, my love, my all in all.
This holy token at thy cross
I know as gold must seem but dross.
But in my heart, Lord, thou dost see
How it has pledged my all to thee,
That I a steward true may be.*

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.

Leupold points out, “Let both be done. If may come to pass under the providence of God that both shall be alike good. With such prospects and the certainty that God watches over all worthwhile enterprises and brings to pass what deserves to succeed, the vain and the curse of hopelessness are lifted.”

You never really know which project the Lord is going to put his hand of blessing upon, so Solomon suggests that you give time to a couple and then the Lord will bless either one or the other, or both equally well.

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

Leupold points out, “The author is really drawing a conclusion from his proceeding contentions in this chapter. If a man has definite purposes in life, here sowing, life at once becomes a thing worth living for – sweet and pleasant. All who have

followed his substantial exhortation must agree with him. Not only with the idea of living as such does the Preacher concern himself but with the prospect of living to a ripe old age. That too in the face of the evil of the day and because the light is sweet should be regarded as a good gift of God and in it a man should rejoice.

I John 1:5 – 7 “And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

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.

Hubbard points out, “At the beginning of his book, Solomon had called attention to the wearisome futility with which the sun made its daily round. Here his outlook is different. Reminded of life’s fragility, he encouraged his friends to celebrate every hour of daylight. There is an urgency to this celebration, noted the wise Solomon, because death is coming and lasts so long. Death will pull the blinds and black out the lights of life.”

The aches and pains of old age are inevitable. It is a dreary empty time of life. “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.

J. Sidlow Baxter in his series called Explore the Book says of this verse, “In the above quotation, the words ‘but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment’ have been gravely misunderstood. They have been taken in an ironic sense, as though the Preacher, immediately after encouraging the young man to get the best out of life, mocks him with the threat of retribution for so living. That is not the true sense of the words at all. We get the sense more truly by changing the ‘but’ into ‘and’: ‘and know thou that for all these things.’ The fact of a righteous judgment hereafter is mentioned not as a scare but as a comfort because it is then and there that the ironies and the enigmas which make this present life vanity even to the restitution and compensation. It is an anticipation of Paul’s words in Romans 8:20 that although the creation has been made subject to vanity, it has been thus subjected in hope. Admittedly, the thought of that final judgment is meant also to be a deterrent to folly and sin. The main thought here is that of hope

in it. And that is why the Preacher, having mentioned it, immediately adds, “Therefore, remove sorrow from your heart and put away evil from your flesh.”

McGee points out, “Remember, young man, now is the time to make your decisions in every category of life. It is very important that you make the right choices now. How many men have lived wasted lives and are living them today because they made the wrong choices in their youth. Your youthful days are empty if they are not lived right. Life is a gift that is given to us by God, given one day at a time. In fact, one second at a time. It is a precious gift and it is to be used for the glory of God. What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Hubbard points, “Like a bubble the days of our youth soon burst so we have to clutch them while we can. Obviously, the wise man was not counseling a rebellious or wild style of life when he told his students to walk in the ways of your heart. Lawlessness, wickedness, lewdness were as much out-of-bounds for him as for any of Israel’s wise men. Take your fill of life. Do your best at what you do. Live each day to the hilt in work, in love and in the enjoyment of God’s good gifts. All of these are displays of God’s grace. He will judge us as to whether we have made the most of them.

II Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.”

J. I. Packer in his book Knowing God says, “The doctrine of final judgment stresses man’s accountability and the certainty that justice will finally triumph over all the wrongs which are part and parcel of life here and now. The former gives a dignity to the humblest action. The latter brings calmness and assurance to those in the thick of the battle. This doctrine gives meaning to life. The Christian view of judgment means that history moves to a goal. Judgment protects the idea of the triumph of God and of good. It is unthinkable that the present conflict between good and evil should last throughout eternity. Judgment means that evil will be disposed of authoritatively, decisively, finally. Judgment means that in the end, God’s will, will be perfectly done.”

The certainty of divine judgment is seen on page after page of the Bible. God judged Adam and Eve, expelling them from the garden and pronouncing curses on their future earthly life. God judged the corrupt world of Noah’s day, sending a flood to destroy mankind. God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, engulfing them in a volcanic catastrophe. God judged Israel’s Egyptian taskmasters, just as he foretold he would, unleashing against them the terrors of the ten plagues. God judged those who worshiped the golden calf, using the Levites as his executioners. God judged Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire in the book of Leviticus. He judged

Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who were swallowed up in an earth tremor. God judged Achin for sacrilegious thieving. He and his were wiped out. God judged Israel for unfaithfulness to him after their entry into Canaan. God threatened his people with deportation as the ultimate penalty for impiety and eventually, after repeated warnings from the prophets, he judged them by fulfilling this threat. The northern kingdom Israel fell victim to the Assyrian captivity and the southern kingdom Judah to the Babylonian captivity. In Babylon God judged both Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. In the New Testament judgment falls on the Jews for rejecting Christ; on Ananias and Sapphira for lying to God; on Herod for his pride; and on Christians in Corinth who were afflicted with illness by reason of their gross irreverence in connection particularly with the Lord's supper. The book of Revelation is filled with references to future divine judgments that are yet 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.

The verse starts with the words "so then". In light of what he has had to say: banish anxiety from your heart.

I Timothy 6:6 "But godliness with contentment is great gain."

Philippians 4:6, 7 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I Peter 5:7 "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."

Matthew 11:28 – 30 "Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my load is light."

Don't worry about the fact that you are getting older and that the time of your death is nearer than the day of your birth, and cast off the troubles of your body which are aging and the aches and pains that are making themselves known to you. He then gives the reason for the two previous commands, "for youth and vigor are meaningless."

Just because a man is young and he has strength does not mean that he has happiness and the answers to life.

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” –

Richard de Haan in his book The Art of Staying Off Dead-end Streets says, “The call to place God and his will uppermost in your thinking during childhood stands in sharp contrast to the philosophy of many. All too often people say they will sow their wild oats in their youth and then turn over the rest of their lives to their lives to the Lord. They have the idea that in this way they can enjoy the best of this life and still enter heaven. This attitude is wrong, first of all, because it is an insult to the Lord. He deserves and asks nothing less than our best. A woman named Mrs. Mack once taught an attractive young lady this lesson in a unique manner. She sent the girl a box of roses so wilted that their petals were falling off. The girl was surprised to receive the gift and bewildered when she saw the condition of the flowers, but she passed it off with the thought that perhaps their delivery had been delayed because of an oversight. Later that day she met Mrs. Mack on the street and thanked her for the roses. The older woman smiled and 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 went into the drug store. As you walked by, I heard you telling someone that you were going to become a Christian later, not while you are 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, charm and vigor have faded and you have become old and wrinkled. I thought these roses would illustrate what you are doing to the Lord by waiting.’ The girl learned the lesson of the wilted flowers and soon accepted Christ and began to serve him with zeal.

J. Sidlow Baxter in his series Explore the Book has the following poem:

*Thus generations come and go,
From youth to age they wiser grow;
Yet as they pass they all relate
They learn their lessons just too late.
Our junior wisecracks dodge the truth
That dense old parents once were youth,
That present youth must older grow,
Oft haunted by, “I told you so”,
And all their youthful bombast rue
When they as parents suffer too!*

*When they as parents suffer too,
As with strange certainty they do,
They marvel at the self-sure ways*

*The next relay of youth displays.
 They hear the same old arguments
 Arrayed in fresh accoutrements –
 The times are different, so are we,
 Just let us have our way, and see.
 For artful nature oft repays
 Her rebels in ironic ways.*

*Thus generations, as they go,
 Perpetuate the tale of woe.
 They will not learn from yesterday,
 But choose to learn the harder way –
 Experience shall be teacher, please;
 And well he teaches – but what fees!
 What fees he charges those he schools
 Before he makes wise men of fools!
 How oft his scholars have confessed,
 “Ah yes, poor Dad and Mom knew best!”*

*Each generation soon is past,
 So sure at first, so sad at last.
 As ranks of youth successive rise,
 Each thinks, “We are supremely wise”.
 They each a lot more knowledge know,
 And yet a bit less wisdom show.
 O sanguine youth, God’s word revere –
 Honor your parents while they’re here;
 And you will find in later days
 What handsome dividends it pays!”*

Robert Foster in his Challenge to Men from Ecclesiastes cites William Cowper’s poem, “*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*”:

*God moves in a mysterious way,
 His wonders to perform.
 He plants his footsteps in the sea
 And rides upon the storm.
 Deep in unfathomable minds
 Of never-failing skill
 He treasures up his bright design
 And works his sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take
 The clouds you so much dread*

*Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust him for his grace.
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain.
God is his own interpreter
And he will make it plain.*

v. 2 Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain.

In verses 2 – 5 there are 15 characteristics of old age described under the symbolism of nature. They are the characteristics of the years that approach when you'll say, "I find no pleasure in them."

Leupold points out, "This section shows the manner of things men have to suffer after youth is past. The thought is apparently that because of his multifarious infirmities man will then be so burdened as to have many difficulties remembering his Creator. He will have too much to do with his own weaknesses."

1. "Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark"
Old age is the time when the lights grow dim, both physically and emotionally. The days are dreary and the nights are long. Gloom and depression begin to settle in.

He does not mean that the sun, the moon, the stars and the lights are all going out. He means that we don't see them as we used to. J. Vernon McGee tells about an experience in Hawaii with Mrs. McGee: "We took a walk when we were in the Hawaiian Islands under a full moon, and it was beautiful. I said to her, 'My isn't that a beautiful moon! But you know, it doesn't seem as romantic as it once did. How do you feel?' She replied, 'No, I don't think it is as romantic as it once was.' I used to think Hawaii was the most romantic place in the world. Well, my friend, when you get old, the luster dims."

Hubbard points out, "Most of the year in the Bible lands the sun could be counted on every day. But in winter after the autumn rains, cloudy, colder days would

come. These were the days when nature was dormant, the days between the rich fall harvest of fruit and grapes and the appearance of the almond blossoms as the messengers of spring. Leafless trees, songless birds, fruitless vines, clouded skies – these were the signs of winter. They were also symbols of the barren life of old age, when pains were many and pleasures were few.”

2. “and the clouds return after the rain”

McGee points out, “Time flies and one sad experience follows another. The clouds return after the rain. When you get old, you can go out and have a great day, but believe me, you must take three or four days to rest up afterward. I have learned that.”

Even in earlier years there was a certain amount of rain, that is, of trouble and discouragement but then the sun would emerge and the spirit would quickly bounce back. Now it seems that the sunny days are gone and after each spell of rain the clouds appear with the promise of more.

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.

3. “when the keepers of the house tremble”

Hubbard points out, “His next and fullest picture compared old age to the collapse of a mighty household. Its details are so many and so vivid that they have to be studied one by one. Hard times are ahead, he has warned, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent. In the day when our arms and legs are too shaky and weak to do their full work. Other members of the body will also find their powers fading.”

These keeps of the house, the arms and the legs, that once were strong and active, now are wrinkled and gnarled and have a tendency to tremble just a little bit.

4. “and the strong men stoop”

The shoulders are no longer erect. When we are young and strong, we have broad shoulders and then we begin to stoop over. The shoulders begin to round off and they don’t stay back like they once did.

5. “when the grinders cease because they are few”

The teeth are no longer able to chew because there are too few uppers to meet the remaining lowers.

6. “and those looking through the windows grow dim.”

The eyes begin to fail steadily. First, the bifocals; then the trifocals; and then surgery for cataracts. And now, they can only read extra large type with the use of a magnifying glass.

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”

In this symbolism the writer is speaking about the hearing beginning to fail. “You’ll just have to speak a little louder ‘cause I’m not able to hear you” is often heard among older folks.

8. “and the sound of grinding fades”

Even the sounds around like conversation and outdoor noises are beginning to fade.

MacDonald points out, “The doors on the street are shut’ refers, of course, to the ears. Everything has to be repeated over and over. Loud noises like the grinding of the mill are very low and indistinct.”

9. “when men rise up at the sound of birds”

McGee points out, “I can remember when I was a boy that even a loud alarm clock wouldn’t wake me up in the morning. When my wife and I were young, we didn’t mind the noise of children. We didn’t mind the noise of music coming from the neighbors. We could sleep in motels and hotels and none of the noises bothered us. Now, even the little chirp of a bird disturbs us. Now when we travel and we come to a motel or hotel, I always ask, ‘Can you give us a quiet room?’ We are getting old and we rise up at the voice of a bird. Any little noise disturbs our sleep.”

MacDonald points out, “The old man suffers from insomnia. He is up bright and early when the birds first begin to chirp or the rooster crows.”

10. “but all their songs grow faint”

Now our voices begin to change and start to crack and it’s hard to hold a firm, steady tone so that we can sing like we used to.

Even people who once had beautiful singing voices lose the quality of their voices as they grow older. The vocal cords become seriously impaired, and as the voice is crackling and unsteady, singing a song is almost out of the question.

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"

As you get older, you have a fear of ladders and tall buildings and riding in airplanes, and any other set of circumstances that would put you in a high place.

12. "and of dangers in the streets"

It's tougher to get out and drive anymore because of the fear of being in an accident. And the loss of self-confidence about one's own ability to handle emergency situations.

13. "when the almond tree blossoms"

A blossoming almond tree is white and the senior citizen is going to turn white on the top or else there won't be anything left on the top. It's going to be one way or the other.

MacDonald says, "The blossoming almond tree is generally taken to picture the white hair, first in rich profusion and then falling to the ground."

14. "and the grasshopper drags himself along"

MacDonald points out, "The grasshopper may be interpreted in two ways: First, the grasshopper shall be a burden. That is, even the lightest objects are too heavy for the old person to carry; or, the grasshopper dragging itself along pictures the old man bent over and twisted, inching forward in jerky, erratic movements, hobbling on a cane."

McGee points out, "When old age comes, little things that never used to bother now become a burden. We love our grandchildren dearly and enjoy having them with us but after a while we are glad to see them go home again. Strength fails. Endurance fails. Patience fails. Many little things become a burden."

15. "and desire no longer is stirred"

Hubbard points out, “Perhaps the most poignant phrase in the catalog of woes is this, ‘and desire fails.’ To Solomon who prized life’s simple enjoyments: work, food, drink, love – the failing of desire meant the loss of what he deemed good. Therefore, he urged his young students to ‘remember also your Creator, who has given us good things to enjoy and the youthful power to enjoy them.’”

“Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.”

Paul says in Philippians 1:21 “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Verse 23: But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, for that is very much better.”

II 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.”

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,

McGee points out, “Here is a list of the organs of the body; at the end they no longer function. The silver cord is the spinal cord. The golden bowl is the head, the bowl for the brain. The functioning of the brain decreases in its efficiency as one gets older. And at death it ceases to function to all. The pitcher is the lungs. The pitcher is broken at the fountain. The wheel is the heart. The wheel is broken at the cistern. It is no longer pumping blood through the body. All of this is a picture of the deterioration of old age leading to death. Life cannot be sustained without the functioning of these organs.”

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

McGee points out, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit return to God who gave it. There is no soul sleep. I wish the people who try to use verses from this book of Ecclesiastes to support their idea of soul sleep would just read on until they get to this verse. The body sleeps but the spirit of the soul returns unto God who gave it. Let me repeat that the New Testament assures us that to be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord. The soul immediately returns to God. This body is just a tabernacle or a tent that we live in. It is just the outer covering. The soul goes to be with God. When President Adams became an old, someone asked him how he was getting along. His reply was something like this: ‘Oh, I’m doing fine but this house I live in is growing very feeble and I think I’ll be moving out of it before long.’ That was true. He did move out of his old house shortly after that.”

Hubbard points out, “In other words, Ecclesiastes saw death as a reversal of creation, that there was no joy to this picture. The return of the human spirit to God he did not see as a triumphal entry to the courts of heaven. The whole process of aging and the fearful imminence of death were the last stages of a life scarred by futility. And the Preacher ended his words as he had begun them twelve chapters earlier.”

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

This takes us back to chapter 1:2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

Life is empty if you are just living it for here and now. One day we will find that all we have in our hand is a fist full of ashes and we will have eternity ahead of us.

When as a child, I laughed and wept; 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 gone.
 (author unknown)

Thinking of old age, someone has written this little bit of poetry:

Thou knowest Lord I am growing older,
 My fire of youth begins to smoulder.
 I somehow tend to reminisce
 And speak of good old days I miss.

I am more moody, bossy
 And think folks should jump at my command.
 Help me Lord to conceal my aches
 And realize my own mistakes.

Keep me sweet, silent, sane, serene,
 Instead of crusty, sour and mean.
 May the Lord give us the grace to grow old gracefully.

MacDonald points out that, “And so Solomon comes full circle to where he began with the basic tenet that life under the sun is vanity, meaningless, futile, and empty. His pathetic refrain reminds us of the little girl who went to the fair and stayed too long:

‘I wanted the music to play on forever. Have I stayed too

long at the fair?
 I wanted the clown to be constantly clever. Have I stayed
 too long at the fair?
 I bought me blue ribbons to tie up my hair, but I couldn't
 find anybody to care.
 The merry-go-round is beginning to slow now. Have I stayed
 too long at the fair.
 I wanted to live in a carnival city with laughter and love
 Everywhere.
 I wanted my friends to be thrilling and witty. I wanted
 somebody to care.
 I found my blue ribbons all shiny and new, but now I've
 discovered them no longer blue.
 The merry-go-round is beginning to taunt me. Have I
 stayed too long at the fair?
 There's nothing to win and no one to want me. Have I
 stayed too long at the fair?"

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.

Here we come to the conclusion of the whole matter. And the writer is speaking of the fact that he has imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. Of course, we have this record in the book of Proverbs.

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

We can certainly say this about the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon has been in search of trying to have just the right words to describe the mid-life crisis that he is going through at this time.

v. 11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected savings 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.

MacDonald points out, "The teachings of wise men are like sharp-pointed instruments – plain, direct and convincing. In the collected sayings from the one Shepherd are like well-driven nails or pins that give stability to a tent. They provide strength and are also pegs on which we may hang our thoughts."

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.

Foster in his work on Ecclesiastes puts a poetic piece called “Trust in God”:

Courage brother, do not stumble
Though your path be dark as night
There's a star to guide the humble,
Trust in God and do the right.

Let the road be rough and dreary
And its end far out of sight
Foot it bravely, strong or weary
Trust in God and do the right.

Perish policy and cunning
Perish all that fears the light
Whether losing, whether winning
Trust in God and do the right.

Trust no party, sect or faction
Trust no leaders in the fight
But in every word and action
Trust in God and do the right.

Some will hate you, some will love you,
Some will flatter, some will slight,
Cease from man and look above you,
Trust in God and do the right.

William MacDonald says, “So my testimony is that all his ways are pleasantness and all his paths are peace. My song is: I bless the hand that guided. I bless the heart that planned. It were a well-spent journey, though seven deaths lay between. The question often comes to me, what could I want in life that I haven't had? And the answer is always the same, Nothing. My Lord has done all things well for me. But there is a pain in my heart for those around me who are still living empty, wasted lives. I feel like the stricken deer in William Cowper's poem, saddened by the realization that most of mankind find the total of their hopes and fears, dreams, empty dreams:

I was 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.
 There 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
 Dreams, empty dreams.”

CONCLUSIONS:

What are the lessons that we can gain 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.

LESSON #6: Fear God and keep his commandments.

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

We have followed Solomon through the mid-life crisis. We have seen the foundation of the mid-life crisis in study #1.

In study #2 we saw him follow the path of the success syndrome.

In study #3 we saw him in quiet frustration, bumping up against the eternal purpose of God.

In study #4 we saw him caught in the corporate squeeze.
In study #5 we saw him snared by materialism.
In study #6 we saw him trying to work his way out of depression.
In study #7 we saw him living for the present.
And in study #8 we saw him fighting the old age syndrome.

The solution of the mid-life crisis for the person who does not know Jesus Christ is to come to faith in the Lord Jesus, to receive him as Savior, to become a new creation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then begin to see the Lord bring meaning and purpose. For the believer in the mid-life crisis it is the willingness to submit to the way things are and to trust that God is ordering the circumstances and events of one's life to bring glory and honor to himself through the work that goes on in our lives, to develop Christian character, to make us more like the Lord Jesus. "And soon we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."