

Remember your Creator in the Days of your Youth!

For: Voice of the Church

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Youth is a wonderful time of life. It's the time of life when people experience energy, opportunities, hopes, and dreams. Youth is also an important time of life. It's the time of life when decisions are made. Young people decide on what education they will pursue, what career they will choose, who they will date and marry, and whether they will serve the LORD.

We are only young once. That has implications: we can use the time wisely, or we can waste it. If we don't use it wisely, we will miss out on the energy, opportunities, hopes, and dreams that youth offers. If we don't use it wisely, we can make bad decisions regarding education, career, marriage, and serving the LORD. Within that context, Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth..." (ESV).

The book of Ecclesiastes is known for its theme about the vanity of life apart from God. The book opens in Ecclesiastes 1:2 like this: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." What this earth offers is fleeting; it is like breath or vapour which disappears in a moment. The message of this book is that life only makes sense when we believe the gospel of the promised Saviour Jesus Christ.

Within the context of the gospel as proclaimed in Old Testament times, Ecclesiastes 11:7 says, "Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun." When we are alive, we see the sun. Ecclesiastes is saying: Life is good! It's good to be alive!

But what about all the misery in the world? There's poverty, disease, famine, war, and terrorism. The author of Ecclesiastes is no pessimist, despite the fact that he writes many things that sound pessimistic, and despite the fact that he speaks often about the "vanity" or "meaninglessness" of life (Eccl. 12:8). Life is only meaningless apart from God! Then there is reason for a pervasive feeling of despair.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ – God's promised Saviour from sin and death – breaks through that despair and gives hope, courage, and joy! The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:10 about "...the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Only the Christian knows what leads to a true zest for life, and that is that Christ came into the world to redeem life! The misery which we see all around us does not have the last word for the Christian.

This means that the Christian may rejoice in life! There is still so much to be enjoyed in life! Ecclesiastes 11:8 says, "So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all..." And Ecclesiastes 11:9 says, "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes." In other words: Enjoy life! Use the energy and opportunities of youth to enjoy life, and to pursue your hopes and dreams.

Not only does Ecclesiastes speak about the *joy* of life, however, Ecclesiastes also speaks about the *seriousness* of life. The seriousness of life is evident from the fact that the time of youth is fleeting:

after youth comes old age. And after old age comes death, and after death comes judgement. After speaking about a person rejoicing in life, Ecclesiastes 11:8 adds: "...but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity." The days of darkness refer to lying in the grave, where the light of the sun is not seen. And after speaking about doing enjoyable things in life when we are young, Ecclesiastes 11:9 adds: "But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." We are accountable to God for how we handle our youth.

Using memorable imagery, Ecclesiastes 12 describes the infirmities of old age. It all boils down to the following. The shine is off life in old age. After one infirmity there will be more infirmities, just as rain is followed by clouds. The arms begin to tremble, the legs are bent, the teeth fall out or are pulled, and the eyes can't see well anymore. The ears become deaf, sleep is harder to get as a person is up with the birds, and the voice loses its strength. Walking uphill becomes difficult, and even a flat surface presents the challenge of not stumbling. The hair turns grey, one drags oneself along while walking, and the various appetites are lost. In short, the elderly are headed toward the grave.

At death, life comes crashing down. Ecclesiastes says that it's like a lantern hanging on a silver cord; when the cord snaps, the lantern falls down and breaks. It's like a pitcher attached to the rope and pulley of a well; when the pulley breaks, the pitcher plunges to the bottom of the well and is shattered. Such is death: life comes crashing down.

When we die, we go to our eternal destination. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says that "...the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." The body returns to dust, as God said after the Fall into sin (Gen. 3:19). The soul returns to God and is committed by God to eternal condemnation or eternal salvation; it will be either hell or heaven. As we read in Hebrews 9:27, "...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...."

Three times in that lengthy description of aging and death, Ecclesiastes uses the word "before" to emphasize remembering our Creator in the days of our youth (Eccl. 12:1,2,6). The message is loud and clear: Remember your Creator *before* all those things happen! Take life seriously! The fleeting character of youth, coming old age, death, and judgement are all reasons to consider the seriousness of life. The Bible says that those who are young may enjoy their youth and have joy in life, but it should not be superficial enjoyment and joy; it's supposed to be the kind of enjoyment and joy which knows the seriousness of life. People are only young once, and this means that people must use that time of life well spiritually too! Ecclesiastes says, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth" (Eccl. 12:1)!

"Remembering" God our Creator is more than just thinking of him. It is about acknowledging God and responding to God in faith by embracing the gospel promises of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is about living for God. As it says in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Major decisions are made when we are young, and often those decisions are determinative for the course of our lives. If we waste time at school – not using our opportunities – our future career opportunities become limited. The same holds true largely for our spiritual life. Living superficially apart from God when we are young often means that we will live superficially apart from God when we are older. The pattern of life is often set when we are young. That's why Ecclesiastes issues the appeal, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth!"

When we acknowledge God and look to him in faith, we don't have to despair at the fact that youth is fleeting and that youth is followed by aging and death. Neither do we have to despair because of all the misery in the world. That's because Christians worship the Creator who has provided his only-begotten Son as Saviour from sin and death!
