



Before The Final Awakening

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

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Let me take you back in time to a 24-month period of time in American history, where the threads were unraveling at an alarming rate.

In 1968-69, the American culture was experiencing revolutionary changes. The sexual revolution was well underway; drugs were being promoted culture-wide; protests on university campuses would climax in the shooting deaths of 4 students by the National Guard. America was divided over the war in Vietnam. Martin Luther King was fatally shot and 60 days later, Senator Bobby Kennedy was shot and killed; riots were breaking out in Memphis, Baltimore and Chicago.

But then, one month later, everything just sort of stood still and the American people paused to watch their television screens as the Apollo 11 rocket landed on the moon.

More than 650 million people worldwide watched it on television. Walter Cronkite was the popular newscaster who hosted the viewers and he glowingly said that

mankind had advanced, in just the last 69 years, from traveling in a horse and buggy to traveling in space.

Millions of people watched and heard that amazing sentence delivered by Commander Neil Armstrong as he stepped onto the surface of the moon and said, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

This moment was called the greatest American triumph.

What the world at that time — and at any time, frankly — needed to hear was a word of truth from God.

And it would have, had it not been censored and disallowed.

What 650 million people didn't hear was what another astronaut said. The microphone was cut off as Buzz Aldrin stepped forward and read the words of Jesus Christ, from the Gospel of John: "I am the vine, you are the branches . . . without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

He then opened two small packages containing communion elements which he'd brought from his home church in Texas. He later recounted in reports that have been widely ignored, he poured the juice into a little cup and in the one-sixth gravity of the moon it curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. And as Neil Armstrong looked on in silence, Aldrin took communion. The first foods ever prepared and consumed on the moon were reminders of the death and sacrifice of our Creator, God the Son.

It was originally going to be heard, by the way. Aldrin was going to read the communion passages as well, but at the last minute, NASA decided to keep it off the air, in deference to a woman by the name of Madilyn Murray O'Hare, who was suing anyone and everyone for any kind of public reading of God's word.

And so out of fear of litigation, NASA and the networks withheld from 650 million people what they really needed to hear: not that this was some great triumph of human ingenuity (and it was amazing), but that apart from God, we will never accomplish anything of lasting value.

There has never been a time in human history when the world was without division and corruption and unrest and wickedness and sin.



Do you see some of those same symptoms of sin Stephen is describing in the late 1960s in today's culture? Which ones particularly stand out?

And there will never be a time when our world will voluntarily and publicly honor and remember their Creator, until the Lord reigns upon the earth in His glorious kingdom.

In the meantime, the verdict is in — Solomon has said it over and over again: life down here under the sun, without allegiance to our Creator God, will become empty and futile and, in the end, disastrous.

As Solomon nears the end of his private journal, let's turn now to his final comments; they make up a three-fold warning for the sake of our exposition.

Ecclesiastes chapter 11 — and the first warning is especially for young people — here it is:

Remember your Creator so that you don't become misguided in your youth

I'm reading in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 1:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw

*near of which you will say,
“I have no pleasure in
them.”*

Ecclesiastes 12:1

The older you get, the more difficult life becomes, with added responsibilities and challenges and pressures.

One author must have been writing his commentary around Christmas time and he saw one-to-many Santa Clauses, because he wrote, tongue in cheek, that life comes in four stages: in the first stage, you believe in Santa Claus. In stage two, you realize the commercial scam and you no longer believe in Santa Claus; in stage three, you become Santa Claus — you’re paying for all the gifts — and in stage four, you look like Santa Claus.

Don Givens, *Storms of Life: Ecclesiastes Explained* (Xulon Press, 2008), p. 143

And a young person says, “Don’t talk to me about getting old; I will never become some old geezer like you.”

Well, thanks a lot!

But listen, Solomon isn’t emphasizing that here anyway. In fact, he’s not stressing to the youth, “Remember the fact that you will get old!” Did you notice he writes: remember your *Creator* in the days of your youth?

Not, remember you will get old one day, but remember your Creator.

It will never be easy for you to remember your Creator in a world that suppresses the truth of Him; the knowledge of Him;

refusing to give Him honor and thanks for His magnificent creation (Romans 1:21).

Think about the fact that the Apostle Paul said the truth of the Creator was being suppressed and God was not being honored in the public square 1,900 years ago.

The strategy of the enemy is to pummel our youth especially with the propaganda of evolution — you have no Creator; the universe is the result of random chance; you’re just a more highly skilled animal and your life is the result of gene mutations, so your life is all up to whatever you can make of it.



Do you think Satan tries to propagandize our youth today? How would he do that? What are the common tools of the enemy to convince young people to abandon God?

The last thing Satan and the world system ever wants you or anyone to hear are the words of God the Son who said, “Without me you can do nothing.”

Solomon essentially writes here, “young people, you were planned by God. You’re not an accident; you are designer made — created and crafted with every ability and every disability — uniquely able to bring glory to God as you trust Him with your life.”

Youth is not the time to avoid God, it is the time to give your life to God.

In fact, the Hebrew word here for **remember** is more than simply recalling something or bringing something to your mind; it carries the idea of a commitment or a decision that results in action.

John D. Currid, [Ecclesiastes](#) (EP Books, 2016), p. 147

Remembering God produces resolutions to live for God.

Remembering God means walking with God, obeying God's word, applying God's wisdom and relating everything to God's will.

One author wrote that according to denominational and mission statistics, 95% of all believers come to faith in Christ before the age of 50; most of them before they leave their childhood years behind.

Adapted from Ray C. Steadman, [Is That All There Is To Life?](#) (Discovery House, 1999), p. 162

Youth then is the time to believe in your Creator God and follow Him.

Remember your Creator so that you don't become misguided in your youth.

Here's the second warning:

Remember your Creator so that you don't become miserable in your old age.

Keep in mind that Solomon has also told everyone to rejoice in their days — not just young people.

Back in chapter 11 and verse 8 he wrote, "So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all."

But Solomon is also a realist. He realizes now as an old man himself that with age comes a boat load of additional challenges.

And over the course of the next several verses, he poetically describes the problems and ailments of growing old.

Authors and scholars disagree on some of the finer points, and I'm especially grateful to William Barrick on literally creating a spreadsheet in his commentary that catalogued all the different viewpoints of each physical ailment mentioned in these verses.

Let's go through them fairly quickly – ***beginning with verse 2:***

*Before the sun and the light
and the moon and the stars
are darkened and the
clouds return after the rain.*

Ecclesiastes 12:2

In this context, this seems to indicate the sad countenance that can overcome an old person who now struggles with the loss of clarity as everything grows dark.

One author wrote, "About the time your complexion finally cleared up, your memory begins to go."

Steadman, p. 158

Most commentators believe this is a reference to the loss of memory. Clarity and recall are dimming with age.

Maybe you think you're there right now, but you can't remember if you are or not.

I read recently about some 35-year-old college friends who met together having decided to reunite every 15 years or so to stay in touch. They all lived in the same town and for their first reunion, they decided to eat at the Glowing Embers Restaurant because it was conveniently located. They all agreed.

Fifteen years later, at the age of 50, they met and discussed where to go eat. They decided to go to the Glowing Embers Restaurant because they liked the menu. They all agreed.

15 years later at 65 years of age, they met and discussed where to go eat. They decided on the Glowing Embers Restaurant because it was quiet and smoke free. They all agreed.

15 years later, at the ages of 80, they met and discussed where to go eat and they decided to eat at the Glowing Embers Restaurant because they had never eaten there before. They all agreed.

P.J. Alindogan, "Communicate and Relate," The Potter's Jar blog, (3-25-1999)

That's really not funny.

Solomon writes that old age can be metaphorically, poetically described in **verse 3**:

*In the day when the keepers
of the house tremble, and
the strong men are bent.*

Ecclesiastes 12:3a

His is a reference to the hands that are now trembling — the hands and arms that we might use to defend ourselves — they begin to bend and shake.

Steadman, p. 158

Solomon refers to the legs of marble that are sturdy and strong among the young, but now they're weak and they tremble under the strain.

Solomon writes further in verse 3:

*And the grinders cease
because they are few, and
those who look through the
widows are dimmed.*

Ecclesiastes 12:3b

The grinders are your teeth, of course. Dental care is marvelous, but your original teeth are few and far between.

Adapted from David Jeremiah, [Searching for Heaven on Earth](#) (Integrity Publishing, 2004), p. 297

You have come a long way from the days of your childhood when you celebrated the loss of a tooth! You used to get paid money under your pillow when you lost a tooth. Now you are just paying dearly.

Solomon writes here about looking through dimmed windows. A reference to blurry vision — and can you imagine living in Solomon's day without the benefit of glasses?

Solomon describes more in verse 4:

*And the doors on the street
are shut—when the sound
of the grinding is low.*

Ecclesiastes 12:4a

This is more than likely a reference to hearing problems — the ears are shutting as if they were the gates to a city, or the doors of someone's house.

The sounds of the outside mill or the sounds in the streets are now low and not clearly heard.

Here's another description of old age — verse 4, the latter part:

And one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low.

Ecclesiastes 12:4b

When one rises at the slightest sound in the house — a bird singing, or a thump in the attic. Sleeping through the entire night is now a rare experience.

Solomon refers to the daughters of song being brought low.

The vocal cords that used to allow you to sing now quiver and shake. You don't sing as loudly — or you probably shouldn't sing as loudly as you used to.

Now in verse 5:

They are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way.

Ecclesiastes 12:5a

Aging increases fears because the potential of physical harm is so much greater. Bones are brittle; age heals so much slower, and the fear of breaking

something is now much more important to guard against.

So, you carefully walk up or down the stairs; you watch out for curbs and you never get on a ladder. Even driving at night now raises even more concern with having an accident.

Getting old takes a lot courage.

Solomon writes further in verse 5:

The almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails.

Ecclesiastes 12:5b

The almond tree blossoms white in the late winter; it begins with reddish blossoms and then turns white — this is a clear reference to that auburn hair turning gray in the winter of life.

Like a grasshopper who loses its youthful ability to hop about and drags itself along as though burdened down.

Barrick, p. 201

Mobility is an issue with the elderly — they walk as if burdened down; as we age we start to shuffle along until we get that walker with 10 gears and then we're dangerous.

Solomon refers here to **the loss of desire** — this is a reference to the caperberry, used in Solomon's day to increase sexual desire as well as physical appetites for food.

Jim Winter, [Opening Up Ecclesiastes](#) (DayOne Publishers, 2005), p. 149

He doesn't specify which one, so he's probably thinking about both.

Solomon has colorfully and realistically and at the same time, poetically described the winding down of the body.



As Solomon has described the physical effects of old age, are there any that particularly worry you? Which of these physical ailments worries you the most, or might bring you the most concern? Why?

And how life changes. So, remember your Creator all the way back there in the days of your youth; start building a foundation of truth and trust in Him, because He wants you to enjoy not only your youth, but all your years as you continue to build on that foundation of trust in His creative plan for your life.

But how interests and activities and desires change over time.

One author told the humorous story of a couple in Florida who met and decided to get married. He was 82 and she was 79. As they discussed their wedding plans, they passed a large, brand new pharmacy and he pulled in.

They went in and addressed the man behind the counter, "We're getting married. Do you sell heart medication?"

"Yes, of course."

"Who about medicine for circulation?"

"All kinds."

"Medicine for rheumatism?"

"Definitely"

"Medicine for arthritis and scoliosis?"

"Oh yes, whatever the doctor orders."

"What about vitamins, sleeping pills and Geritol?"

"Absolutley."

"And you've got a variety of wheelchairs and walkers?"

"We've got all speeds and sizes."

"Well that settles it, we want to use this store as our bridal registry."

Jeremiah, p. 298

By the way, old age is arriving with diverse problems, but it's also arriving with divine promises.

Like this one from Isaiah 46:4 to the nation Israel, but also applicable to every believer; God says to us:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnants of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and

*I will bear; I will carry and
will save.*

Isaiah 46:3-4

God's in control; make the most out of your youth and make the most out of your age.

And the way you do that is to remember your Creator. Don't forget your Creator, and God's word tells you, your Creator will not forget you.



What does this encouragement, about God being in control and him never forgetting you, mean to you today? What comfort and security can you place in these words?

Solomon now shifts to the final scenes of life — first by describing a funeral procession in the last part of **verse 5**:

Man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.

Ecclesiastes 12:5c

Mourners were professionally trained to lament at the funerals of those who were well off enough to have them hired.

The mourners are in the streets — death has finally arrived.

And now Solomon provides some descriptions of that final moment, emphasizing the suddenness of death.

Remember your Creator — that's the context; see **verse 6**:

Before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Ecclesiastes 12:6

Here is a golden bowl — a lamp — hanging from the ceiling from a silver chain. The chain suddenly breaks, and the light of life is broken. Solomon is describing an expensive lamp, perhaps to hint that death is no respecter of persons.

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ecclesiastes: Be Satisfied* (Victor Books, 1990), p. 132

The water pitcher is filled with water — water in the Old Testament is an image for life — but the machinery — the wheel — suddenly breaks; it stops working, an image of the heart stopping its pumping and suddenly, the pitcher of life is shattered. Death has arrived.

Ibid

And what happens at death? No more metaphors from Solomon, no more poetry. Just the raw facts now — **verse 7**:

And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Ecclesiastes 12:7

God told Adam and Eve that because of sin, there would be death. He said, “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19).

But that isn’t the end!

There is a separation of body and spirit — the material and the immaterial. Your physical body returns to dust, but your spirit lives on, and the Bible will tell us that it either immediately goes to Heaven (2 Corinthians 5) or to Hades (Luke 16) — that place of torment where the unbeliever will await their final judgment before God.

So Solomon essentially issues a third warning here:

- Remember your Creator so that you don’t become misguided in your youth
- Remember your Creator so that you don’t become miserable in your old age.

One more warning:

Remember your Creator so that you aren’t mistaken at your death.

Life is fleeting, it’s just a breath — the Bible says your life is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (James 4:14).

Solomon is saying the same thing — summarizing the brevity of our lives, no matter how long we’ve lived — verse 8:

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 12:8

Sound familiar? That’s how he began his journal — chapter 1 and verse 2 — Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity.

Vanity, you remember can mean fleeting, futility, brevity, frustration.



What is the significance of Solomon starting and ending his journal with these same words, about vanity? How do these words seem to bookend the entire passage?

And no matter how long you live, eventually you are confronted with the reality that your life is fleeting away!

Rabbi Harold Kushner tells of a man who came to him for counseling. He said, “Two weeks ago, for the first time in my life, I went to the funeral of a man my own age. I didn’t know him well, we worked together, talked to each other from time to time, had kids about the same age. He died over the weekend . . . it could just as easily have been me. That was two weeks ago. They’ve already replaced him at the office. I hear that his wife is moving out of state. Two weeks ago he was working fifty feet away from me, and now it’s as if he never existed. It’s like a rock falling into a pool of water, and then the water is the same as it was before, but the rock is gone. Rabbi, I’ve hardly slept at all since

then. I can't stop thinking that it could happen to me."

Adapted from Jeremiah, p. 4

What's the answer?

Solomon is ending his journal in the way he began it: life is short; it's just a breath between you and death, so remember your Creator!

He gave His life to make your life worth living.

He came to earth so you could go to Heaven.

He was rejected so that you could be accepted.

And His life gives you purpose in life so that you can:

- live so as to honor Him
- introduce others to Him
- find your joy in Him
- rejoice in His good gifts
- serve others along the way
- await the coming day when you will see Him — when your body goes back to dust and your spirit travels upward and away to meet your Creator God.

Can you imagine that moment when your spirit arrives in Heaven — the transition from mortality to immortality (1 Corinthians 15).

That moment when it dawns on you that you are there, eternally safe and secure within the gates of pearl and in the presence of joy and laughter and singing like you have never heard coming from the redeemed of all the ages, and our Lord, upon His throne of dazzling brilliance, before whom we fall in worship.

But can you imagine that moment when the spirit of an unbeliever travels through the gates of Hades — that place of torment described by Jesus Christ himself where the unredeemed are awaiting the final judgement.

Can you imagine that moment soon after death, when it dawns on them that:

- there really was an eternal God
- there really was a Creator
- there really was sin
- there really is an afterlife
- there really is a judgment
- the Bible was true
- their conscience about sin was telling them the truth
- creation was declaring to the truth; it wasn't random accidents, it was divinely created
- then there really must be a Heaven
- and there really must be a Hell.

Solomon issues the warning: death is not the final slumbering — some final sleep. Death is the final awakening!

I've been in the presence of people at the moment of their death and I have seen the same thing again and again: they lay there, and suddenly their eyes open, and they're gone.

Death is not a final slumbering; death is the final awakening.

Remembering your Creator means you won't become misguided in your youth. Walk with Him.

Remembering your Creator means you won't become miserable in your old age. Trust Him.

Remembering your Creator means you won't be mistaken at your death. Believe in Him.

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