

What Is Life About?  
August 29, 2021  
Allen Power

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

*“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages...”* Do you recognize those words? Did you enjoy the circus as a kid? Which circus acts were your favorites?

Ever feel like the circus is a pretty good metaphor for life? Many days we feel like the jugglers. A young family in a minivan often seemed like a tiny car full of clowns. At times we feel like our head is in the mouth of a lion or we are walking with determination along the high wire. Like the circus, life comes with excitement, anticipation, laughter, terror, thrills, and even cleaning up after the animals! And like the circus, there's a big finale and we're sad when it ends.

As Solomon ended this journal of wisdom we call Ecclesiastes, he had a message for “children of all ages.” There's important wisdom here for the young but he reserves most of chapter twelve for those of us who are moving toward the “finale” in life. When the circus promised the “greatest show on earth” it was perhaps over the top hyperbole. It's NOT an exaggeration to say that Solomon's closing words in Ecclesiastes reveal the “secret” for living life “under the sun.”

Here's the truth that should change us this week: The secret of life for “children of all ages” is to fear God, obey His commands, and be sure you're ready for the day of judgment all people will face when this life is over.

**Ecclesiastes 12:1–14 (ESV)** — **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”; **2** before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, **3** in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, **4** and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the

daughters of song are brought low— **5** they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— **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, **7** and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. **8** Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. **9** Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. **10** The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. **11** The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. **12** My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. **13** The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. **14** For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

- Fearing and obeying God is the “secret of life” for people of all ages, but the younger people embrace it, the better! Why is that?
- Remember your creator when you are young isn’t referring to intellectual knowledge of God. What does it mean to “remember” God while living life every day?
- Why do you think the choice of the word “creator” is no accident?
- Why do we need to remember God as creator?
- In **Psalm 8:3–4 (ESV)** David was “awestruck” as he “remembered” his creator: *“3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”*
- He is the source of everything we have. He is our creator, sustainer, protector, provider, and through Christ the source of eternal life.
- Embracing that in youth literally engraves it on our hearts and minds!

- The best thing we can do for young people is to influence them to make every decision in life in awe of God and obedience to His commands.
- As parents, we might tend to come across like it's about "following rules" because it's about obedience and warning is what we do best!
- Instead we should teach that relationship with God is a blessing and not a burden. We need to convey the benefits of that relationship. If the relationship is right, the obedience will follow. When tempted to sin, the person in right relationship with God will "remember" their Creator.
- **1 John 5:3 (ESV) — 3** For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.
- Now, Solomon shifts to those who are "getting on in life."
- Verses 2-7 describe the toll aging takes on body and mind.
- Solomon paints a picture of the decaying of an old house:
- The "guards" are trembling legs and the "strong men" weakening arms.
- "Grinders" becoming few means losing our teeth.
- "[T]hose who look through the windows are dimmed." Eyesight.
- "Rising at the sound of the bird." Who has begun to get up earlier?
- "...daughters of song are brought low." Hearing fades.
- "Afraid of what is high" (fear of falling) and "what is in the street."
- The hair gets as white as "almond blossoms" in winter.
- "You drag along without energy like a dying grasshopper."
- Encouraging, huh? As we've seen, Solomon never "sugar coated" anything when he was writing about real life or, about aging.
- In verse five he reminds us that death is coming when "the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." <sup>i</sup>
- His point is not to just depress us about aging and one day dying.
- His point is to give us a sense of urgency about "remembering" God.

- Verse four in the NLT says it well: <sup>4</sup> Remember him before the door to life's opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades.<sup>ii</sup>
- While we can't deny the toll aging takes on body and mind, Solomon is challenging all of us at any age to fear God and obey Him.
- Though aging is real, why should we NOT "retire" from "remembering" our creator by fearing and obeying him. How can aging actually give us a new platform from which to influence the younger generations?
- Solomon shifts to this idea of sharing godly wisdom in verses 9 and 10.
- It feels like Solomon is giving himself a pat on the back for his wise teaching, but I think there's a lesson for all of us:

**Ecclesiastes 12:9–10 (ESV) — 9** Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. **10** The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

- Was Solomon simply "taking a bow" for sharing wise teaching?
- I think he was modeling the importance of sharing God's word.
- You don't have to have the gift of teaching a group to simply share the truth of God's word with others, but we can't share what we don't have.
- This is why Bible study is important. This is why it's crucial to really digest solid, biblical teaching and preaching. We can't obey what we don't know and we can't share what we don't have.
- God bless you for making Bible study a priority in your life!
- Solomon talks about "weighing, studying, and arranging" words of truth.
- If I just stood up and said, "*Read Ecclesiastes and do what it says*" you would likely go looking for a new class! When we come together and discuss God's word, when we ponder it, make notes, and digest it we not only benefit in our own lives but we can share it with others.
- Don't just tell your kids to "*Read the Bible and do what it says.*"

- Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says to have God's word "on your heart" and "teach it diligently" to your children (and others.)
- God's word helps us fear Him and obey His commands.

**11** The words of the wise are like cattle prods—painful but helpful. Their collected sayings are like a nail-studded stick with which a shepherd drives the sheep.

- Sometimes the truth of scripture is a little painful, but we need it!
- Solomon warned about looking for truth in places other than scripture:

**12** But, my child, let me give you some further advice: Be careful, for writing books is endless, and much study wears you out.

- Enjoying other literature isn't bad at all; just don't accept the teaching of men over the teaching of scripture.
- Now we come to Solomon's "big finish," the secret of life; ready?
- In chapter one he said, *"I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless—like chasing the wind."*<sup>iii</sup>
- Now he has come full circle from "meaningless" to meaning.

**Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 (NLT) — 13** That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty. **14** God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.

- Sometimes Solomon got long-winded and verbose in making his points in Ecclesiastes, but his conclusion is short and powerful:
  - Fear God – Hold Him in awe and reverence for Who He is
  - Obey His Commands – His way is the best way!
  - Understand that one day all people will stand before God.
- The unsaved will face a final, terrible judgment for rejecting Christ. That makes it urgent to share the gospel with them.
- The saved have been spared that judgment (which we truly deserve) because of Christ's sacrifice, but we will still give an account of how we lived our lives (Matt. 12:36-37.) That makes obedience crucial for us.
- What a motivating finale to this "circus" of life!

- Knowing our time on earth is short and our opportunity to live for Christ is passing, we need to make every day count for Him.

### So, What's the Takeaway?

- My mother (who is in Heaven) used to say, *"It's bad to get old."* She had plenty of good reasons for saying that.
- She also used to frequently remind us (even when dementia had robbed her of logic) *"We have a lot to be thankful for."*
- Even at that advanced stage of decline it was her way of sharing her faith. Though she couldn't remember her kids, she could still remember her Creator. That's because she started remembering as a child and continued to remember Him every day after that.
- Some questions to ponder ---
- Are we working to influence the next generation to fear and obey God?
- Are we doing it in a winsome way that makes them open to the Holy Spirit's voice or do we come across as if the Christian life is about rule keeping instead of grace?
- Are we telling them how God has been faithful in our experience and how our love for Him makes obeying Him a blessing and not a burden?
- Are we spending personal time in His word "importing" truth so we can "export" it to others? You can't export what you don't have.
- Are we motivated as the years pass to be even more committed to living the way Solomon described.
- Are we determined to resist the temptation to "retire" from living in fear and obedience to God and sharing God's truth with those around us?

---

<sup>i</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ec 12:7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ec 12:4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>iii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ec 1:14). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.