

“When Everything Has Been Heard, What Will You Do?”

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14

As Solomon finishes presenting the evidence that trying to understand life without God (an ‘under-the-sun’ perspective) is vanity, futile and meaningless, he issues the listener and reader a challenge; if what I have concluded is true, what are you going to do about it? Because if we were under the impression that all this debate on wisdom is purely philosophical, we are sadly mistaken. In these last 18 verses Solomon uses the word “remember” at 3 key points. The Hebrew word and concept for ‘remembering’ is not a mere mental exercise in recalling a fact, but a call to act on the knowledge that you now have or maybe had but forgot but now have been reminded of.

‘Zakar’ means call to mind so as to act. A great example from Israel’s history is in Ex. 2:23,

*²³ During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning and he **remembered** his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.*

And then God acts in Ex. 3-4 and calls Moses to lead them out of Egypt. God remembers what He said and then acts on it. God is modelling what He wants us to do every time we open His Word. Stay in the Word of God and He will remind us over and over about promises He has made, acted on and now expects us to do the same. So then, what is it Solomon wants us to remember (which is now God’s Word) that he expects us to act on?

As he concludes his letter, Solomon addresses youth (v.9) and reminds them that they won’t always be young! So, his motivation towards enjoying life from God’s perspective comes from life’s brevity:

Will We, Enjoy a Godly Life Before its Over? **(11:7-12:8)**

Numerous times Solomon has reminded us that life is a gift from God and only in knowing God can one truly enjoy life and endure life’s unsettledness and trials and sorrows. Back in Ch.2 when he tried to find joy in enjoying the creation’s blessings apart from the Creator, he realized,

^{2:24} A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

So he makes his final appeal especially to those who are young and thinking life will go on forever – it won’t. So he says in 11:7,

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

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.

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,

Enjoy life while you are young. Just like you enjoy the warmth of the sunshine on your face, enjoy life. But like the sunshine on your face, its not always there. Life has dark days and there will be more darker days than you think because youth doesn't last that long. So pursue life, have fun, 'follow your heart' which is not how people use that today because he follows that with a disclaimer; don't forget to read the fine print in God's Word. Solomon is advocating pursuing joy in the context of knowing God and understanding God's per-spective from His Word. Because he finishes v.9 with,

but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

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

When he says cast off anxiety and troubles, I think what he means is anxiety and troubles that you bring upon yourself because you are following the desires of your heart, not God's. And anxiety and trouble have come as a result. That's what happens when we're young. We take risks, we make poor choices 'just for fun' and we pay for it. There is a judgment day coming. In Hebrew its 'the judgment'. So Solomon encourages us to pursue joy however,

Knowing pursuing joy against God's Word has grave consequences (11:9b-10)

We don't think about life's end when we're young. We don't think about it enough even as we age – but we should, not in a morbid way but as an incentive to enjoy the life we have here, now with the family and friends God gives us. John Piper wrote a book with this very title, 'Don't Waste Your Life' referring to living a life for God is the most satisfying life you'll find here. Because as Solomon said, God has set eternity in our hearts and our hearts are wired that way to be satisfied fully by what is eternal. That's why Solomon is talking to young people because as you enter your teen and young adult years you start to hear the lies of our world which says happiness can only be found in this world, during this time in your life. So he appeals with another 'remember' in 12:1,

12:1 *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"—*

² *before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;*
[before life starts losing its enjoyment because in old age everything gets harder]

³ *when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop,*
[we lose strength and start to bend over]

when the grinders cease because they are few, [lose our teeth]
and those looking through the windows grow dim; [eyesight dims]

⁴ *when the doors to the street are closed [our mouth gets lines around it and looks locked] and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;*
[our hearing goes]

⁵ *when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets;*
[fears increase; easily startled]; *when the almond tree blossoms*
[grey hair] *and the grasshopper drags himself along [we slow down] and desire no longer is stirred [sexual passions reduced]. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.*

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, [all these metaphors for broken and ending and finished]

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

⁸ *"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.*

“Everything is meaningless!”

And if you're not there yet, wonderful! All the more reason to enjoy a godly life

Starting in your best years (12:1-8)

If living for God, by faith in His Word and in His Son who paid the price for sin's penalty and gives us power over sin now (which only causes pain) why not start as early in life as possible and enjoy most if not all of your life knowing God and seeing life through His perspective? Many of us didn't get that from the beginning. We came to know God later in life. We didn't know any better before, but God in His grace sent messengers with the gospel and He turned the light on in our hearts and now we get it.

Some of you started with that knowledge in life but you weren't convinced enjoyment could be found in God alone so you followed the world's lies for awhile. That didn't go to well and now you're back. And some of you are nodding with a smile because you have followed God your whole life; not perfectly. Nor was your life necessarily easy, but God never failed to satisfy you and encourage you and give you His peace because you remained convinced that

“And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Heb. 11:6).

I believe this is what Solomon is challenging his readers with. Challenging the ones who already know this to make sure you're fully convinced and engaged in living for God and not just dabbling with God when you have nothing 'better' to do. And challenging those who are still trying to find joy in the creation and not the Creator. If the creation is flawed and groans in expectation for the end of the age when it too is healed of sin's consequences, then how can it satisfy you?

So Solomon concludes his letter with this challenge,

Will We, Enjoy Life to the Glory of God (12:9-14)

“Remember your Creator” is an appeal to act on the knowledge you have. Once God helps us understand the meaning of life – that life is from God and best enjoyed through a relationship with Him by faith alone – then we must share that with others who are looking for it but haven't found it. How do we enjoy life to the glory of God?

By knowing Him more through His Word (vv.9-12)

Solomon explains that wisdom itself comes from God, and that even though he explored all kinds of knowledge written by others, only God's truth gives us hope, purpose and joy.

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

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

That last part is often misunderstood. 'The many books' Solomon is referring are the millions of books out there that claim to be telling you this is what life is all about but don't agree with the One True Shepherd. They are not of God. Those teachers who write those books just make you weary because they are not offering you what is upright and true. God's Word goads us forward. A goad was a farmer's pointy stick that forced the cattle where he wanted them to go. God's Word is like that. Heb. 4:12 says

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

God's word is God speaking to our heart directly. He teaches us, corrects us, rebukes us and equips us to serve. See, remember His Word, act on His Word. Remember and then act.

Enjoy life to the glory of God

So more people will know Him and discover His lasting joy (12:13-14)

What does it mean to fear God? To be so awed by how amazing He is that you are drawn towards Him even though it can be a little scary at times. That's why its called faith. We trust Him who sees all and knows all because we can't. Remember Moses and the Israelites after Moses came down from the mountain after receiving the 10 commandments? The people heard the thunder and saw the smoke and lightning and told Moses, we're afraid; you talk to God for us.

²⁰ *Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."* ²¹ *The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.*

They were afraid to approach God because they hadn't gotten to know Him like Moses had. And many people are afraid or disinterested or confused about God because of poor information or lack of information – the knowledge of His Word. The whole duty or purpose of mankind is to fear God and keep his Word then we have to share that with others because, the judgment is coming, and they are unaware. Life ends one day and we'll all stand before God. Those of us who know Him by faith, will walk into His presence like Moses. Not really sure where He's taking us, except that we'll be with Him and all will be fine.

If God can know every hidden act (good or evil) then we cannot escape Him. We are indebted to Him because He gave us our life. He gave us every good thing in this life. And every bad thing that happened to us was His goading us to say, life isn't perfect because of sin. You won't find happiness and meaning in it so turn to Me and pursue joy in a relationship with Me.

Solomon lived 900 years before Jesus came, the physical evidence of the invisible God. So we have even less of an excuse not to be in awe of God and follow His Word.

So everything has now been heard, how will we respond? We who know God through Jesus Christ, have we been drawn closer to God and are more desirous of finding our joy in Him? Has our faith grown? Have some questions about His ways been answered or at least you've been assured of His good purpose and presence even though the answers haven't come yet? He has set eternity in our hearts. Hope, purpose and joy can only be found in Him. Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if you don't know Him yet, I ask you to listen to the urgency in Solomon's words, as one who lost his way for awhile and tried finding joy in this world. And discovered it didn't satisfy. Learn from someone else's mistakes. Believe that the main purpose in life is to know God by faith through His Son Jesus. Confess your sins and your need for forgiveness and believe by faith that following God's Words will bring you the greatest joy you've ever known.

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