

- **\*READ Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8\*** As we have noted many times recently, the book of Ecclesiastes can serve as a first class aid for the person who is seeking to live a life of excellent purpose and meaning. So many individuals walk through life on this earth mindlessly...always wondering what it is that they have missed that would bring some true substance to their existence. This book of the Preacher could very well serve as the perfect prescription to the ailment of living a meaningless life.
- This book is able to help so much because it addresses so many different aspects of life that can cause many people many pains. Any adult who is struggling in this life could pick up this book and quickly see the better way of God's wisdom and be almost instantaneously aided to live life better. But did you notice that the Preacher mentions a specific individual in this text that would do well to listen to his godly wisdom?
- While we might say that the majority of this book focuses on things that we might encounter as adults, the Preacher takes a moment here at the tail end of the book to make specific comments towards those who are in their youth...those who have a lot of life still left to live...those who are in the prime of their lives. The Preacher had high expectations for the young person who might be reading this Text, and no higher expectation can be had of anyone than for them to remember their Creator.
- Our society, at large, isn't one that expects all that much from the younger generations. Because of the actions of some who truly embrace their immaturity and do foolish things, all young people are often grouped together as being useless or unable to contribute to society in a positive and meaningful way. But this isn't something that is all together new...in fact, this must be something that has been prevalent in other societies because Paul gave a strong admonition to Timothy to not allow others to despise him or look down upon him because he was young. (**I Timothy 4:12**) While some might seek to have little to no expectations for the younger crowd, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, Paul, and ultimately our God have high expectations for the young person, and that can be summed up by imploring him or her to remember God in his or her young years. But what does this mean? Or maybe how can this be done? This morning, we are going to consider how the young person can remember God in those years, and how the older person can help them to live up to this high godly standard.

## I. For the young people:

### A. Use your youthful years to your advantage.

1. While society might look at the years of your youth as years that you can just mess around and waste in foolishness...the Preacher says that you, as a young person, ought to use your years of youth in a way that will bring true joy to yourself. (**11:9a**) While many young people of this world waste away their youth with frivolous endeavors or by just not doing anything, the admonition from the Preacher is for the young person to take advantage of these years while he or she is in them...because as we'll consider in just a moment, the next phase of life is inevitable.
2. But how can the young person take advantage of his or her youth? The Preacher says that can be done by finding true joy in these years. Now, you ask ten young people what brings them joy, and you'll probably get fourteen different answers and many of them will probably be immature and wasteful. However, the Preacher is imploring the young person to use these years well to a useful and beneficial end. Because the truth is that the years of our youth provide us with abilities and freedoms that we will one day lose and we will more than likely never get them back. In our youth, we don't have to worry much about bills, jobs, dependents, and other responsibilities of life that will one day pop up and smack us in the face. Therefore, we must use these years of freedom in such a way that we will benefit the most, and there is no better way to use the years of our youth than to see to grow in our faith and character and to make sure that we are establishing God as the focus of our lives.

3. You need to use these years learning everything you can about this life and yourself. Absorb as much information, knowledge, and wisdom as is possible because the old adage is said for a reason. It is hard to teach old dogs new tricks, so learn everything you can in your youth. Take it from someone who had to learn some things the hard way at times because I didn't pay attention and learn some important things in my youth that would've helped me once I had adult responsibilities laid upon me. It isn't fun playing catch-up as an adult because you skated through the years of your youth not caring about things that actually matter.
  4. The Preacher says to rejoice and let your heart be pleasant during your childhood and young manhood. Sadly, many young people, today, see joy and pleasantness as things only found by doing nothing or by just wasting away the years of their youth. Remember, this book of Ecclesiastes was written to show that true joy and fulfillment are found in God and living this life in appreciation for His goodness towards us so that He might be glorified and honored. **(Ecclesiastes 2:24,25)** Sure we might not have as much responsibility in our youth as we will in adulthood, but that isn't an excuse to waste our lives away. Instead, we ought to see these years as years to use to our advantage by growing in our character, maturity, and godliness so that we can find true pleasantness and reasons to rejoice in our youth.
- B. Use your youthful years to develop good habits.
1. Notice that the Preacher goes on to say in the second half of **11:9**, that the young person should follow the impulses of his or her heart and do that which the eye desires. So is this a blank check for the young person to do anything and everything he or she might want to do? Whatever his or her heart wants and whatever his or her eyes desires should be pursued? If the verse ended right there then we might be left with that conclusion, but notice the reminder that God will bring everything into judgement. Therefore, what is the conclusion? It must be to develop good habits that are fueled by a pure heart.
  2. Consider some examples of young people who responded well to difficult situations, and how it was that they were able to respond in such a way:
    - a) Joseph was a younger man who had been taken from his homeland. He was a foreigner in Egypt, yet he was given a second chance at a good life by being given power in Potiphar's house. Someone looking at his situation might think that he hit the jackpot by finding himself in such a situation, but we know this was no accident. His fortunes were such because he was a young person who was committed to his God. Therefore, when he found himself faced with the temptation put before him by Potiphar's wife, he knew exactly what he had to do. He had to reject her advances because his heart was set on honoring God. **(Genesis 39:6-13)** Many young people would leap at such an opportunity to take advantage of such a situation, but Joseph had trained himself to be able to react in such a godly way in exactly that type of situation.
    - b) Daniel is another example of someone who had prepared himself to overcome difficult situations by using his youthful years to develop good and godly habits. When presented with the opportunity to partake of things that would lead to his defilement before God, Daniel refused such food and drink because he had *"made up his mind that he would not defile himself."* **(Daniel 1:8)** Let me suggest that Daniel was able to do this thing not because of a spur of the moment decision, but he had developed a heart that allowed him to do this. He had put in the work beforehand to be able to stand in this moment and make this good and godly decision. He was prepared to stand in his faith when strongly tempted.
    - c) But then what about Mary? I believe she certainly is a great example of a young person who showed strong faith in a difficult situation. She hadn't found favor in the eyes of the Lord for nothing! **(Luke 1:26-30)** She seems to have been a young woman of strong character who had sought purity in her life. She had developed this godly character, and it led her to being the woman who brought the Savior into this world. What an honor!

3. All three of these young people continue to receive praise and honor even to this day because they had prepared themselves to endure difficult circumstances in their youths. They had developed good habits in their lives that allowed them to respond to difficult situations in the godliest of ways. These are the examples young people should look towards as they strive to take advantage of their youth to develop good habits and to glorify God. There is no need to wait for some time down the road to do these things...use your youthfulness to God's glory now. Be a young person that is a living representation of what Paul admonishes Timothy to be in **I Timothy 4:12**, now...and do so because there will come a time where you are no longer young and able to do what you are capable of doing right now.
- C. Recognize that youth doesn't last forever.
1. This is what we see from the Preacher at the end of chapter 11 and going into chapter 12. His admonition is to make sure to take advantage of these years not simply because that is what God desires, but also because these years are "fleeting" and they'll be gone before you know it.
  2. There will come a time when the freedoms of youth will no longer be available to us. There will come a time where we will have responsibilities that will take away from opportunities to learn. There will come a time when youth will no longer be accepted as an excuse for not knowing or being able to do something. There will come a time when it will be much more difficult for us to establish good and godly habits that will aid us in our faith. If we don't take advantage of these years that are the "prime of life" then don't expect for the later years of life to be easy and simple and forgiving when you try to make up for what you have wasted.
  3. The picture that the Preacher paints for the reader of the latter stages of life isn't exactly a glamorous one. In fact, he says that you won't have any delight in these latter years because they're just going to be hard. The older we get, the more troubles we will experience. Our eyes and ears won't work like they used to. Our bones and muscles will ache. The simplest of things will become difficult. Our best days will be past, and if we have wasted our youth...if we have failed to give God a permanent place in our lives, then we will find it difficult to make up the ground that we wasted in our youth. Don't waste your youth settling for foolishness and mediocrity. Remember God in your youth. Set Him up in an exalted place, and seek constant growth in your faith and character.

## II. For the older people:

- A. Have high expectations for young people.
1. Whether we are a parent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, older cousin, or just a family friend...we, the older people, have influence in the lives of the young people we know. We have the opportunity to help shape them into the adults that they will grow up to be one day. They're not robots by any means...but our influence can certainly help them to grow.
  2. We can help to influence them for good in their youth by first off expecting great things from them. Remember, one of the problems facing our society is low expectations, and it doesn't take much effort to live up to low expectations. Young people are notorious, I speak from experience, for sinking as low and doing as little as is expected from them. We can help them to excel by expecting it from them. This is exactly what Paul did in regards to Timothy. Paul expected much from him in his faith. (**I Timothy 1:18; 4:14,15**)
  3. It's not as if we don't expect anything from our young people. We expect for them to perform well in school, sports, hobbies, and many other things. Why would we not expect for them to do great things in their faith? We have the examples of young people doing great things in the Bible. Let's set the bar high for our young people, and then let's help them to meet and exceed those high expectations.

B. Provide godly influence.

1. We can help young people to meet high expectations by first living up to those expectations ourselves. Rarely will young people excel beyond that which they see from those they look up to. So if we, as the people of influence, don't set the standard for faith and character...then how can we be disappointed when our young people are weak and underdeveloped.
2. Speaking to us parents specifically for a moment...we are given the primary responsibility for setting the spiritual tone for our households. It is first our responsibility to take every opportunity to teach and influence our children to pursue growth in their faiths and character. This begins with pursuing a strong faith ourselves which we might view as passive teaching, but it also involves active teaching. It involves sitting down with our children and speaking with them face to face about God, faith, and their purpose. It involves family devotion times. It involves being aware of their Bible class responsibilities and making sure they are prepared. If we fail to do these things, then what message is being sent to our kids? All they are seeing is a mom and who take them to church, but their faith ends there. We must be better than that if we truly want our young people to remember God in their youth. We must seek to be like Lois and Eunice and allow our faith to influence growth in our children. **(II Timothy 1:5)**

C. Be there to help them when things get tough.

1. Finally, we as older people can help our young people to remember God in their youth by being their to support them when they are going through difficulties. As older people, that necessitates that we once were young and while that might have been quite a while ago for some of us, things have pretty much remained the same as far as the difficulties of youth.
2. Young people still struggle with inexperience at times. They make mistakes out of ignorance. They are tempted with new things they have never faced before. They are tempted on all sides by Satan, and sometimes he uses their friends to try to lead our young people down the road of sin. Things might look a little different from when we were young people, but really things are still the same. This means that we must be ready, willing, and able to be there to support our young people when they face the troubles that life can throw at them. We must be there to listen to them. We must be there to give them sound advice and wisdom which seems to be exactly why Paul wrote these two letters to his "son in the faith" Timothy. We simply must support them as they give every effort to grow and remember God in their youth.

While society might not expect much from young people, we absolutely must expect much from our young people...especially because God expects much from young people. Don't waste your youth, but use these precious years to grow and mature in your faith and character. Use these years to prepare yourself for adulthood and those years where you will be the leaders of the church. For those of us who currently lead the church, let's support them, love them, and lead them in this growth. Let's do it for their good and for the good of the church moving forward and to the glory of our great God. May God bless the young people of this church and every church as they strive to remember their Creator in the days of their youth. **\*PRAYER\***