

# MORAL ADVICE TO THE YOUNGER FOLKS

## *Ecclesiastes 11:8-10*

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Studying the book of Ecclesiastes brings mixed emotions of joy, sadness, fear, depression, and the like especially considering Solomon calling things we think we are chasing after as vanity.

As we've gone through this book of Ecclesiastes, one thing Solomon has circled back to time and time again (**2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-10**) is the idea that life is a gift from God, and we should enjoy the small stuff of life. In order to do this, we need to rejoice (**11:7-9**), remove (**11:10**) and remember (**12:1-8**) (Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible OT*, p. 1142). Today we will deal with verses **8-10** of **Ecclesiastes 11** but I will begin the discuss from verse 7 where our minister stopped last week because the discuss is a continuation. Let's see our text, reading from verse 7;

*Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.*

*So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.*

*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. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.*

*Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.*

**Ecclesiastes 11:7-10**

### **REJOICE (Ecclesiastes 11:8)**

The first reason we should enjoy life now is that we cannot do so after we die. The metaphor of verse 8 refers to the light of life vs. darkness, which represents death. We will die, but for now the "light" of life is "sweet" and "pleasant."

The goodness of life is portrayed by *light* which, as elsewhere in the OT, is used to denote 'joy, blessing and life in contrast to sorrow, adversity and death' (cf. **Genesis 1:3f; Job 10:22; 18:5f.**). It is being joyfully alive (cf. **Job 3:20; Psalm 49:19**). Life is not truly life unless it can be enjoyed. Note that "light" often designates the pleasures of life' (e.g. **Job 10:22; 30:26; Psalm 97:11; Isaiah 45:7; 60:19-20; Amos 5:18, 20**). Similarly, *to see the sun* means not merely 'to live' but 'to live joyfully.' Paul also echoed similar sentiments when he said, "rejoice always, again, I say rejoice – **Philippians 4:4**".

There is a call, especially for older folks — people who have lived “*many years.*” It is good to find joy in the pleasures of life. Solomon recommends that we “*rejoice in them all*”—all the years, even though the good life of “light” will be interspersed with the difficult days of “darkness.” Sooner or later, we will suffer loss, disappointment, injustice, and grief. “*All that comes*” — including the years when we are old and gray — “*is vanity*” (***Ecclesiastes 11:8***).

Some commentators think the Preacher is confused here, that he is “*giving the contradictory advice that his reader should both enjoy life but also remember that he is going to die.*” This is not confusion but clarity. Ecclesiastes gives us a realistic view of life that is joyful about its happy pleasures while at the same time sober about its many sorrows. The book steadfastly refuses to show us anything less than the whole of life as it actually is.

When the Preacher tells us that we will have many dark days, he is not being cynical or trying to rob us of all our joy. Instead, he is telling us to enjoy life as much as we can for as long as we can. “The days of darkness” qualify what he says about rejoicing in the light, but they do not negate it. To the end of our days there is sweetness in the world, and therefore we are called to rejoice. Do not take life for granted. Do not complain about all your problems, the way many of us sometimes do. But greet each new day the way the Psalmist did, saying, “*This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it*” (***Psalms 118:24***).

So, once again, the preacher affirms the goodness of creation and the rightness of enjoying all that is gifted to us by God in it. The young person is to make the most of it all. This is not an invitation to hedonism (*Hedonism is a philosophical and ethical theory that holds that pleasure or happiness is the most important thing in life*), which has already been disproven as a way to joy in chapter 2. Proper enjoyment of life is possible only within the moral boundaries established by God, who will evaluate all human deeds according to his righteous judgment (cf. ***12:13-14***).

In all his writings, Solomon never advocated sinful self-indulgence, only the enjoyment of life’s legitimate pleasures and good gifts. Whatever woes or ailments one has, one should not dwell on them excessively, but rather enjoy the moments of goodness and beauty. What a joy it is, therefore, to live for many years — not only because we have more time to serve the Lord in sowing and reaping (see ***Ecclesiastes 11:1-6***), but also because we have more opportunity to enjoy the goodness of life.

The preacher’s advice is to start early on this pathway of joyful existence before God. . . in the sure knowledge that life will only ever become more challenging as time passes and as we move inexorably toward the darkness of death: “*Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come*” (12:1).

### **Young People, Rejoice**

The call to rejoice is not just for the elderly but also for youth. While old people are to praise God for the length of their days, young people are to praise God for the energy of their youth. Hence the Preacher’s second call: “*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” (Ecclesiastes 11:9).*

While you are young, rejoice in your youth. Your body is strong, your cares are few. Your future is full of possibilities. Don't waste them. And don't think only about yourself. Don't just live for the moment. Realize that every choice has consequences.

Solomon balanced his counsel to the youth to follow his or her impulses and wholesome desires, with a reminder that God will judge us all eventually. Solomon probably thought a lot about God's judgments before death (cf. **2:24-26; 7:17**). God knows that we all— young and old—face temptations. Solomon reminds us that God will hold us accountable for our choices. He says, *“Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (Ecclesiastes 11:9).*

One of the weaknesses of youth is that we rarely consider our mortality and the reality of future judgment. We will be held accountable for our thoughts, affections, words and deeds. The Hebrew refers to “the judgment,” that day when *“God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Romans 2:16)*. That day may seem afar off, but it will come.

Life speeds on and may be cut short by tragedy. Ray Stedman says, *“When you are young, life seems to stretch endlessly before you. It seems that you will never grow old. But as you live through the years, life seems to speed by more rapidly, and at last it seems as if it is very brief. Suddenly you find yourself looking and feeling old. As someone has said, “About the time your face clears up, your mind begins to go!” That is how brief life seems to be”*. (Ray Stedman, *Is This All There Is to Life?*, 175)

That day, that judgment day, will ultimately arrive. Martin Luther said, *“There are only two days on my calendar: This day and that day.”* He was referring to the judgment day. That day should guide what I do and how I live today. We would all be better off if we took seriously the fact that yesterday (with all its regrets) is gone and tomorrow (with its potential worries) is unknown to us. Thus, we need to focus our attention and efforts on today... but in light of that day, the day of judgment.

**Uncle Screwtape**, a fictional demon from C.S. Lewis's [\*Screwtape Letters\*](#), concurs with “the Enemy's” (God's) priority of the present. He writes to his nephew Wormwood, The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present.

Knowing this, the senior demon advises his young nephew to tempt humans with the past and the future as a way to keep them from the present — this day. But to live “this day” rightly, we must live it in view of *“that day”*; we should allow the reality of future accountability to shape the way we live life today—every choice we make, every word we speak, every deed we do. It should guide what we do and how we do it.

God “looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens” (**Job 28:24**). This means that everything we do and everything we decide matters for eternity. How we spend our money, what we do with our bodies, the way we use our time, what we decide about our future, how we handle our relationships—what we touch,

taste, hear, and see—all of this matters to our Judge and therefore ought to matter to us as well.

Rejoice responsibly. Enjoy life's pleasures, but not in sinful ways. Celebrate the gift of youth, but at the same time follow God's command to "*flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*" (2 **Timothy 2:22**). Enjoyment has its limitations. It is circumscribed by God's commands. Many a youth has sown wild oats (*habits that comes back to bite them*), only to live with the consequences for a lifetime. And beyond this life there is the judgment to come.

After encouraging the young to enjoy the legitimate pleasures of their carefree years, the Preacher concludes with the statement, "Childhood and youth are vanity." These words are not to be taken as minimizing this period of life, but as declaring that its freshness and vigor will not last very long. Therefore, its joys must not be considered an end in themselves. Delight in youth, but do not overlook the whole picture, including judgment and eternity. (Richard W. De Haan, *The Art of Staying Off Dead-end Streets*, 146-47)

### **REMOVE VEXATION (Verse 10)**

Solomon's counsel in light of the shortness of life, however, is to "*remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body*" (**Ecclesiastes 11:10**). Try to eliminate those things that trouble the heart and the body when you can.

A "*vexation*" is any problem that causes us worry and concern, that "*angers, grieves or irritates*" (Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*) It is "*the bitterness provoked by a hard and disappointing world*" (Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), p. 99).

We could list a lot of things that can cause vexation today and it differs from person to person. Solomon says, "*remove it.*" Do what you can to minimize vexation to your heart and pain to your body. This is not a call to deny the very real suffering that everyone experiences. Nor is it a call to escape pain by living for pleasure. Rather, it is a call to take care of our mental and physical health.

That is a major message that is coming to us today. COVID lockdowns and getting COVID have played havoc on the mental health of us all, but especially young people. Anxiety, depression, drug abuse, domestic abuse and suicide have skyrocketed during these past three years. During the pandemic, a larger than average share of young adults (ages 18-24) report symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder (56%). Compared to all adults, young adults are more likely to report substance use (25% vs. 13%) and suicidal thoughts (26% vs. 11%).

If we are getting discouraged by various vexations, and if we are tempted therefore to become depressed or disillusioned, we should do what the Preacher says and remove those vexations from our hearts. This starts with refusing to feel sorry for ourselves. Rather than dwelling on all the things that are going wrong, we should count

our blessings. Gratitude is sweet medicine to souls weighed down with worries and anxieties, with discouragement and depression.

Another way to “remove” these vexations is to put them in God’s hands through prayer. Paul commands “*Do not be anxious about anything*” — or *vexed* about anything, we might say — “*but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*” This command is then followed by a promise: “*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (**Philippians 4:6-7**). The Biblical way of removing vexation is to cast our cares on God. Peter tells us to “*cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*”

When the Bible tells us to put away pain, it is not giving us license to drown our sorrows in alcohol or to use life-destroying drugs. This can be a challenge when the pain is great. Some people don’t want to use painkillers because they can be addicting, or because they make your mind hazy and confused. I can understand that. So be wise in the use of painkillers, but **Ecclesiastes 11:10** does give us the option of using medicine that will “put away” the pain.

One of the reasons why the Preacher tells us to remove pain and vexation is because he knows that we cannot stay young forever: “*youth and the dawn of life are vanity*” (**Ecclesiastes 11:10**). This does not mean that youth is meaningless. The Preacher has already told us to rejoice in our youth and to enjoy its many pleasures. But youth is vain or empty (*hebel*) in the sense that it is elusive and ephemeral. It is like smoke that disappears into thin air or mist that vanishes with the morning sun. One day we are young and strong, but almost before we know it, those days are gone. Thus, the Preacher advises us to live free from care as long as we can.

This isn’t cynicism or pessimism, just reality. Enjoy your youth while you are young. It won’t last forever. We should celebrate and enjoy the blessings of being young and celebrate and enjoy the blessings of growing older. (*Notice I didn’t say, “getting old.”*)

Recognizing that the potentials of youth are not given to us forever can help us to enjoy them more while we have them. It can certainly cause us to appreciate them more. Celebrate life, rejoice in it. Remove vexations and pain as far as possible. Remember that life has an expiration date. Remember that there will be a judgment afterwards. Live life now so that you will be rewarded at that judgment.

## Conclusion

A life of obedience and devotion to God is the only way to lasting happiness. When a young person combines the enthusiasm, idealism, and energy of youth with a deep devotion to the Lord, he has all the ingredients for a wonderful life. Free from feelings of guilt and fear, he is at peace with himself, God, and the world. He experiences a sense of fulfillment as he does the will of God, and looks forward to a lifetime of joyous service followed by eternal glory with his Savior.

## Reference

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