

# Remember your Creator

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, your word is indeed upright and true, and we pray that your word will show forth your goodness once again, as well as helping us to know what we should do in the light of your goodness.

So please shape us by your word this morning. We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen. What are you going to do with your life?

That's the perennial question, isn't it? Asked by your parents, your grandparents, your teachers, your friends, and yes, by you yourself. Especially when you've just started life in university or if you're in your early years in the working world.

What are you going to do with your life? Or if you're older, what have you done with your life? In an article that I read many years ago now, the clinical psychologist who was being interviewed explained that the 20s are the most important decade of your life.

Our 20s are the most defining decade of adulthood, she says. 80% of life's most defining moments take place by about age 35. Two-thirds of lifetime wage growth happens during the first 10 years of a career.

[ 1 : 18 ] More than half of Americans, that's the context that she's speaking into, are married or dating or living with their future partner by age 30.

Personality can change during our 20s than at any other decade in life. Female fertility peaks at 28. The brain caps off its last major growth spurt.

Later on, she advises all 20-somethings to recognise that what you do or don't do during your 20s will have an enormous impact across years and even generations.

To quote her again, you are deciding your life right now. So if you're no longer in your 20s, I'm sorry, your ship has sailed.

And if you're still in your 20s, no pressure then. But while this psychologist, I think, is clearly overstating her case, we all recognise that there are certain advantages to being youthful.

[ 2 : 25 ] And for the moment, I won't specify what age that is. It's a time of energy, of vigour, of get up and go. There's a willingness to try new things and less difficulty in changing directions.

After all, it's easier to switch from being a doctor to an entrepreneur if you've been a doctor for two years rather than 20. There are less commitments, less responsibilities than there are later in life, when you might have a mortgage to worry about, or perhaps a spouse and children, or a more senior role in your company.

It's a much more ideal time to decide what you're going to do with your life. When you're older, or so it seems, there's so much less to look forward to and so much more to look back on.

But when you are young, your whole future is before you. We don't know how old the teacher was when he wrote Ecclesiastes, but it's safe to say he certainly was not a young man.

All throughout Ecclesiastes, death is a looming reality for him in a way that I think is very hard for a young man to fathom.

[ 3 : 49 ] There's a sense that he's had a very wide experience of life. He's tasted pleasure, he's tasted philosophy, he's tasted wealth and success.

But he found it all to be Hebel. It's the kind of realization that will probably only strike someone who's been there, done that.

For 12 chapters, he's been sharing his observations of the world, gleaned from his experience. And yet his very last words in 12 verse 8 are the very same ones that opened the book in 1 verse 2.

Hebel. Everything is Hebel. But that's not to say that he's been merely repeating himself all this while. In fact, I think it's safe to say that from chapter 7 onwards, he begins to give more positive advice about living in the world under the sun.

In chapter 7, he tells us that wisdom, though limited, is valuable. So in chapter 8, he tells us how to be wise when confronted with imperfect authorities.

[ 4 : 59 ] In chapter 9, he encourages us to put our lives in the hands of God and not in our own. In chapter 10, he quotes a whole selection of Proverbs showing us that the way of wisdom is better than folly.

And in 11 verse 1 to 6, he tells us how being wise means taking risks for the Lord. And in today's passage, the teacher will, in a sense, sum up all that wisdom for us.

He looks at us and says, whether we are young or old, here are two commands that you need to put into practice if you want to be wise. Rejoice and remember.

Rejoice and remember. So firstly, rejoice in your life. Verse 7. Light is sweet and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

This thing called life is a good thing, the teacher says. The picture is that of a delivery room. After all those hours of labor, out comes the newborn.

[ 6 : 13 ] Her first cry will kick-start her lungs. The doctor will make sure that her nostrils are open. And her eyes, though unable to see much, will at least be able to detect light as she opens them.

And so new life begins. Light is sweet. It is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun because new life is here. She is born.

There has been no complications. And for the moment, that is all that matters. Savor the miracle of new life. Rejoice. Now, no one will be able to predict how many years this person will live.

Not the parents who will have a major influence on this person's life, but no say in determining the length of her days. Not the doctor, even with all the advances of medical technology.

And so the teacher's advice is this, verse 8. However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. You have no control over the quantity of your days, but you do have a say in the way you perceive the quality of your days.

[ 7 : 38 ] So enjoy them. Take time to delight in God's blessings to you. Rejoice in meaningful conversation with friends. Celebrate family time. Be thankful for good health.

Be thankful even in the so-called trivial things like a good coffee, a good day out, a good night's sleep. There is sports, nature, the arts.

Rejoice in them all. The boxer Muhammad Ali once said, Do not count the days, make the days count. The teacher would have a proof.

And so would the apostle Paul. Remember 1 Timothy 4, verse 3 to 4. All that God created is good and to be received with thankfulness.

And we can rejoice even if, verse 8 again, there will be many days of darkness. The teacher hasn't forgotten what life under the sun is like.

[ 8 : 45 ] The days of darkness here, I take it, refers primarily to the knowledge or experience that our bodies are on a one-way street to decay and death.

There's a parallel expression in 12, verse 1 when the teacher refers to the coming of evil days, which we'll get to later on. And so the teacher is aware that one day the light of verse 7 will dim. He isn't caught by surprise that the same Muhammad Ali, who was such a fearsome fighter, the greatest according to many, would one day be reduced by Parkinson's disease to someone who could not carry the Olympic flag for more than a few seconds.

The days of darkness will be many. Expect it. But that doesn't stop the teacher from exhorting us, rejoice in your life.

Now verse 9 tells us he's addressing the young. But as I hinted at earlier, it's important to realise that youth here is a relative term.

[ 10 : 00 ] The young are basically anyone who can still enjoy life without too many of the limitations imposed by an ageing body or an ageing mind, as we'll see in chapter 12 later.

So if you are 60 today, but your health is good, you can consider yourself included among the young. And if that's you, the teacher says, make the most of that time.

Verse 9. Don't fall into the trap of living in such a way that on your deathbed, you say, if only, if only I invested more time in building friendships, if only I had been more serious about God, if only I focused less on gain and enjoyed life more simply as a gift.

Don't let youthfulness, as the saying goes, be wasted on the young. While you have the capacity to do so, rejoice in your life.

And notice, verse 9 is a command. Now we're used to God's commands being more along the lines of avoiding certain things.

[11:21] Don't lie, don't envy, but be happy, follow the ways of your heart, really? And yet that's what verse 9 commands.

You see, I wonder if you realise God wants to fill us with joy. See, for instance, what the psalmist says of God, Psalm 16, verse 11 on the screen.

You make known to me the path of life. Sorry, on the screen, please. Let me read it anyway. You make known to me the path of life. You fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

So there you have it. There's God's purpose for us. Sometimes it's said that God is more concerned with our holiness than our happiness. But it's probably more accurate to say that God is concerned with both our holiness and our happiness.

It's exactly why he continues to give us the joys of kombucha tea and paper art and climbing up Mount Singai. It's what lies behind his command to us to rejoice.

[12:37] Because the joy that comes from him is exactly what he wants us to possess. And that's why Paul also issues the same command in Philippians 4, verse 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always. He knows that is God's longing for us. Quite a few of you know that my son is into dinosaurs right now.

So imagine if I got him the best Giganotosaurus toy ever. And what I long is not for him to kind of leave the dinosaur all wrapped up nicely in the box, but to see him take that toy on daily adventures chasing after Mickey and Minnie Mouse.

And I want to see him enjoy his gift. As the pastor David Gibson puts it, real relationship involves seeing another person take pleasure in gifts given.

Delight is what we ask of the other as we freely give to them. And in this world, God is the Father who gives good gifts to his children.

[13:53] And how we receive those gifts, gifts, and how we live in light of those gifts given to us indicates what we think about our Father.

And that's why the teacher wants us to rejoice in our lives. It's how we proclaim the Lord is good. That's what makes Israel's history so tragic.

Because so often they proclaim the opposite instead. God's people, you see, has been given abundance after the Lord. In Deuteronomy 28, we read this.

Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you.

So notice what is happening. God's people, you see, has been given abundance after abundance. Just read the first 13 verses of Deuteronomy 28.

[14:56] But they failed to serve God joyfully. They had a grumpy, complaining, even resentful spirit. They were in effect telling God, he's no good.

His gifts are rubbish. And so notice what happens. Judgment. has to be served. And this is what the teacher is warning us about at the end of Ecclesiastes chapter 11 verse 9.

When we resent God's gifts, or we abuse them, or we fail to steward them in the way we should, we will be called to account.

Because what we are really doing is calling the author of good evil. So we need to have the right attitude to our lives, to the good things God gives us if we want to live rightly in this world.

But why is it so hard to do so? Well, perhaps one reason is because we have rooted our joy in the wrong place.

[16:10] You see, earlier I said youth is often associated with energy and vigor. It's associated with boundless opportunity and greater freedom. It's associated with less anxiety and with the fullness of life.

And so, naturally, we want to hold on to our youth. It's where we think we will find our joy. Time flies. In the very first sermon in this series, I told you that if you had lived until you are 80, you would have lived for roughly 4,000 weeks. So if you are 20 today, you have already used up at least 1,000 weeks.

And as you get older, not only do you have less weeks left, you seem to lose them faster. As anyone past the age of 30 will tell you, time seems to speed up as you age.

Your youth and with it all its energy and vigor are gone before you know it. Time flies. That's the issue. It might have seemed like only last week you were sitting for your SPM.

[17:30] And only yesterday you were celebrating the 10th year anniversary of starting work. But before you know it, your house is an empty nest and your retirement is at hand.

So if we root our joy purely in the days of our youth, then what happens is that our joy diminishes as we get older and older.

for as verse 10 puts it, youth and vigor are also her bell. So if this is where your joy is rooted, you will just spend your remaining days here trying to recreate the good old days, hankering after nostalgia, and becoming grumpy because we can't be like what we were before.

You become absolutely certain that the music on the radio and the cartoons on the TV and the preaching in the pulpit were so much better when you were a teenager than now. No one seems to know what you're talking about when you mention the days when Manchester United were the champions of Europe, or they just look at you with pity.

And then they tell you that you just said the same thing five minutes ago, but you've forgotten. And as we begin to lose more and more of our joy, we are more and more in danger of being like Israel in the Old Testament.

[19:02] Subconsciously, as life goes on and trials and difficulties wear us down, we become a little bitter, feeling that God has offended us, he has deprived us of what he owes us, that he's robbed us of years of our lives.

We say to him as we get older, you're not good. Look at all these difficulties I'm having, look at my body. But it is an unchanging truth that God is always good.

Even in trials, he gives us joy. It is in tough times that we learn of the joys of being content, whether we have plenty, or are in need, like Paul in Philippians 4, 11-12, or treasure what suffering can produce in us, character and hope, as in Romans 5, verse 3-4.

That's what the teacher wants for us. He wants us to rejoice in this life, whatever age we are, or whatever circumstance we're in.

What he wants, verse 10, is to banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body. But what is the pathway to such joy?

[20:26] If it is not found by rooting our joy in the things we can do while we are still young, what is it to be rooted in? Well, the teacher says it has to be rooted in something deeper.

And that brings us to his second command. Remember your creator before it's too late. Remember your creator before it's too late.

The preacher's tone is urgent here. Remember your creator. That's where your joy is to be found in. And notice, it's not just remember God, but your creator.

Because God isn't just the king who rules us. He's the creator who made us. He's the creator who made the sunsets for you to enjoy, who's given us the gift of words for us to love others and to be loved by others with, who's given us wealth and possessions and enables us to enjoy them.

He says that back in Ecclesiastes chapter 5. He's the creator who has made each of us individually and lovingly and knows how we are all wired.

[21:46] Remember him. It's something we have to actively do. It's something we have to be deliberate about. And three times in 12 verses 1 to 8, he uses the word before.

in verses 1, 2, and 6. Now, clearly we should remember our creator at all times. But it is during a specific time that we must remember in particular.

When is that? Well, look at verse 1. Before the days of trouble. Now, what is that? Look at verse 2. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain. The preacher, utilizing apocalyptic language, is deliberately evoking a very sad picture.

It's a picture of judgment, of creation gone wrong, of creation not working the way it's supposed to. And as we'll soon see, it's a picture of how our created bodies age and decay and no longer work the way it's supposed to.

[23:10] It's a sign that our eventual passing is not far off. It speaks of the painful existence of death in this world. The dawn of life spoken of earlier is gone.

You could try to disguise its effects, buy anti-aging creams, travel the world, exercise more, and the skies might be clear for a while.

But it's not long before the clouds return. It's a sad picture. So remember your Creator before such a time comes.

Deepen the joy that comes from knowing God, that will never be taken away even when we grow old and our body breaks down. And the teacher is only getting started.

For the rest of our passage, he paints an incredibly gloomy picture of old age and death. Let me read to you again verses 3 to 4.

[ 24 : 18 ] Remember your Creator verse 3, when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim, when the doors to the street are closed, and the sound of grinding fades, when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint.

Now some people have read these verses allegorically, verses 3 to 4 is said to represent an aging body in terms of a house.

The keepers are the hands that tremble, the strong men are his legs, unable to bear the weight of his body anymore, the grinders are his teeth, of which they are few, and so he cannot really chill. Those who look through the window represent his failing eyes, the doors on the street represent his ears that no longer hear so well, the singing represents his voice, which is now weak, and so on and so forth.

Ten years ago, when I preached on this passage, I wasn't completely convinced by that interpretation, although some of it works quite well, that the grinders on one level refer to our teeth seems plausible enough, whereas other things like the doors being ears seems a little bit more of a stretch.

[ 25 : 59 ] So I'm not still completely convinced that it's allegorical, but what I would say is that it's best to look at the picture being painted here in verses 3 onwards in its entirety.

And try not to press the details too much to say that, oh, this definitely equals to that, although clearly there is a richness of metaphor and figurative language. Now, what is more important here, I think, is the mood, the feel, the outlook that the preacher wants to convey.

And the picture being painted here is that of a ghost town. There is terror, verse 3, as the keepers of the house, its servants tremble at what is to come.

Verse 5 continues this thought. They are afraid of hikes and of dangers in the streets. That is, the citizens of this ghost town, they have no sense of security.

Every danger, big or small, is magnified. There is lethargy, back to verse 3, as a place once full of activity, it no longer has any strong man left.

[ 27 : 18 ] The workers of the mill, its grinders, have closed their doors. They can only look through the windows with despair and nostalgia at what used to be.

There is a lifelessness, an eerie silence, verse 4, as even in your sleeplessness, only the sound of birds can be heard.

And in fact, if you go onto the streets, verse 5, all you can see are mourners going about in the street. Terror, lethargy, despair, nostalgia, lifelessness, silence.

Silence. Well, that's what it's like when you are old and aware that death is just round the corner and that your days of youth are hanel.

In verse 5, the preacher starts to move away from the imagery of the ghost town to that of nature. the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred.

[ 28 : 37 ] Now, here the metaphors are more straightforward. Almond trees, you see, are blossoms, they burst out as reddish pink flowers and they turn snowy white before they fall.

And so OH, no matter what society you are from, is often marked, by that distinctive white hair. That is, if there's any hair left.

The grasshopper that drags itself along refers to the slow, stiff walk of an old person, no longer as spry as he was in his youth.

The phrase desire fails is literally the caper berry shrivels up, which is not reflected in our English translation. Now, the caper berry is an Afro-sodiac, so something that boosts your sexual desire.

And so the teacher is saying your libido is no longer what it used to be, your sexual desire fails. And don't bother with the tongkat ali, it's not going to help.

[ 29 : 47 ] love. And all this is leading to one destination, verses 6 and 7. Remember him before the silver cord is severed and the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Four different pictures, all pointing to the same stark reality, brokenness and death. You see, the teacher knows.

He knows that when you are young, you don't think about death. You can't imagine it coming. But the teacher says one day you will get to the age your grandpa or your grandma is now.

It will come and it will come faster than you think. So don't delay. Remember your creator before it's too late.

Root your joy in him, not in anything else. And that is the call to all of God's people throughout the ages.

[ 31 : 10 ] When God saved his people from slavery in Egypt, he made sure they celebrated the Passover to remember God's rescue. As Moses stands before the Israelites just before they entered the promised land in Deuteronomy, he calls on them to remember how God led them through the wilderness.

When Joshua readies the people to enter the promised land, he calls on them to remember God's promise that God is going to provide them a place of rest.

And the night before he died, Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. He breaks the bread and he says, this is my body, do this in remembrance of me.

He calls on us, his people, to remember him, the good shepherd who allowed his youthful, 33-year-old body to be broken on the cross so that we might have life to the full, so that we might not just rejoice in this life, but in the next.

In the context of suffering and being faithful to the gospel, Paul calls on us to remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.

[ 32 : 41 ] Remember when you are tempted to chase after youthful passions. Remember when you can't seem to maintain self-control. Remember when everyone else is losing their heads.

Because God remembers you. In Genesis 30 verse 22, we're told God remembered Rachel in her moment of crisis.

In Exodus 2 24, we're told God remembered his promises to the Israelite slaves as they cried out to him. Psalm 98 verse 3 says he remembered his love and faithfulness to Israel.

And when the Bible says God remembered something, it is not implying forgetfulness. God always remembers. It's part of his nature.

But when that expression is used, it simply means that he's acting on his faithfulness. His caring nature is being demonstrated.

[ 33 : 45 ] This is who he is. As the prophet Isaiah tells us on the screen, can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born?

Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are ever before me.

God is God and because we know those hands were nailed to the cross, we can be absolutely certain God doesn't forget us.

In John 10 verse 3, we're told that Jesus calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. See, if you belong to Jesus, he never ever forgets you.

He's your creator, Colossians 1 tells us, but more than that, he's your redeemer, he's your shepherd. He knows your name and he calls on you today to look forward.

[ 34 : 53 ] That is a little different from the teacher. You see, the teacher doesn't have a developed theology of the afterlife. He knows in verse 5 that man is going to his eternal home.

And verse 7, the spirit returns to God who gave it. But that is all he can see. But for us who know Jesus and who love him, we see much clearer.

Our outer bodies are wasting away day by day. Every day is a day closer to death.

Ageing is. But our inner selves are being renewed day by day. And every day is a day closer to seeing Jesus face to face.

And that is encouragement for all of us and especially those of us who are old already. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 17, this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal wake of glory beyond all comparison.

[ 36 : 16 ] So yes, today we groan. But he goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 5, we are always of good courage for we have God's sure promises.

And while we still wait for our resurrection bodies, our aim is to please him. We can delight ourselves in him, rejoice in the life that he has given us, knowing that the death of Jesus has made

us new creations.

And so that means, you know what, whether you are 20 or 60 today, you know what you're going to do with your life.

You know the answer to that question. God's word tells you, remember your creator, rejoice in your life, and live like the new creation people we are, while we wait for our eyes to one day see Jesus, the light of the world, the son who has rescued us.

let's pray. Father, your word reminds us today of the reality of living in this time-bound world, a world where our bodies and our minds are in danger of breaking down, where the experiences of Ecclesiastes chapter 12 can sometimes be all too real.

[ 37 : 57 ] And so Father, we pray that you help us to remember our creator this morning.

Remember the one who gave us life, and not just life, but new life, life that is found in Jesus.

So help us to remember him, to live for him, to rejoice in him, and rejoice in the good gifts he's given us. All this we pray in the name of Christ.

Amen.