

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*When Our Bodies Betray Us.*"

I have to give my sister-in-law, Molly, credit for this title. As many of you know she went through quite a few physical trials over the last few years. We were having a conversation this week about our bodies breaking down, and she said, "The phrase I kept telling myself was, 'You are betraying me.'"

I thought that would make a great title for the sermon, so I asked her and she gave me permission to use it.

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Go ahead and open your Bibles to **Ecclesiastes 12**. The easiest way to find it is to turn to Psalms, and then after Psalms is Proverbs and then after Proverbs is Ecclesiastes.

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It sure is a blessing to be back with all of you again. I have missed you. I've missed being behind the pulpit. This was the longest season I've went without sharing God's word with anyone except my family and I missed it immensely.

I kept thinking about Jeremiah when he didn't share God's Word. He said...

**Jeremiah 20:9 There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.**

So I am excited to be able to preach to you again.

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We were in a series on wisdom and we will return to it...I already had one of the sermons done for it. That's the Sunday I was going to preach, but told Pastor Nathan on Saturday night that I might not be able to make it. That Saturday and Sunday were the first and second days that I spent completely in bed.

Those two days were followed by a few more weeks of lying flat on my back. Literally. I couldn't even lie on my side.

When you lie on your back all day you have a lot of time to reflect. I started reflecting on what I thought God was teaching me, and I decided to write it down so I wouldn't forget it. Then I thought it might be good to share those thoughts with you, because this has been such a trying year for so many people. I also thought that this would flow well from Jamison's two recent sermons on trials. If you have not listened to those I would highly encourage you to do so.

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What I would like to do this morning is read through the verses, give you an understanding of them, and then share the application.

**Ecclesiastes 12:1 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";**

We will talk more about remembering our Creator after we get through the verses.

For now I want you to know Solomon is talking about getting older, but when he says **evil days come**, he doesn't mean days filled with wickedness.

Instead, he means difficult days, or days of trouble, which is how it's translated in some Bibles, referring to the days when you get older that can be filled with physical trials, pain, disabilities, sicknesses, or handicaps. They can be so difficult it says you find no pleasure in them.

Look at verse two...

**Ecclesiastes 12:2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,**

Solomon compares old age with the gloom of a dark and rainy day. The idea is the clouds cloud, or darken life's pleasures so much you find no enjoyment in anything.

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Now in the following verses Solomon provides one of the most imaginative descriptions of old age and death anywhere in Scripture. Commentators don't agree on all the details, but they do agree on the main idea that there is a house that represents our bodies and it's falling apart until it finally turns to dust...like us.

This is a fitting metaphor, because elsewhere in Scripture our bodies are compared with houses, and the destruction of those houses is compared with death:

- **Job 4:19 How much more those who dwell in HOUSES OF CLAY, whose foundation is IN THE DUST, who are crushed like the moth.**
- **2 Corinthians 5:1 If the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**

As we read these verses, if you write your Bible, I can tell you what to circle, and tell you what the metaphors mean.

First one...

**Ecclesiastes 12:3a in the day when the keepers of the house tremble,**

Any guesses?

You can circle the words **keepers of the house** and write, "Arms and legs."

Our arms and legs protect our bodies, or houses, and as we get older they start trembling.

**Ecclesiastes 12:3b and the strong men are bent,**

This is pretty straightforward. You can circle the word bent and write, "Osteoporosis."

People hunch over as they get older. This happens even with the strongest men.

**Ecclesiastes 12:3c and the grinders cease because they are few,**

Any guesses?

You can circle the word grinders and write, “Teeth.” They become fewer because they start falling out.

**Ecclesiastes 12:3d and those who look through the windows are dimmed,**

Any guesses?

You can circle the words, “Those who look through the windows,” and write, “Eyes.”

Our eyes are dimmed in that we don’t see as well.

**Ecclesiastes 12:4a and the doors on the street are shut—**

Any guesses?

You can circle the word doors and write, “Mouths.”

Other verses compare our mouths with doors...

**Psalms 141:3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the DOOR OF MY LIPS!**

Older people might not talk as much, or might not have as much to say.

**Ecclesiastes 12:4b when the sound of the grinding is low,**

Again, this refers to our teeth, and the grinding is low because older people don’t eat as much.

**Ecclesiastes 12:4c and one rises up at the sound of a bird,**

You can’t sleep well. The slightest sound wakes you up.

**Ecclesiastes 12:4d and all the daughters of song are brought low—**

The sound of singing is brought low because you don’t hear as well.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5a they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way;**

Older people are afraid of higher places.

**Terrors are in the way** refer to dangerous streets, as it's translated in some Bibles. Older people are afraid of traveling. They know they can't escape if they are attacked or robbed. This isn't much of a threat in our day, but in the ancient world travel was dangerous. Think of the parable of the good Samaritan and the man who was robbed on the road.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5b the almond tree blossoms,**

Any guesses?

You can circle these words and write, "White hair."

When almond trees blossom they turn white, referring to the development of gray or white hair.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5c the grasshopper drags itself along,**

You move slowly like a grasshopper at the end of the summer season, because it worked so hard preparing for the winter.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5d and desire fails,**

You lack the desire to do certain things. Most commentaries point out that physical intimacy is in view, which diminishes with old age.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5e because man is going to his eternal home,**

We are getting ready to leave this life for the next.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5f and the mourners go about the streets—**

Referring to our funerals.

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While we know we're talking about death in the next verse, there are different opinions about the meaning of the specific metaphors. I will give you my best guess after looking at multiple commentaries.

**Ecclesiastes 12:6a before the silver cord is snapped,**

This could refer to the spinal cord breaking.

**Ecclesiastes 12:6a or the golden bowl is broken,**

This could refer to the brain stopping.

**Ecclesiastes 12:6b or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain,**

This could refer to the heart failing, because we know elsewhere in Scripture the heart is associated with a fountain: **Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.**

**Ecclesiastes 12:6c or the wheel broken at the cistern,**

This could refer to the veins and arteries that go out from the heart the way spokes go out from the center of a wheel.

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Even if the interpretation of some of these metaphors is incorrect, we can still tell he's talking about death and glean important truths...and this brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson 1: our body (part one) is fragile.**

Everything Solomon mentioned is fragile: a silver cord, a golden bowl, a pitcher, and a wheel.

And our bodies are fragile.

Fragile was the word I kept repeating to myself over the last month. I just felt fragile:

- Whenever the kids came in to see me, it was always like, "Be careful with Daddy."
- When I was able to stand up and walk around the house, it was like, "Be careful with Daddy."
- Last Sunday was my first back to church and many of you wonderfully came up to give me a hug, but I could tell you were doing it very carefully. It was like, "Be careful with Pastor Scott. He is fragile."

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When Solomon says to remember your Creator in the days of your youth, he is giving some great advice because that is what allows old age to be bearable.

He knows that our bodies are fragile - and as he says in verse two, the painful days are ahead - so we should lay a good spiritual foundation when we're young to be prepared for the difficulty ahead.

**Lesson 1: our body (part two) is valuable.**

Solomon describes the destruction of four objects. They might not look valuable to us because we are so wealthy, but in the ancient world in which Solomon wrote this, only wealthy people would have such costly materials...such as **silver cords** or **golden bowls**.

Since they represent our bodies, Solomon is saying our bodies are valuable.

**Lesson 1: our body (part three) can break suddenly and unexpectedly.**

When I was looking at these verbs I realized how fitting they are: snap, break, shatter. It's not pleasant to think about, but they describe what can happen to our bodies as we age.

Even if we are healthy at this moment, each day that passes we are one day closer to something snapping, breaking, or shattering.

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The other application is...

These objects all break suddenly and unexpectedly, and since they're metaphors for death, they communicate how death can come suddenly and unexpectedly.<sup>i</sup>

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Look at verse seven...

**Ecclesiastes 12:7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.**

There were metaphors up to this point, but now Solomon couldn't be clearer.

Two different directions: our bodies go down to the ground and our spirits go up to God.<sup>ii</sup>

Once the spirit leaves the body, the body begins to decay and eventually turns to dust. Just like **Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for YOU ARE DUST, AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.**"

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I want to share something with you from when Katie and I were going over the sermon...

She said, "This is pretty much the most discouraging message ever."

To be honest, I agree with her. I get. It sounds very discouraging.

But guess what?

It's true! We get older, our bodies break down, and we die.

I know this doesn't go really well with health and wealth and prosperity preaching, but it's in the Bible, it's true, and God wants us thinking about it, because it's going to happen, so we should think about...and hear preaching about it.

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Now look back with me at verse one. I think we can find application better after covering the other verses...

**Ecclesiastes 12:1 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,**

We would probably expect Solomon to tell ALL people to remember their Creator, because it's important for everyone to remember their Creator. But instead, he says young people.

Why?

Well, the obvious reason is it is easy to forget your Creator in the days of your youth.

But why is it easy to forget your Creator in the days of your youth?

This brings us to Lesson 2...

**Lesson 2: it is easy to forget our Creator in the days of our youth because (part one) everything is working well.**

When you're young you typically don't have the sort of physical problems that Solomon describes in these verses that older people have that can cause them to seek the Lord in prayer.

We don't like having physical problems, but one of the wonderful benefits is they cause us to turn to the Lord. When I am weak then I am strong. Few things cause us to pray more than health problems.

So Solomon says remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before your body starts breaking down.

**Lesson 2: it is easy to forget our Creator in the days of our youth because (part two) meeting Him seems far away.**

I was probably in the best shape of my life when I was in ROTC in college. As you can guess most of the other cadets who were in ROTC with me were also in very good shape.

One day an older officer was talking to us and he said, "When you're young you never think about dying." He knew we were young, fit, and healthy, and death was the furthest thing from our minds. He was right. Then he said, "When you get older you start thinking about death more often." He was right about that as well.

Older people think about death much more than younger people, which means they think about their Creator more than younger people think about their Creator. While that's good for older people, it is not so good for younger people.

We should spend our lives, not just our older years, thinking about our Creator. Many people have gotten older, looked back and realized they forgot about their Creator for much of their life. Then they wish they would've done what Solomon said and remembered Him in the days of their youth.

**Lesson 2: it is easy to forget our Creator in the days of our youth because (part three) of the world.**

When you are young it's easy to get caught up in everything the world offers. Being young is exciting, but the excitement can become a barrier to closeness with God. Young people can be more focused on the physical and temporal of this life than the spiritual and eternal of the next life.

So Solomon says remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Doing so will keep you from the world.

### Lesson 3: remember your Creator in the days of your youth before your body betrays you.

I would like to make a strong appeal to the young people here...

God has given you time, energy, strength, vitality, intellect, desire, passion, talent. Basically, He's given you the very things that these verses say you will lose over time as you get older.

So make the most of these things available to you while you are young and you still can.

- When you have the energy...
- When you don't have the limitations you will have when you are older...
- When everything is working well for you...

When your sciatica doesn't have you lying on your back all day in bed.

Don't waste what God is giving you on worldly and meaningless activities and pursuits.

You only have these gifts, talents, and strengths for a limited amount of time, because they are going to diminish as you get older. So use them to their fullest when you are young.

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Tragically there are many people who come to the end of their lives and regret that they wasted so many years NOT serving God.

Do you know one of the best examples, if not the best example, not just in all Scripture, but in all of history of doing exactly what Solomon is warning against?

Solomon!

It is not a coincidence that he is the one who wrote this.

God wrote Scripture through human authors, but He often used the human author's strengths, weaknesses, and experiences, to give them credibility and further bolster the points they are making.

Most people agree that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. He knew better than anyone what it felt like to reach the end of his life after squandering what God had given him. He is one of the best examples of wasting those important strong, healthy years on pleasure and worldliness.

So he reaches out to young people and says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth so that you will not get older and have the same regrets that I have."

The young people here should read this account and say, “Since I know that the difficult days are coming, and I won’t have this strength and vitality forever, I better lay a strong spiritual foundation during the good days when I’m young.”

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Look at the last verse for this morning...

**Ecclesiastes 12:8 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.**

The book closes where it began. In chapter 1 verse two this is exactly what Solomon said. Now he repeats it. It basically serves as bookends on Solomon’s view of life.

But let me be clear about something, because if you don’t understand this one point about Ecclesiastes you will completely misunderstand the book...

It is a record of man’s life without God. This is what life looks like when you live far from God like Solomon did for many years. Of course it’s going to sound depressing, discouraging, and empty. Or another way to say it is: of course it’s going to sound like vanity of vanities.

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I know it’s been somewhat discouraging up to this point. Let me encourage you. Turn to **1 Corinthians 15:58**.

**1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that IN THE LORD YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN.**

Solomon found life to be vanity of vanities, but Paul shows the other side of this.

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

**Lesson 4: Life with Christ is not vain**

Your bulletin might say something different. I thought it’s better this way, but I didn’t change it before the bulletins were printed.

Yes, life without Christ is vain, but life with Christ is not vain no matter what we experience.

I like that Paul says labor. If he said all of your fun, or enjoyment, or hobbies, are not in vain, you would say, “Of course they are not in vain, they are enjoyable.”

But what are we most afraid of being in vain?

Our labor. Our service. Our sacrifice.

Paul says it’s not in vain.

Too take this back to or bodies breaking down:

- All our suffering
- All our pain and trials
- All our perseverance

Is not in vain if we're in Christ.

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Here's one other thought...

As I read the book of Ecclesiastes I see a man who is at best discouraged, and at worst depressed and hopeless.

Why is that?

Most all commentators agree Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes at the end of his life.

- It's the record of a person living without God, and if you live without God when you reach the end of your life all of your good years are behind you. You have nothing to look forward to in the future.
- But for the Christian it is the opposite. When we come to the end of our life, all of our best years are ahead of us. We have everything to look forward to in the future.

Everything was unpleasant to Solomon, but it doesn't have to be unpleasant to us:

- It was unpleasant to him because he only thought about and lived for the next life.
- If we only think about and live for this life it is unpleasant for us as well

But if we are in Christ and we live for and think about the next life we can experience peace and joy even when our bodies break down.

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Let me close with this this quote...

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living sacrifices."

Our bodies seem to betray us, but we can be encouraged that we are using them up as living sacrifices for God's glory.

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<sup>i</sup> A doctor asked me one time, "What is the first sign of a heart attack?" I said I didn't know and he said, "A heart attack." In other words there is no sign.

<sup>ii</sup> The world might define that different ways, such as the heart stopping or brain waves ceasing, but scripturally speaking death is when the spirit leaves the body:

- **Luke 23:46 Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" In having said this he breathed his last.**

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- **Acts 7:59** And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”
  - **James 2:26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.