

# **Living a Meaningful Life**

## **Remember Your Creator**

*Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

December 5, 2010

# Remember Your Creator

## Scripture

In his quest to find out how to live a meaningful life the writer of Ecclesiastes urges his readers to remember their Creator before it is too late in order that they may truly enjoy life.

Let us read Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8:

<sup>7</sup> Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

<sup>12:1</sup> 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”; <sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, <sup>3</sup> in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, <sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— <sup>5</sup> they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— <sup>6</sup> before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, <sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the

**spirit returns to God who gave it. <sup>8</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. (Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8)**

## **Introduction**

There once was an old man who loved to play golf. But he was approaching eighty years old, and his vision wasn't very good anymore. He always had partners with him when he went out to play so they could watch his ball and tell him where it went.

One day his golf partners did not show up to play golf with him. It was a beautiful day for golf, and as he waited at the clubhouse, he got more and more agitated that he wasn't going to be able to play a round of golf that day.

After a while another old man in the clubhouse saw him, came over, and asked, "What's wrong?"

The first man explained his dilemma: "I was really looking forward to playing golf today. But I don't see very well anymore, so I need someone to watch where the ball lands after I hit it."

Now the second old man was even older than the first man.

"That's no problem," he said. "I'll be glad to ride around with you. I've still got twenty/twenty vision. I can see like a hawk. You just hit the ball, and I'll watch to see where it lands."

"Great!" said the first old man.

So they went out to the first tee. The first old man put down his ball, and smacked it straight down the fairway. He turned to his partner, and asked, "Did you see it?"

"I saw it all the way until it stopped rolling."

"Well, where did it go?"

The older man paused for a moment. And then he said, "I forgot."<sup>1</sup>

We all know that our memories deteriorate as we get older. Sometimes, it is simply humorous. At other times our forgetfulness is not really a serious problem, because it does not really impact

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<sup>1</sup> Tommy Nelson, *A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2005), 173-174.

the truly meaningful things of life.

But there is a very serious danger of forgetting God. When God brought his people Israel into the prosperity of the Promised Land, he warned them specifically not to forget him. Listen to this clear warning of God in Deuteronomy 8:2–19, “*And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, . . . testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. . . . For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing. . . . And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. . . . Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments. . . . lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God. . . . You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth. . . . And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.*”

The fact is that Israel often forgot God. And so do we.

That is why the message of the writer of Ecclesiastes, known as Qoheleth or the Preacher, is so important. He urges his readers to remember their Creator before it is too late in order that they may truly enjoy life.

### Lesson

Similarly, in today’s lesson, we are urged to remember our Creator before it is too late in order that we may truly enjoy life.

The Preacher does so with a number of exhortations.

## I. The First Exhortation (11:7-8a)

The first exhortation is in Ecclesiastes 11:8a: **“So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all.”**

The Preacher is exhorting **a person who lives many years to rejoice in them all.**

In the previous verse, the Preacher said, **“Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun”** (11:7). Some people are surprised to hear the Preacher say these words because they picture him to be so pessimistic. However, he is not. He is basically saying: Life is good! It is sweet! It is pleasant! Enjoy life!

That is why he gives the first exhortation in verse 8a: **“So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all.”** Enjoy life! Some people can't wait for the weekend so that they can enjoy life. Other people can't wait for their annual vacation so that they can enjoy life. And still other people can't wait for their retirement so that they can enjoy life. The Preacher urges us not to waste a single moment of any day, but to enjoy each one of our days: **“So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them *all*.”**

## II. The Second Exhortation (11:8b)

The second exhortation is in Ecclesiastes 11:8b: **“. . . but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many.”**

Here the Preacher is saying that a day is coming when we will die. And **the days of darkness will be many.**

The implication is that we are to remember that a day is coming when we will die, and that we are to live life to the full while we are alive. The time to live life to the full is now!

And then the Preacher concludes, at the end of verse 8c, **“All that comes is vanity.”** Literally, he says, “All that comes is a vapor.” Life is like a vapor, a puff of smoke. It is fleeting. You will be in **the days of darkness** before you know it.

Therefore, don't waste time. Enjoy life!

### III. The Third Exhortation (11:9a)

The third exhortation is in Ecclesiastes 11:9a: **“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.”**”

Now the Preacher turns his attention to young people. He urges young people to **rejoice** in their **youth**.

Young people, don't wait until you are old in order to enjoy life! Don't wait until retirement. Don't wait until you are married. Don't wait until you are finished college. Enjoy life now!

### IV. The Fourth Exhortation (11:9b)

To make his point even more forcefully, the Preacher adds another exhortation in Ecclesiastes 11:9b: **“Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.”**

That is, follow your desire! Enjoy what is presently before your eyes!

I love the way Augustine put it. “Love God. And do as you please,” he said. In other words, your first priority is to love God. And as you love him, you will want to do whatever pleases him. And so you will do what you please, but your pleasure will be to please God.

Now, lest you think that this exhortation is without guidelines, the Preacher adds the next exhortation.

### V. The Fifth Exhortation (11:9c)

The fifth exhortation is in Ecclesiastes 11:9c: **“But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”**

The Preacher has commanded full rejoicing and full enjoyment of life. Is he now putting a damper on our rejoicing? The answer is, “No.” But at the same time he does not want us to look for joy in directions that can only lead to pain and sorrow. He does not

want us to seek enjoyment in being promiscuous, in doing drugs, in watching harmful movies, and so on. Sin is always enjoyable, but only for a season.

So, the Preacher reminds us, as he did before (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:17 and 5:6), that God will judge us for our actions. We are accountable to God for all our thoughts, words, and deeds. In other words, the Preacher commands (as one commentator put it), “responsible pleasure, not license to exploit others or squander our own bodies and abilities.”<sup>2</sup> Or, to put it another way, knowing that God will judge us to direct the way in which we enjoy life.

Moreover, we are to be aware of taking the opposite view. We must not become so morose and somber and serious about life that we suck all the joy out of it. That is wrong, and is just as displeasing to God. Another commentator said that “human beings are supposed to enjoy life to the full because that is their divinely assigned portion, and God calls one into account for failure to enjoy.”<sup>3</sup> The implication is that God will also judge us if we do not sufficiently enjoy his gifts to us.

## VI. The Sixth Exhortation (11:10)

The sixth exhortation is in Ecclesiastes 11:10: **“Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”**

The Preacher is again saying that life is fleeting. Before you know it, the dawn of life turns into the dusk of life. Therefore, while you still can, **“Remove vexation from your heart.”** **“Vexation”** is “irritation, or annoyance.” It is something that prevents a person from enjoying life to the full.

Physical pain can also prevent joyful living. That is why the Preacher says, **“And put away pain from your body.”** It is okay

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 222.

<sup>3</sup> Choon Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 371.

to take measures to heal our pain. When something is physically wrong, it is okay to get healed up so that you can enjoy life.

So, while you are young, you should as much as possible banish anxiety from your mind and put away pain from your body. Let nothing diminish your joy.

## VII. The Seventh Exhortation (12:1-8)

The seventh exhortation is found in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8.

*First, notice the exhortation itself.* The exhortation is in verse 1a: **“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.”**

The Preacher uses the word **remember** because we are in danger of forgetting. And this is perhaps especially so for those who are young. Young people have a tendency to think of themselves rather than others. And young people have a tendency to think of themselves rather than God.

Now, lest you think that the Preacher only has pre-teens or teenagers in mind, let me remind you that a young person in Biblical times was often what we call “middle-aged.” Paul wrote to Timothy, who was probably in his 30s at the time, in 1 Timothy 4:12, “Let no one despise you for your *youth*, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” So, these words of the Preacher apply particularly to people who are “middle-aged” and younger.

So, how do you remember your Creator? I believe commentator Sidney Greidanus hit the nail on the head, when he said, “To remember your Creator is more than to recall that there is a Creator, more also than to think about him from time to time. To remember your Creator means to bring to mind daily what your Creator has done for you and to act on this knowledge. To remember your Creator is to make God central in your life and to focus your life on doing his will.”<sup>4</sup>

But what is the reason for the exhortation?

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<sup>4</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 289.

*Second, observe the reason for the exhortation.* The Preacher hammers home the point that we are to remember our Creator *before it is too late*. Notice how the Preacher uses the word “**before**” three times, in verses 1, 2, and 6. This has the effect of repeating three times, “Remember your Creator.”

So, notice verse 1b, Remember your Creator “***before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’***”

Verse 2, Remember your Creator “***before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.***”

And verse 6a, Remember your Creator “***before the silver cord is snapped.***” (This is a picture of death.)

The days are coming when it will be difficult, if not impossible, to remember your Creator. As you age, as you draw near to the end of your life, as you draw near to death, you will find it difficult to remember your Creator. So, remember him now!

*Third, let’s see the Preacher’s description of old age.* The Preacher describes poetically what happens in old age.

Beginning in verse 3 the Preacher likens the body of an old man to a crumbling house.

So, he says in verse 3a, “**. . . in the day when the keepers of the house tremble.**” This is referring to arms. Over the years the man’s hands have kept him and guarded him. They have fed him. They have protected him. Now, in his old age, they tremble. They cannot work for the old man anymore, let alone defend him.

Verse 3b, “**. . . and the strong men are bent.**” The strong men that have carried the old man’s body are his legs. In old age they can barely carry his weight anymore. They bend. The old man becomes bowlegged.

Verse 3c, “**. . . and the grinders cease because they are few.**” This is a reference to the old man’s teeth. In those days they did not have the kind of modern dental care that we have today. And so teeth that decayed were pulled out. It was not uncommon for old people to have very few teeth in their mouths.

Verse 3d, “. . . **and those who look through the windows are dimmed.**” Now the eyes are mentioned. Again, they did not have opticians, and as their eyes weakened, they were not able to see well.

Verse 4a, “. . . **and the doors on the street are shut.**” This refers to the ears. Shutting the doors meant that the noise stopped. Now the old man is said to be hard of hearing.

Verse 4b, “. . . **when the sound of the grinding is low.**” This is again a reference to the teeth, particularly to chewing food. The man has to chew soft food. He cannot chew crunchy food that is loud and noisy.

Verse 4c, “. . . **and one rises up at the sound of a bird.**” The old man goes to bed early and wakes up as soon as the birds start singing. Or, alternately, the old man does not sleep well, and is woken easily whenever there is a sound.

Verse 4d, “. . . **and all the daughters of song are brought low.**” The old man cannot sing anymore. All tones are indistinct. He tends to hear things in a low monotone.

Verse 5a, “. . . **they are afraid also of what is high.**” The old man has become afraid of heights. He does not want to climb stairs anymore because he is afraid that he might fall.

Verse 5b, “. . . **and terrors are in the way.**” “The way” is a reference to a road. An old man does not like even walking in the road because it is uneven, and he is afraid that he might fall.

Verse 5c, “. . . **the almond tree blossoms.**” The almond tree is one of the first to blossom in Palestine. From a distance it looks like a human head with white hair. The old man’s hair has turned snowy white.

Verse 5d, “. . . **the grasshopper drags itself along.**” The grasshopper used to jump about with ease. But now it “drags itself along.” The old man once moved about with ease. But now he drags himself along.

Verse 5e, “. . . **and desire fails.**” The old man’s desire for life fails.

Verse 5f, “. . . **because man is going to his eternal home,**

**and the mourners go about the streets.”** Death is coming. Soon, the professional mourners will go about the streets and begin their wailing. The old man is dying.

*Fourth, let's see the Preacher's description of death.* The Preacher describes poetically what happens when a person dies.

He says that we are to remember our Creator **“before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken”** (12:6a-b). He compares human life to a golden bowl that is attached to a silver cord. **The silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is broken.**

Verse 6c, **“... or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain.”** Death is like a pitcher that breaks when it is drawn up from a well.

Verse 6d, **“... or the wheel broken at the cistern.”** This well is more sophisticated, in that it has a wheel. But it is also broken, and that is a picture of death.

Verse 7a, **“... and the dust returns to the earth as it was.”** We die, and our bodies decay and become as dust.

Verse 7b, **“... and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”** The immortal part of man, the spirit, returns to God who gave it.

*And fifth, notice the Preacher's conclusion.* The Preacher's conclusion is in Ecclesiastes 12:8: **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.”**

Another word for **“vanity”** is “fleeting.” And so the Preacher is saying in effect, “Fleeting, fleeting, everything is fleeting!” He is urging people to remember their Creator before it is too late.

## Conclusion

Israel constantly forgot God.

We constantly forget God.

Jesus commands us to remember his finished work on the cross. He did so in the Lord's Supper when he told us to eat and drink “in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). So, let us not forget God, but remember our Creator so that we may truly enjoy life. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the book of Ecclesiastes. Thank you for the teaching of the Preacher.

Help us not to remember our Creator before it is too late in order that we may truly enjoy life.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, remember your Creator before it is too late in order that you may truly enjoy life!