

Ecclesiastes 12
Be Young, Enjoy Life, and Be Godly

Two contrasting perspectives on living and dying that I read about last week...

<http://worldandeverything.org/2018/05/andree-seu-peterson-the-new-math/> 5/14/18

ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON: *I have a different concept of time than I did a year ago. It's the new math of my life, unexpected perquisite of this unwelcome gift that keeps giving. The death of a spouse, one learns, is a package that comes full of surprises released one by one.*

The lesson of this year is finite numbers: There is a finite number of rainbows you will see in your lifetime, a finite number of full moons, and surprisingly few after all. A finite number of times you will walk into your husband's study and choose to stop and say "I love you," or just brush past for the book you were after.

At first after he left, I was desperate to live longer, into my 70s at least, just to have a chance to make up for the unkindnesses of the first 47 years. But almost immediately I was suspicious of that math—a little too cut and dry.

St. Paul tells of a more encouraging math, an alien algebra; Christ's death in exchange for my sin. "The free gift is not like the offense. If by the one man's offense death reigned, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounds to many." Glorious asymmetry.

Who's to say that 80 mediocre years is better than the 46 my husband had, with that merciful four-month season of "making every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him"? (II Peter 3)

What mathematician will produce the proofs for that? Jesus died at 33. Where is the man who will say, "Pity he died too soon"?

Dear Lord, better a short life that's lived to thee, than four score of merely marking time.

*I often walk through a two-hundred-year-old cemetery and read dates on headstones. **There seems very little advantage, a century later, to having been the last one dead.***

VS

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2065254,00.html>

Cenegenics Medical Institute, "the world's largest AGE-management practice," in Las Vegas...

Amortality — the term I coined for the burgeoning trend of living agelessly —(THEY ARE TRYING HARD TO BE THE LAST ONE DEAD)

The defining characteristic of amortals is that they live the same way, at the same pitch, doing and consuming much the same things, from their late teens right up until death. They rarely ask themselves if their behavior is age-appropriate, because that concept has little meaning for them. They don't structure their lives around the inevitability of death, because they prefer to ignore it. Instead, they continue to chase aspirations and covet new goods and services. Amortals assume all options are always open.

Ecclesiastes tells us that the "amortals" are in for a rude awakening.

REVIEW

The lead voice of this Book of Ecclesiastes, called himself the Preacher and he has a thesis which is:

Life is empty; life is vain; life is meaningless; life is futile; life is frustrating; life is trivial; life is without satisfaction, and it goes off script.

When that happens people try to solve the problem or fill the void with all sorts of things – work, pleasure, philosophy, pragmatism, entertainment...

Those attempts to import meaning don't work.

The wisest thing you can do is to realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know. - David Gibson

If wisdom has any power to protect us, it is in admitting our own limitations and vulnerabilities.

Michael Eaton...

Be bold (11:1-6) or better, be generous!

Be joyful (11:7-10).

Be godly (12:1-14).

Key to Godliness v. 1-8 Serve God early and Often (like voting in Chicago)

1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; 2 before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; 3 in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; 4 and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.

5 Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. 6 *Remember Him* before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; 7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

As you approach life in your youth remember your CREATOR, before things fade and fall apart.

As you set out in life REMEMBER that you owe your life to your Creator – you are not autonomous.

YOUR CREATOR – He made us and knows what is best for us. He made us, and we are not our own – Ps. 100:3.

The Creator is the one who has made a time for all things and seasons (3:1ff) He sets the pattern and framework of our existence, and he will call the past to account – 3:15.

Remember as creator = remember His awesome power, His absolute control, His knowledge, His self-sufficiency – ("I AM THAT I AM"). He is all those things and we are not.

**One of the best things you can do for your soul is to consider the attributes of God.

This is the fight of faith – that God has our best in mind and at heart. – EX: Gen 3 – the temptation is to doubt the character and heart of God.

Jacques Ellul... "You may consider yourself autonomous, but you are incapable of knowing what should be done, incapable of knowing what wisdom is. You are a creature... Our problems do not stem from our failure to stay in our garden...All the evils of the world stem from our taking ourselves to be the Creator." A Meditation on Ecclesiastes

Re: John Lennox : two worldviews – natural materialism and theism
Rom 1 the CREATOR / creature distinction

Once this is lost, then it is hard to stay on the path of Wisdom in life.

“REMEMBER” is not the opposite of “forget”. Biblically, the term conveys an idea that is deeper than “oh yeah, I remember that”. **Remembering is to shape and influence how we live and respond. Remembering is a call to action. There is intentionality to it.**

We – young and old- don’t gravitate toward orienting our thoughts and lives around our Creator, so we must be reminded to “remember”.

- Isn’t that crazy, given how we are dependent on Him for every breath. The fact that we so easily forget God is evidence of the reality and depth of sin.

Ecclesiastes and wisdom books of the OT touch on this issue of our response to God all throughout the book.

“When hevel happens, will you reverence God or doubt God”

Job 13:15 Though he slays Me, yet will I trust Him.

The Preacher calls the youth to remember God because he wants them to thrive and do well in the days of their youth. Don’t wait until you’re older to “find God”. Why wait?

When you get older things start to decay and it can be easy to become bitter toward God if you don’t have the foundation of faith.

It is hard to develop a sound view of the Creator when you’re confined to a wheelchair or a sick bed or are losing your mental capacities. DON’T WAIT.

WE DON’T STUMBLE INTO WISDOM as adults or as children. Remember the target audience- v. 12 “my son”

**Prov 22:15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

If it is not removed, it will remain. Children don’t stumble into wisdom, they must be led there by faithful loving parents. A failure to discipline our children is to leave their hearts bound in foolishness. We are not doing them any favors.

Wisdom issues, or a lack thereof, are Worship issues, and there is an ongoing battle for the object of worship in the hearts of our kids, and in our own hearts. The child who is not instructed in the Creator/ creature distinction will see him/herself as “God”. No one gives up that status easily.

IN THE DAYS OF YOUR YOUTH – before it’s too late

Youth are called to use this fruitful vigorous time of life to honor God.

v. 1-5 are a poetic way of looking at the waning years of old age and approaching death. Like good poetry the verses need to be felt, not over analyzed.

v. 2-7 Pictures of oncoming frailty, distortion and decay

Barzillai to David “I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not?

Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women?” (2 Sam. 19:35a).

There are exceptions, but typically, in our early years, troubles and illness are usually setbacks, not disasters. If you take a fall and break a leg or even hip when young you expect to recover.

But as you get older (65+), such a fall is far more serious and life expectancy is greatly reduced.

*** Kids, all the more reason why you should not run in church – the consequences could be very serious if you knock over an older adult.

v. 5 – Why the decay?

We are going toward death – our new home

- It is continuous action and may involve many years-
- The process is irreversible
- It is experienced as a sad process – “mourners in the street”

v. 7-8 A return to dust from which we came. This is a reversal of mankind’s origin – Gen 2-3
The human spirit withdraws thus bringing an end to earthly life and its separation from the body.
These images are used to urge young people to remember their Creator in the days of their youth
BEFORE all the decay starts to happen.

**This text is a good argument for multi-generational engagement i.e. church life. YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD NOT JUST HANG OUT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE. You get a skewed view of reality. It is good to see and be around those of us who are slowing down. We can be object lessons of the importance of taking life seriously and honoring God in your youth. We can also hopefully be examples of those who still remember our creator as the inevitable weakness sets in.

THE HINDRRANCE TO GODLINESS v 8 “hebel”

The reality of death brings the Preacher back to the opening theme of 1:2 – Vanity of vanities.

Given that we all die, it seems to make life a waste.

EX: an expensive toy for a child at Christmas only to have it broken by Noon.

That’s what our lives are like – even 80-90 years is a blink of the eye in light of eternity.

The most common refrain of the skeptic is, “How can you believe in and trust a God who allows so much bad stuff to happen?”

It’s a good question, but it assumes that we are able to understand the mind of God.

It also puts us in a position to stand over the mind of God.

If God is God, then wouldn’t it make sense that he has ways that we can’t understand – Rom 11

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?

If God is big enough to blame, then He is big enough to reverence and trust.

If God is not great enough to be revered, then he can’t be big enough to blame either.

Don’t let the hebel keep you from enjoying life and fearing God.

David Gibson – “When we are not grateful for the little things, it is only a very short step to no longer being grateful for anything.” Let’s not be ungrateful grumpy Christians.

It is amazingly ironic that often Christians will disparage the pleasures of life because they are “vanity.” Solomon comes to exactly the opposite conclusion. Because our work and life are “vapor,” we must enjoy these things while we have them. Do you like to read? The time is coming when you will not read anymore. Do you like sports? The time is coming when you can neither be a spectator nor an athlete. Do you love to cook? The time is coming when you won’t be able to smell the food or take pleasure in preparing it. Disparaging such things now while you have them would be the mark of a fool. Once again, the conclusion is familiar. Be wise. Trust God and enjoy life. Meyers, Jeffrey. Ecclesiastes Through New Eyes:

The Legacy of the PREACHER v. 9-12

9 In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. 10 The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.

11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of *these* collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion *to books* is wearying to the body.

13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

His purpose was pastoral, and he was diligent – pondered, searched and arranged many proverbs. He sought to make them delightful, yet they served as goads.

The words of the wise are like goads, i.e., they help guide one along the proper path. (A “goad” is a long, pointed stick used for prodding and guiding oxen while plowing.) Moreover, the words of the wise provide moral and intellectual stability like nails firmly fixed. Ultimately, such wisdom is given by one Shepherd, God

ESV BIBLE
These words are like goads in that they prod and challenge us.

They are like nails in that they hold things together or give us a place to hang our lives.

THE WISDOM OF GODLINESS – v. 13 FEAR God and keep his commandments
(MORE ON THIS NEXT WEEK)

The fear of God delivers from wickedness and self-righteousness and leads to a hatred of sin. It is THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.

Exhortation to “keep his commandments”

Conduct flows from worship, and we all worship something. (David Foster Wallace)

The Preacher goes back to being intentional about Remembering your creator and Fearing God because those are NOT things we “just gradually slip into.”

So, Here’s the question for our young people:

Are you following your Creator or do you think you’ve got a better way?

Have you embraced Christ as Savior and Lord? If not, why not?

Are you waiting to live it up a bit thinking that you can get religion when you get old?

YOU MAY NOT GET OLD, OR you may get old and lose your capacity to hear, think, read, and understand the things of Christ.

Ultimately it is ABOUT BEING WITH God, NOT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR God.

The way of wisdom is the fruit of walking in a relationship with God, it is not a “to do” list or something we earn by behaving for God.

“Fearing God is the way to live without fear. All our anxieties about a life we cannot predict or control are banished before God who controls all.” - Meyers

Fearing God and keeping his commandments is someone we meet before it is something we do

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so we can enjoy God and His gifts.

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