

Take God Seriously (While You Can)
Eccl.11:7-12:8

Table: Dress pattern: When I worked at Cal with Campus Crusade for Christ, I noticed a pattern among many of the Cal students who had grown up going to church and who were now living away from home for the first time. Early in their freshman year most stopped attending church and reading their Bible and even praying on a regular basis. They seemed to have developed a case of spiritual amnesia and forgot all about God. Yet they still considered themselves to not only be Christians but good Christians because of their church background. They were just taking a vacation from God and assumed they would come back later. However most never did and the ones who did return to God were often surprised by the things they had done and said during their vacation from God. They wondered, "How did I fall so far so fast?" It wasn't so much a failure of self-discipline; but a failure of memory. They simply forgot about God. Well, after leaving the campus and working in the church for the past 33 years, I've seen that same spiritual amnesia in adult Christians. Many people who call themselves Christians don't think about God much of the time. They are good enough to avoid pain and embarrassing themselves, but God isn't really a factor in their decisions. In Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8, Solomon talks about our great need to remember God which I entitled, "Taking God Seriously (While You Can.) Now Solomon's reason to remember God may surprise us. His contention is that our capacity to enjoy life depends on how seriously we take God. This morning I want to look at three things in this section of Ecclesiastes: first Why to take God seriously in vs. 7-10 of chapter 11; second When to take God seriously in vs. 1-8 of chapter 12; and finally, How to take God seriously as we do a little practical application of this passage.

Couch: Symphony manuscript: Vs. 7 of chapter 11 begins Solomon's conclusion of Ecclesiastes; where all he has written up to this point has been headed – like the final movement of a symphony. A symphony always has several different movements or parts, each with its own distinctive musical themes. We're familiar with the first movement of Beethoven's 5th Symphony and its distinctive theme; da-da-da-daaa. In a symphony, each movement has its distinctive theme and in the finale, most of those themes are heard again. That's what happens in Solomon's conclusion; he repeats some of the themes from earlier in the book and one of the major themes of Ecclesiastes is our need to enjoy life and to enjoy it now; which appears again in vs. 7-10.

Lamp: turning on the light: *"The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come {will be} futility."* (7-8) If you've ever been in pain at night and unable to sleep, you long for the dawn because somehow, you know the light of day will make you feel better, or know how great it feels when after weeks of gloomy, cloudy days, there's a sunny day, you'll understand what Solomon means when he says, *"The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun."* Solomon uses a sunny day as a picture of our life; something to be enjoyed even though it is brief; because the days of darkness (which we'll see means the days of old age and death) are coming. *"Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come {will be} futility."* No matter how long we live, Solomon reminds us that everything to come under the sun will be like all that has come before; futile, brief and ephemeral. So enjoy the brief days of sunshine because the long days of darkness are coming. Do you enjoy each day? The New Testament tells us to rejoice always which is a command I break daily. I always want to be somewhere else doing something else. But last week for the first time in my life I had debilitating back spasms and couldn't even stand up straight or walk. At first, I had to crawl to get from one place to another and then, even worse, I had to use a walker. I was flat on my back all week and really missed going to work, being able to swim and especially being with my Christian brothers and sisters. It gave me a glimpse of the coming days of darkness when I will no longer be able to do what I'm able to do now; and made me far more appreciative of what I can do. That's Solomon's point; which he addresses to those who need to hear this lesson most. *"Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the*

prime of life are fleeting.” (vs. 9-10) Solomon is an old man and he talks to the young: from children and youth all the way up to those in the prime of life; and says, “Remember, you’re only young once. Enjoy it while you can. This is the best time of your life so be happy and follow the ambitions of your heart and the desire of your eyes.” There are things you can only do and enjoy when you’re young. Now you may notice that all the old folks here are nodding in agreement. “Yeah, enjoy these years because they are gone so fast.” However, few do. For many of us, when we were in high school, we couldn’t wait to be in college. And when we were in college, we couldn’t wait to graduate and get on with our careers. And when we graduated and settled into our chosen field, we couldn’t wait to get married. And when we got married, we couldn’t wait to have kids. And when we had kids, we couldn’t wait until they could take care of themselves. And when they left home, we thought, “Those were the best years of our life. Why didn’t we enjoy them more?” If you’re young or still in the prime of life; if you still have dreams to pursue and goals to reach, don’t waste time in needless fear and caution or distraction. Go for it while you have the chance.

Fireplace: bucket of water: Yet Solomon adds that in those pursuits, never forget that God will judge all that they do – either now or later. Every choice will have a consequence. We reap what we sow. Thanks for the cold bucket of water, Solomon. “Seize the day! Enjoy life. Pursue your ambitions. Follow your dreams. And, by the way, don’t forget that God will judge everything you do.” Don’t those commands contradict one another? “Rejoice in your youth; yet know that God will bring everything you do to judgment?” How can I enjoy my youth with God’s judgment hanging over my head? What we’ll see is that remembering God is essential if we want to enjoy life. Not every impulse of our heart is healthy and not everything our eyes desire is good for us, right? Solomon is just giving us some guard rails to protect us from our self-destructive impulses and desires. Solomon says, “Life is brief so enjoy it to the fullest!” But then he adds, “But make sure you enjoy the things God has given for your enjoyment and in the way He intends for you to enjoy it.” God’s commands are the guardrails which protect us from becoming slaves of our own impulses and desires. For example, the Bible is clear that God created most people to get married and that strong desire for companionship and intimacy which is in most of us has been put there by God. However that desire will get us into trouble if we follow it indiscriminately and don’t remember God’s commands. You like the way somebody looks and how they make you feel and so you follow the impulses of your heart and the desire of your eyes and fall in love and it feels so good. Nobody has ever been in love like this before. What could be wrong when it feels so right? But if we ignore what the Bible says about the importance of the other person’s character and whether they fear the Lord and how responsive they are to God and to His plan for their life; once the feelings evaporate, we find that relationship more painful than joyful; and we have no one to blame but us. God gives us commands because He loves us; because He created us and knows what will make us happy. That’s why Solomon continues, “*So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.*” Why remember that God will bring you to judgment for every choice we make? So we can avoid grief and anger and pain because the prime of life is so brief. That’s why remembering God and that there are consequences for every choice we make will protect us from needless grief, anger and pain so we can enjoy life to the fullest. That’s what Solomon means by “remove grief and anger from your heart because the prime of life is fleeting.” Life is too short to waste it in unnecessary grief, anger and pain. So why should I take God seriously? Because our capacity to enjoy our brief time on this planet is directly related to how seriously we take God. And since this passage is addressed to the young, let me make one more point. I’ve found that it is very common for middle school and high school students to avoid sin not out of faith in God but to keep their parents happy. “If Mom ever found out what I did, I’d be dead!” You’re a good kid – but not because you’re responding to God in faith, you’re responding to your parents. That’s why when most church-going kids leave home for college, their behavior changes. I know mine sure did. Mom and Dad aren’t around; I can finally do what I want. But Solomon says the reason to take God seriously now as a young person is because the joy you will experience in life depends on it. Don’t obey God because your parents expect you to; obey God because it will be to your great benefit. That’s really the difference between young people who are living on their parent’s faith and young people who have their own faith and are convinced that God rewards those who seek Him, that no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly; that it is to their great benefit to follow Christ; and whether you’re young or old; that is the conviction we must come to if we’re going to take Him seriously and enjoy the life He’s given us to enjoy. Why take God seriously? For many reasons obviously, but Solomon’s point is that because God is the source of blessing and joy and life, we cannot enjoy life to the fullest by ignoring Him.

Wingback: Procrastinator. However if you're young or still in the prime of life, the temptation is always to postpone taking God seriously. I'll take God seriously someday – just not yet. After all, you're only young once. Once I finish college, I'll take God seriously, but now I'm going to enjoy myself. Or once I settle down and get married and have kids. Or once I'm established in my career. Or once our kids aren't in diapers any longer and we can leave them in the church nursery without them missing their nap. Or once our kids are done with sports; or when the kids have moved out of the house, because they don't want to go to church and we don't want to go without them; or once we retire – then I'll take God seriously. It's easy to put off taking God and the development of our relationship with Him as seriously as we know we should. That's why in chapter 12:1-8, Solomon talks about when to take God seriously. *"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';* Why remember your Creator when you are young? Days are coming when it will be much more difficult to remember Him, years when we will say, "I have no delight in them. I'm sick of living." In vs. 1-8 of chapter 12. Solomon reminds his students that old age isn't for sissies and to remember God now because they may not be able to take God seriously if they wait. The key to understanding this passage is the word, "before" which occurs three times in this passage. Remember God *before* all the things happen which accompany old age and the approach of death because you may not be able to remember Him after that. Vs. 2-8 *"before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;* (See the contrast again of light and darkness and between sunny and cloudy? Again, Solomon compares the days of our youth and prime as happy, sunny days and old age as dark and cloudy days. He may be referring to the gradual loss of our sight as we get older as everything gets darker or he may be referring to the many troubles of old age when one problem follow another like one cloudy day follow another; health problems, financial problems, problems with our kids and grand kids; like a long series of dark days where we never see the sun or the stars to break the depressive monotony. Solomon says, "These are the days that are coming – so take God seriously and enjoy life now while you can. *"...in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble,* (probably referring to our hands, the guards of our body which once were strong but now tremble) *and mighty men stoop,* (our legs which were once straight now are bent and weak) *the grinding ones stand idle because they are few,* (referring to our teeth: in Solomon's day, there weren't capable dentists and most old people had lost most of their teeth and could eat only soft food) *and those who look through windows grow dim;* (diminished eyesight) *and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low,* (it becomes harder and harder to hear) *and one will arise at the sound of the bird,* (it becomes harder and harder to sleep through the night) *and all the daughters of song will sing softly.* (our old raspy voice can no longer sing). *Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road;* (as we get older, we become more cautious and fearful of losing our balance or of falling down or of crime since we are now helpless) *the almond tree blossoms,* (our hair – if we have it – become white) *the grasshopper drags himself along,* (grasshoppers normally symbolize agility and quickness but now we can only slowly drag ourselves along) *and the caperberry is ineffective.* (The caperberry was thought to increase appetite but when we're old, even that doesn't work. We're not even interested in food.) *For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.* (We are all on our way to the grave. We're all slowly dying, our bodies are deteriorating; it is an inevitable trip we will all take. When we're young, we think we're immortal. When we get old, we know we're not and that it is only a matter of time before our body shuts down; which is what death is. That's why Solomon concludes, *"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; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."* The silver cord and the golden bowl refer to a lamp which once burned bright before the cord broke and the bowl smashed on the ground. The shattered pitcher by the well and the crushed wheel at the cistern, both of which were used for transporting precious water no longer work; all pictures of how death makes a once useful life now broken and useless; which is why Solomon repeats again the motto of Ecclesiastes, *"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"* Vapor of vapors, all is vapor; so brief, so ephemeral, so quickly gone.

Chair: 14 year olds praying. When do I take God seriously? Now. Why now? Because according to Solomon, I may not be able to take Him seriously later. Just as now is the time to enjoy life, now is the time to remember God because one is dependent upon the other. Remember, Solomon is speaking to the young here and reminding them of how quickly old age and death arrive; so don't postpone enjoying life and don't postpone taking God seriously. Statistically, most people find Christ become Christians by the age of 14. I was 20 when I gave my life to Christ. There's no hard and fast rule and older people often become Christians; but typically the younger you are, the more likely you are to take God seriously. Why. It's easier to change when we're young. The older we get the

greater the pressure to conform, the more things we have to lose, the more people who will be affected by our decisions and the more set in our habits and opinions we become. For most, it is far easier to not even consider following Christ than it is to face that kind of life change.

Fridge: 5 Gs: Let's look at how to take God seriously. What does remembering God mean? Thinking and behaving as if He exists; viewing all of life through the lens of "If the God the Bible reveals is real, how should that shape the decisions I make?" What comes into my mind when I think about God is the single most important thing about me; because what I believe about God will determine who I am and what I do. That's why Solomon said that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Taking God seriously is the first step in living a wise life because the way I live, the decisions I make, my character and my values are all a direct result of what I believe about God. The commands in the Bible are not a bunch of rules some prophets and fishermen put together over drinks one night. The commands of the Bible are simply our response to God. God says be holy; why? - because He is holy. God says love one another; why? - because He loves us. God tells us not to worry; why - because He controls all things in control. The commands in the Bible make perfect sense as long as we remember the God of the Bible. Therefore, every problem we have in living the way God want us to live is rooted in spiritual amnesia; forgetting and not believing in God as He has revealed Himself. If I really believed that God loves me the way the Bible says He loves me, would I ever be afraid? If I really believed that no good thing does God withhold from those who walk uprightly, would I covet what you have? If I really believed that true happiness was found only in the presence of God, would I be addicted to the things I hope will bring me pleasure? What I hope you can see is that every sin is rooted in unbelief and in a failure to keep the first commandment - to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. In every temptation, we need to pay attention to our heart; to what it craves, delights in, fears and believes; and ask ourselves, "Am I responding to the truth about God or to something else? How can we remember God each day?"

Here are five simple tools for reminding yourself about who God is and they all begin with the letter G. When you're afraid, stressed or worried, it's time to remind yourself that God alone is great and that you don't need to be in control because He is; you don't need to worry about people, circumstances, results or the future; but only about whether you am trusting Him. Worry and fear are rooted in unbelief about God's control of our circumstances or about God's intentions toward us and so reminding yourself that God is great, created all things for His purpose and is working all things together for our good is the key to defeating fear and worry.

When you're tempted to please people or to care too much about what people think, it is time to remind yourself that God alone is GLORIOUS and worthy of all glory and you don't need to fear anyone or anything but Him. He alone deserves my respect and idolatry is giving what belongs to Him to anyone or anything else. God says in 1 Sam 2:30, *"Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed."* My job is to honor Him and to give Him glory in every situation, to take Him more seriously than I take anything or anyone else; and the more I honor Him, the less impressed I will be with anyone or anything else – including myself.

When you're tempted to depend on anything besides God for satisfaction and happiness, it is time to remind yourself that God alone is perfectly GOOD; that there is nothing more beautiful, more delightful or more satisfying than Christ who came to satisfy our hunger and to quench our thirst so we don't have to look elsewhere for satisfaction. No temporary earthly pleasure matches the deep joy and satisfaction which only the One who is pure goodness can give us. That's why Jesus said in John 15:10-11, *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in (experience) My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and {that} your joy may be made full."*

When you're tempted to condemn yourself because you fail and don't measure up, it is time to remind yourself that God alone is GRACIOUS and deals with us in unconditional love rather than according to what we deserve; so that I don't have to prove myself to myself, to others or to Him but simply accept His promise that I am valuable to Him because He has declared and demonstrated my value by sending Christ to die in my place and by clothing me in Christ's perfection; and that's grace. As Paul writes in Titus *"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy."* And when I'm tempted to condemn others or to treat others the way they treat me, it is also time to remind myself that God is gracious and calls me to treat others as

He has treated me, forgiving them not because they deserve to be forgiven and loved but because I didn't deserve to be forgiven and loved.

When you're confused about the right thing to do, it is time to remind yourself that God alone is GENUINE; that He always tells the truth and it is impossible for Him to lie so I need look nowhere else for wisdom but His word. He alone is truthful. He alone knows everything. He alone can lead me in the right thing to do.

That's why the New Testament says, "*The righteous shall live by faith.*" The lifestyle the Bible describes is simply the natural result of remembering God; remembering who He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Sin is always the result of unbelief and so giving into sin is always a failure of memory, not of self-control. So take time to remember God each day. Remind yourself daily that He alone is great and glorious and good and gracious and genuine; the friend who never fails, the food which always satisfies, the Savior who never leaves.

Jesus said the whole Bible was about Him - He is the hero and the main point of Scripture - and that is why there are tensions in the Bible which are only resolved by the gospel. We saw one this morning in Eccl. 11:9. Solomon tells us to enjoy our youth, to pursue the impulses of our heart and the desire of our eyes: and at the same time, to remember God and that He will bring all our choices to judgment. The last part of the verse seems to contradict the first part. How can I enjoy my youth and pursue the things I really want and remember God at the same time? Remembering God ruins everything because the things I want aren't the things I think He wants. That's why people forget about God. They want to be happy and so they don't want Him intruding into their lives. And that is the fundamental human problem. What we want isn't what God wants for us. So there is this tension between enjoying life and remembering God. Either I cast off the constraints of religion and live free - or I remember God and live a narrow, repressed life. Either way, enjoying life will elude me. People who live wild, immoral lives end up empty and broken and people who live cautious, religious lives end up repressed and frustrated. That's why the gospel is good news because it resolves this tension between what we want and what God wants. The gospel is the good news that Christ became human to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, redeeming us from our slavery to sin and to death. He lives the life we failed to live, perfectly obeying God in all things so that God can credit us with His perfect record as a gift. He dies the death we deserve to die, dying in our place on the cross and bearing the punishment for our sins so that God can pardon all who put their faith in Him. And He rises from the dead, defeating death in our behalf so that we can live forever. When we believe the gospel, God makes everything that is true of Jesus true of us. The person we used to be, the slave of sin, the person who didn't want what God wants, dies and a brand new person is resurrected in their place. We look the same on the outside but we're new on the inside. That's why Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:17, "*If any person is in Christ, he is a new creation;* And because we're now a child of God, God writes His laws on our heart and gives us the character of Christ so that what used to feel natural no longer feels natural and what used to feel unnatural now feels natural. By grace, God changes us and we want what He wants. The impulse of our heart and the desire of our eyes are now what He wants us to have; and so for the first time, we enjoy life by remembering God.

