

An interesting thing about chapters 11 and 12 is that **the mood changes**. In 1-10 Ecclesiastes has a **philosophical; introspective tone**. But now the **pace is going to quicken**, and the **exhortations** are going to **start flying**.

More than ever, you'll see that this is an **old man thinking about the generations** that are coming behind him. He's **wearied by life and sin**. He knows that the only thing that has **meaning** in life is **following Christ**. And he's just going to say now to his hearers very directly.....**you should serve God NOW**.

ill. Its similar to when I came to Grace Church 7.5 years ago. I had been **in seminary w/ all the ideas and philosophies** being tossed around, and then I came here, and it was like, "ok....let's go....its time to get to work."

That is Solomon here today, urging us **out of the classrooms** and **into the harvest field**.

Why You Should Serve God Now

1. You Don't Know What the Future Holds

Let me **tell you** what Solomon is communicating to us in these first 6 verses, and **then I'll read** them. As I read them, hopefully **you'll see it**.

He wants the smallness of our knowledge and control, and the certainty of difficulty, to motivate us to get going and serve God.

Here is how **Derek Kidner** says it, "If there are risks in everything, it is better to fail in launching out than in hugging one's resources to oneself."

Here's how **Jesus** says it, "he who loves his life will lose it."

Read verses 1-6

Notice first Solomon's **examples of how certain difficulty** is:

- Verse 2—
- Verbs 3b— with the falling of the tree....it **does not ask us** about where we'd like it to fall. It just comes down....sometimes in the **middle of the woods**; sometimes on your **house**.

And notice the examples he gives about **how little control we have** over so many things in life:

- Verse 3a—the **clouds** move about according to **their own plan**....we have **little control** over where they rain.
- Verse 5-- on the unpredictability of life: **how is it that God breathes life and a soul into a child** in his mother's womb? Its pure mystery how that happens. It is one of many examples of the things in life that are hidden and free of our control, and yet are very, very real things.
- Verse 6b—

Ok, so **in light of the difficulty** that is definitely coming your way, and **in light of how little control** and knowledge you have of the future, **how does Solomon urge us to respond?**

He urges us to **act**. To **move forward**:

- Verse 1—this is probably a reference to a **business venture**. But the **principle** there is...**proceed**....things are **going to work out**.
- Verse 2—whether he is talking **investment strategy** here, or **generosity strategy**, his point is that we should **craft our plan and then act** (in this case, diversity, in light of coming difficulty), but still the point is....act.
- Verse 4—here he makes his point in the **negative, by way of rebuke**. Basically he's saying, listen....if you don't wait for everything to be just so, **you'll never act**. And that leads to a total lack of progress. They'll be no harvest of any variety then.
- Verse 6—**same point. Go for it**, he is saying.

So for us: let's just get **up on our feet**, let's **open our mouths**, and let's **chase after a life** that is in service to God, for the **glory of God**, in the **realm of God's calling** on each our lives.

All of us need to **use the minds** God has given us both to **know Him**, and to **craft a plan** of action. And then we need to **step out and do something**, trusting that our life is **in his hands ultimately**, and that we will **suffer no bad thing** that did not come **sifted through** his wise and loving hands.

I have **no idea what this may mean for your life** in this moment. There are **as many different applications** to this text as there are people in the room.

ill. the delay I put forward re **having children**...but the feeling on that day was **EUPHORIC**.

I believe God would want you to remember that **in Jesus, there are no ultimate risks**. Everything comes sifted through his hand. And whether you are or will be a **mother, or a banker, or a missionary, or a carpenter** (we need Christ-centered versions of all of those) there is **fruit to bear**, people to engage with the **gospel**, and **glory for God** to be gained through your life.

But for **each of us** there are **unknowns**, there are **risks**, and there is some **degree of suffering** that will be involved.

Don't let those things keep you from a life that is **spent for Jesus**; that is **spilled out** for his cause in the world.

2. It's the best way to be happy (11.7-9)

Let's start in verse 9. What's he saying there? He's saying, **go for it. Enjoy life**. There is a lot of good, and you should seek to enjoy it. Isn't that refreshing? I mean, really, **Christianity should not be this morose...dreadful** thing where everyone is **bored, and lame, and miserable**, but **holy**.

That's not the Ecclesiastes vision at all. What Solomon keeps returning to is the idea that **there is much to enjoy** in life, and that we ought to **thank God for it**, and **enjoy it**.

There is **a Satanic lie that rests heavy upon the minds and hearts of most people**....especially young people...in the world today. And the lie...the dichotomy if you will....is that there is **life with God over here**....and its relatively **quiet and friendly, but basically boring**. And then there is **true life....a rich life of pleasure and fun and enjoyment**....and of course sin.

But that is just a **tragic misconception**. Satan has **not created anything**. He himself is a **created being**. He has not invented good things for you to enjoy. All that he does is **take the good things that God created**; the pleasures that God created, and **twists them into perverse**, short **lived evil things**. They give pleasure for a season and then lead to death.

ill. KORN Guitar player

Sex and alcohol and drugs are sort of the cliché examples here, and its because its true in their case.....there is **short term pleasure** that leads to **pain, and bondage, and death**, and all sorts of **multiplying problems**.

But all sin is like that:

- At one level it feels good to be **one way around these people, and another way around these people**. But what that leads to is:
 - o them seeing through you eventually
 - o you never figuring out who you are, and having a life long identity crisis.
- At one level the morsel of **gossip feels good**, but in the long run:
 - o it makes you the kind of person that people don't trust
 - o enslaves you into a self-righteous, judgmental person.
- At one level **greed feels good** because it drives you into figuring out ways to obtain more stuff, but in the end:
 - o it leads to massive amounts of debt
 - o leads to utter emptiness.

- At one level **narcissism feels good** because everyone pays attention to you, but eventually:
 - o you let them down, they leave you
 - o all you are left with is the truth that you aren't very good.
- At one level **laziness** feels so good, but:
 - o it leads to bad health, poverty
 - o a personality that repels people.

Look, the **Bible really stakes its claim on this**: sin leads to misery, following Christ leads to joy.

And so **look at verse 7-8**....he's just saying....look, there is a **lot of good in life**. Enjoy it. And get to it, because life does not last forever.

Take a familiar verse, Psalm 37.4, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

What's he saying there? He's saying....you press into Christ, he will transform your desires, and then he'll give you what you desire.

Which is why the **church Fathers** like Augustine and Luther said, "**Love God, and do whatever you please.**"

ill. If we imagine the life that God intends us to live as a large circle. Sin is everything outside of that circle.

And basically, inside that circle there is just this **freedom to absolutely go for it**, to live it up, to eat, drink and be merry, and thank God for every piece of it.

The reason that we so often fail to live happily inside of that circle is that **we don't believe God that it's good inside the circle**. **And in this way, our problem is with God. We don't trust Him. Your problem is not with what God says to do or not to do. Your problem is with God. You think you know better than God how to make sense out of life.**

And if we can all just have a **moment of sanity**....that is **ridiculous**. It just is. **God made you**—you know that. **He made the world**—you know that. **He made rules** for your good---you know that. Don't tell me you don't....you are lying to yourself. Ok, so you know all of that stuff. If you are going **to then reject, and try to find good outside of God's rules, you are making a dumb decision**.

The problem for **some of you** is you think that you are **going to be the one guy; the one girl, to trick the system**....you are going to **pursue sin and not get burned**. You are going to keep it **under wraps**; under your thumb, and all these dire warnings you hear from Solomon and me and others.....ah, their the fools. You are the one that has this thing figured out. You are **a fool**.

It is so **much better to enjoy the good** God has given to us rather than turning our back on that, living outside of God's rules, and being absolutely **plagued by not only a guilty conscience**, but the **increasingly devastating effects of sin**.

Ok, so **inside of the circle, go for it**. Enjoy. That is **the carrot**.

There is a **small stick** here as well.....end of **verse 9**.....just keep in mind.....you're going to **stand before God** one day, and you will give an account. Not just a general account...an exacting account. Jesus said that we will give an account for every careless word we speak.

So, keep that in mind as well, when you are seeking to gain joy and good from your life.

3. So that the roots of sin don't sink any deeper (11.10)

Ok, let's look at verse 10. And remember **he's an old guy** at the point of life that he is writing this. He assumes that his **readers are younger than he is**. And what is he saying?

He's saying...**deal with the things that plague you while you are young**. He's saying **before these monsters** in your soul get any **more traction** in you, get rid of them; **work on them**; go after them. Because the **longer they stick around**, the more damage they will do, and in the end, the harder they will be to destroy.

ill. Simple illustration to picture this. If you have ever **pulled weeds in your garden**, you know that a young weed has a shallow root, and is relatively easy to pull. But a weed that has been around for a while....it's got roots that have sunk deep; it has probably reproduced itself a number of time and has thus created more weeds.

That's exactly **how sin works**.

Look all of us are **born with sinful elements** in our **personality type**. Nature v. nurture, both are in play, but you get to know someone at any level, and you can start to pick up on what their particular personality is, and usually what some of their biggest temptations to sin are.

And here is what he is saying to you young person. **Deal with that now. Don't wait until you are 40**. Two things will happen the longer you wait.

First, that **sin pattern is going to wreak havoc all over your life and relationships** for every year you let it stick around.

I think its fair to say that **most miserable old people were foolish young people**.

Second, its **roots are going to just get deeper and deeper, and its going to get more and more difficult** to root that thing out.

So, I don't know what your deal is....**maybe its fear of man**.....maybe it's the **need to be in control**.....maybe its **anger**.....maybe its **timidity**.....maybe its **lust**.....

Repent now....get help now....work on it now....fight the good fight now.

4. Because You are Going to be Old One Day (12.1-8)

read 12.1---ok, that's **pretty straight forward**...."Serve God **while you are young**, because there is coming a day when you are going to wake up, and wish you had **not survived your sleep**." You are going to **wish you are not alive**. And that day is actually **fast approaching**.

So, you have to **go for it now. Get to it**. What God is saying here through Solomon is going to be one basic thing: **press into Christ NOW**.....

not when you **get a car**; not when you go to **college**, get your **first job**, get away from **your parents**, get **married**, start making some **money**.....**NOW, DO IT NOW**.

And **look at how** he is going to urge you in this direction.....he is going to **give this litany of reasons** why its **miserable to get old**.

So, **don't miss the window of your life** when you really have the energy, and health and ability to serve Christ.

Read verses 2-8

Verse 2....he is saying that there is a **day coming when your mental vitality** is going to start to **fade**. Your **memory**; your **sharpness**. That's **going to fade**.

ill. on my moms side of the family some great aunts starting **eating this monster mushrooms** to help keep their minds sharp....all of us get to that point.

Verse 3

"When the keepers of the house tremble," –

when you get old, your **arms and legs, they start to shake. Putting on a watch, buttoning a shirt**....those become really difficult tasks.

“the Strong men are bent”

The **posture of old people** just gets worse and worse, continually falling forward.

“the grinders cease because they are few,”

your **teeth start to fall out.....**

“those who look through the windows are dimmed”

Your **eyesight goes**. You can’t see anything. This is keeping the **book at arm’s length**; pulling the **seat in your car all** the way up, etc.

Verse 4

“and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low”

Have you ever seen a picture of an **old person when their dentures are out**? Their **lips are bent in.....**the lips are pursed.....and the sound of the grinding is low.....ie, they **don’t eat much**.

ill. How many of you have ever been around **teenage boys at dinner.....**i mean they will just **go after it**. And sometimes its loud. Its always intense. But when they get old.....they’ll have one **little bite of applesauce**, one sip of **coffee**, and they’ll be all done. The sound of the grinding is low because you are old, you don’t eat very much.

“one rises up at the sound of a bird,”

here he is talking about the tendency of old people to **not be able to sleep well**. At some point, older people just don’t need an **alarm clock anymore**. They just wake up....**5:30, 6AM....to do what? Nothing, really, they just can’t sleep**.

“and all the daughters of song are brought low,” this is a reference to increasing **difficulty in hearing**.

Verse 5

“they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way” This is the tendency of **older people to be scared of heights.....scared of things in general**.

How many of you have grandparents that **don’t like to go out at night?** Or **don’t like to drive on the interstate?**

You know, its true that at **some level young people need to be protected from themselves**, but we also need to be careful about our **over-protective culture** that sometimes discourages a **God-given, God-approved sense of risk** and adventure in young people.

ill. Do you ever think about some of the **dumb things you did when you were young?** I mean, just take **sledding** down a hill. At some point, don’t all young people sled down a hill that ends at a **busy street or huge trees, or barely frozen over pond?** Don’t they all at some point **build ramps** for their sledding that aren’t safe?

And I look back on some of the things that I did, and I have to say....I would not have the **guts to do that today**.

ill. I met a guy recently that spent **2 years back-country camping** so that he could map out and study unreached people groups for the sake of the gospel. Basically there were these groups of people that missiologists knew existed—somewhere in those mountains. But they didn’t really know anything about them—their language or culture, etc.

And so a mission organization **hired these 2 young, brave single men** to spend two years figuring all of those things out. We need some guts in the kingdom. And there is **something about being young that helps that**.

And let’s just be **absolutely serious about this point for a moment**. The **places in the world where the gospel is not**—many of those places are very **scary, threatening places**. We need some **young men and women with backbones**, and a **passion for the lost** to go there.

Let’s finish up verse 5:

“the almond tree blossoms”,

The thing about an **almond tree is it will go white and the wind will carry the blossoms**. So he's talking about a person's hair getting gray, and falling out. Serve God before that begins to happen. Some of **you need to look at your Dad, and see that it's time to get moving on this**.

"the grasshopper drags itself along,"

He's giving us the **image of an animal with a lot of zest normally**; a lot of bounce in his step who breaks his leg. It's the image of **a once vital, healthy, strong individual** who now needs a cane, or who has a bad leg, who is experiencing the aches and pain, and inevitable effects of time.

Serve God **before that starts to happen to you**.

"and desire fails,"

That **means what you think it means**. Let's move on.

Verse 6

"before the silver cord is snapped,"—that's a reference to **your spinal column**

"or the golden bowl is broken,"—that's your **skull**

"or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain,"—your **heart**

"or the wheel broken at the cistern,"—probably that is a reference to your **veins and arteries beginning to run down**.

Serve God before any of those things go bad.

And now, back up to the **last phrase of verse 5**:

"because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets"

There it is....serve God before its too late. Look, **almost all of you at one level fancy yourselves as young**. And I'm not going to **argue that point**. Here's what needs to be said—**whatever vitality remains in that mind of yours**, those **feet** of yours, that **mouth of yours**, **those knees**—whatever remains, for how ever many years—**give them to Christ**.....press into Him.....use what you have left to **serve Him**. To **know Him**. To be spent for his cause, and his glory.

Because, one day....look at 7—" and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the SPIRIT RETURNS TO GOD WHO GAVE IT."

Think of your soul....the vitality of your life as on loan from God. You've got 70 years; maybe 90, and then you stand before God, and what you did in this life determines the quality and substance of your eternity.

I'm just **pleading with you here young people**. He **bought you with his blood**. He **felt the nails for us**; he **bore the wrath** for us. And in doing so, he told us to take up our cross and follow Him. He told us to lose our life, and then gain it back a thousand fold for his sake.

That's the **upward view—consider Christ**. What about the **outward view—consider the world**.

Listen, young people, it **does not matter what you spend your life doing**.....be a **teacher, a banker, a farmer, a mechanic, a mom, a nurse, a pastor, a missionary, a IRS agent**.....wherever you go, whatever you are good at, there is **fruit** to be born there; there are people who will **only hear the gospel if you tell them**, there is work to do there if you are really following Christ.

For those of you who have a desire to make an impact for Christ with you life, let me **add one thing to Solomon's plea**. **Be aware of the American Dream**. The American Dream is calling you to make a living for yourself that is

comfortable, that is luxurious, that includes 2.5 children. And I just want to be a voice that says—**beware of settling in to that.** Be **afraid of the tendency to slide toward what is easiest and what everyone else is pursuing.**

Because right now, you have **not yet settled into the bondage and comfort of that.** **Ten years from now,** for some of you, the **light bulb will finally come on,** but at that point, it will be **difficult to extract yourself** from the bondage that living for the American Dream can become.

But right now, your mind IS sharp; your back IS strong; your lungs still breath deeply; there is courage in your gut. And you have a lot of **options before you about how to spent that capitol.** Spend it on things that matter.

Jesus is on a **worldwide mission to gain glory for his Son.** He's doing it by **calling sinners into his parade,** and putting them to work. Do you see this **massive thing you get to be a part of?** Now is the time to go for it. Whatever that looks like in your life.

Let me **close** with **Hebrews 13.12-16.**

Just quickly, notice.....its **outside the camp where the difficulty is.** We **said at the beginning** of the sermon that **difficulty is certain.** But look **what else:** outside the camp is also **where Jesus is.**

Why go there, young people? Verse 14—because **here we have no lasting city.**

Inside the camp of safety and security and freedom from risk we have no lasting city. Which means its actually unsafe and uncertain---this body is going to break down. This mind is going to lose its vitality. These lungs are going to quit on me.

But there is a city that we seek that will last forever.

So, lets gather up the life we have been given....and let's spend it for the sake of the city that is to come.

What does verse 13 look like for you?

And let's do it now. No more waiting.