

Ecclesiastes 12:1 ¶ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

This last chapter begins with words of wise counsel for young people. It is usually when we are young that one is most full of energy and physically strong and healthy enough to most enjoy God's wonderful creation. It is in our youth that our gifts and abilities are at their peak and the limitations to our service before the Lord are least. In my experience, age doesn't diminish the desire to enjoy life to its fullest and give God our best, but the aging process does begin to limit our physical capabilities.

As I continued to look at these verses, the word "remember" stood out to me. In other words, don't let the enticements of the flesh that are so strong in our younger years interfere with your relationship with your Creator, Almighty God. It also implies that this will take a conscious effort; life is full of distractions.

Ecclesiastes 12:2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

This verse begins a series of word pictures as to the effects of aging. I remember reading this chapter with a whole new sense of understanding when I first became aware of this connection.

Though not as obvious to me as some of the other word pictures, this verse is understood by many to be referencing the functioning of the mind. In connection with the previous verse, it is a well known fact that our learning capabilities are at their peak when we are young. As we grow older, our mental capacities seem to darken; we become more forgetful. It's a time that we fear the onset of dementia in some form or other.

Ecclesiastes 12:3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

This verse goes on to describe the weakening of our arms and legs (the keepers of the house) and the change in posture that often results from bone loss and lack of exercise. Many begin to lose their teeth (grinders) and our vision (those that look out of the windows) begins to suffer and to be more dependent on light. I can already relate to this observation. My mom used to nag me about reading in better light; that is no longer necessary since I can't read many things without additional light at this stage of life.

Ecclesiastes 12:4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

This verse seems to be referencing the gradual loss of hearing that many experience. It seems we are always asking our children to be a little quieter as

parents; by the time we are great-grandparents we often want them to speak a little louder. Also referenced is the tendency to wake up with “the voice of the bird” in the early morning; you don’t seem to be able to sleep as well as you once did.

We are very blessed in this day and age to have the knowledge, medical advances and technology to slow down and/or compensate for many of the natural effects of aging.

Ecclesiastes 12:5-6 Also *when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

As we get older, we tend to become more fearful of heights or situations that pose difficulties due to our weakening physical capabilities. The flourishing of the almond tree is a reference to the budding white blossoms and seems to paint a picture of our hair turning white.

Other translations indicate that “the grasshopper shall be a burden” is referencing the difficulty in mobility that often accompanies weakness and joint afflictions such as arthritis.

The desires of the flesh no longer hold the temptation they once did. The Hebrew makes specific reference to the caper berry, an aphrodisiac, and could therefore be specific reference to waning sexual desire.

The last part of the verse is referencing approaching death. I learned a bit more this time through regarding the silver cord, golden bowl, pitcher, fountain and wheel at the cistern. I had just made the reference to death in general. Some of the commentaries connected the silver cord to the spine, the golden bowl to the brain, the pitcher at the fountain to the heart and bloodflow, and the wheel at the cistern to the digestive system. Death usually results from a breaking down of bodily function in one of these areas.

Ecclesiastes 12:7-8 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

At death the body naturally decays and turns back to dust. Solomon recognized that there is a life force, the spirit, that he pictures as returning to God. I think he is emphasizing that as the Creator who gave that spirit life, God will determine the eternal future of that spirit. Solomon’s conclusion as he observes the natural flow of life is that it is worthless and empty unless one remembers the Creator in the days of his youth (cf v1).

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*

It was established in the beginning of our study that God had blessed Solomon with wisdom beyond that of any other man. Though Solomon strayed from applying that wisdom in his own life, he determined to impart his wisdom through many proverbs that would provide wise guidance to his people. He chose his words carefully in expressing the truth that God had revealed to him.

Ecclesiastes 12:11-12 The words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd. And further, **by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is* no end; and much study *is* a weariness of the flesh.**

I think it is important to note again that the “words of the wise” do come from one Shepherd, the Lord God.

Psalms 111:10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.”

Proverbs 2:6-7 “For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.”

Isaiah 11:2 “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding,”

Daniel 2:20 “Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:”

Colossians 2:2-3 “... to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

True wisdom from God as recorded in the scripture motivates one to act according to its truth. True wisdom provides strength like a nail hammered firmly in place. In contrast, the study of the wisdom of men as recorded in a never-ending supply of books results in weariness of the flesh.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¶ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.**

Solomon’s conclusion after all his observations: Man should fear God and keep His commandments. With all his wisdom, Solomon rests on the words of God declared to His people by Moses.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?"

The Hebrew for the word "fear" references both being afraid and showing reverence. When we are showing reverence, we have no reason to be afraid of God. When we are afraid of God, it's likely a result of not reverencing Him. I connect reverence to a healthy fear. A healthy fear of God shows recognition of the awesome authority and power of God. There is no greater authority or power. I love the sections of Isaiah in which God testifies about Himself.

Isaiah 43:11-13 "I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?"

Isaiah 45:5 "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me:"

Isaiah 45:21-22 "Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

One who responds to that truth with faith, submission and obedience no longer has to be afraid of God; he can count on the blessings associated with the promises of God as recorded in His word.

Psalms 34:9 "O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him."

Proverbs 14:26 "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge."