

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 | 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”; ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, ³ 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, ⁴ 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— ⁵ 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— ⁶ 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, ⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12 | The End of the Matter

Finally we reach the end of the matter. But in order to see it most clearly Solomon takes us to the end of our lives. The whole book could be understood as an exploration of limits. The limits of reason to explain the world. The limits of the good things in the world to provide satisfaction. The limits of wisdom to interpret the world. And finally the limits of our lives which end in death. Thus the limit of the book, should bring us right to the final point.

The final three exhortations of the book are to be bold, be joyful, and be godly. Today we look at the final call to be godly. But to be godly is to in one sense step beyond the limits of the book. The exhortation to be godly takes us to three ends. The end of your life, the end of study, and the end of the matter. I won't bury the lead, the end is judgement and the judgement is not yours. But if you understand that end, you'll understand how to live. And the answer to the question of how to live is to live a godly life, because in the end you will be judged.

1. The End of your Life

Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 | 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”; ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,

The end of the book leaves no time to merely consider things under the sun. He must speak plainly now. Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Now is the time to remember your creator. When the days are intoxicating and distracting and times moves swiftly and you move swiftly with it you must remember your creator. If you don't remember your creator who caused the beginning of your life you will be terrifyingly reminded of him at the end of your life. Winter is coming, the planting and harvesting which kept you so occupied will come to an end. It is the final statement of vapor. Your whole life will close down, like the closing of an old house. Solomon shows us what it looks like. Let's look at it together.

Ecclesiastes 12:3-4 | 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, ⁴ 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—

The keepers of the house tremble, like an old woman's hands. The strong man's back is now bent no matter how much it previously carried. The grinders cease, there are two few to grind the wheat. Like teeth. The windows are dimmed, as vision blurs. But he is a true poet so don't think he's just making analogies for body parts. The doors to the street are shut, there are no more public dealings. One rises at the sound of a bird because the old man can't sleep through the night anymore. And the singing in the house has gone low and the whole world is muffled.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 | 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

My Grandpa drove a white Chevy Tahoe, he shouldn't have been driving but I'll let you tell him that. Someone had to be there to put him in it, someone had to be there to let him out. The almond tree blossoms like gray hair. The grasshopper, that once bounded as if weightless now drags itself along at the approach of winter. The caper berry which was like a stimulant, the literal translation of desire here, doesn't work. The black coffee nor little blue pill does the trick. (This is the connotation of caper berry). And the last thing that friends can do is mourn because man is going to his eternal home. This home is being closed down.

Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 | 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,⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

The silver cord which holds the lamp snaps. The golden bowl, so beautiful in its time breaks. The pitcher which so many times came to the fountain shatters. And the wheel breaks at the cistern. Solomon reminds us this death that leads to corruption is the wages of sin, because we are but dust and to dust we shall return. There is a last time you will do everything. There is a last diaper you will change. A last time you place your keys in the bowl. A last shower. A last kiss. A last dinner around your table.

Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Do this by remembering that you will die. Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart.

Ecclesiastes 12:8 | Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

We have returned to where we began. Vapor. Now plainly with the teacher, we can see it.

2. The End of Searching

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 | Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

The book could have concluded with vapor. It is fitting and symmetrical ending. But there is more to be said. We receive here something like an epilogue on the teacher, and it hangs off the end of the book like a remainder. How tight and complete the argument of the book could have been by ending at the declaration of vapor it started with, instead there is more to be said that is unaccounted for. We are told here what we can glean from the rest of the book. The teacher had many things to say about many topics, and he sought to lay them out clearly and well. Even delightfully so that we might see the truth.

In order to discover truth you must be attuned to delight. That is often the first insight of truth. A solution must not be merely accurate but elegant. And Solomon has fit the bill. But the words of the wise are not like vapor. These words are not like vapor. The teacher does not leave us lost in the swirl.

Ecclesiastes 12:11-12 | The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.
¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

The words of the wise are like goads. They are like nails firmly fixed. You see the words of the wise, unlike vapor, have a point. They push you along, and they hold things together. Then almost ambiguously we are told they are given by one shepherd.

But here is the limit of the book in the epilogue. Beware of anything beyond the words of the wise. Beyond the goads and nails of the one shepherd. Don't get lost in the swirl of the vapor. Don't keep searching as though you haven't found it. There is no end to such weariness, and how many have been lost in Ecclesiastes because they never knew to get off the ride. They realized they could always go one level deeper before they had to make a decision so they never stopped digging. They forgot to ask questions like children, who ask to receive an answer, and they fell in love with the question itself. So now we arrive at the end.

3. The End of the Matter

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 | The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Under the sun you cannot arrive at the source of meaning. In order to see true meaning you have to know the one who was here before the sun and who will be here when the sun is gone. Fear God and keep his commandments, of this is the *whole* of man. The command is explicit now, as we see the only thing that can break into this life and provide a point and structure, is God himself. For the first time we are called to keep the commandments of God. The commandments of God cannot be deduced from the world, they must be revealed to us from God himself. God must show himself to us. Our translation adds the word duty. Solomon had only written, "for this is the whole of man." The end of Ecclesiastes is the beginning of Proverbs. The grapes have been smashed but turned to wine.

And here is the final word. God will bring everything into judgement. Every minute of every day of every persons life will be judged by him. Every violation of every commandment, every drop of wine not enjoyed, every piece of bread eaten with ingratitude. Who can bear such things? Who is this one shepherd?

John 10:8-11 | All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Fear God, listen to his son.

