

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

The Long, Slow, Difficult Decline/Descent of Human Life

How Ecclesiastes Describes Ecclesiastes

“The Preacher sought to find **words of delight**,
and uprightly he wrote **words of truth**.
The **words of the wise** are like **goads**,
and like **nails** firmly fixed are the collected sayings;
they are given by **one Shepherd**.”
(Ecclesiastes 12:10-11)

The **first 35-40 years** of human life (the first “half”)
and the **last 35-40 years** of human life (and the second “half”)
are **SO DIFFERENT**

“The young have greater acuity ,	the old have greater depth perception .
The young have greater speed ,	the old have greater endurance .
The young have more agility ,	the old have more stability .
The young have greater ambition ,	the old have greater perspective .
The young have greater zeal ,	the old have greater resolve .
The young have greater passion ,	the old have greater patience .
The young have greater drive ,	the old have greater direction .
The young can make more noise ,	the old have a more respected voice .
The young have higher aspirations ,	the old have deeper contentment .”

(Sean DeMars)

The Long, Slow, Difficult Decline/Descent of Human Life

“A Season of Loss” (Jen Wilkin)

“One Foot in the Grave” (David Gibson)

“the slow and steady intrusion of death into life” (Ian Provan)

“I’m not saying the path of God’s wisdom is easy.
Ecclesiastes isn’t saying it’s easy.
God had to alert us that it’s even possible.
We don’t intuitively track with him.
We have to **learn new ways of thinking**.” (Ray Ortlund)

1b before the evil days come

“...one by one, old friends are taken, familiar customs change,
and long-held hopes now have to be abandoned.
All this will come at a stage when there is no longer the resilience of youth
or the prospect of recovery to offset it.
In one’s early years, and for the greater part of life,
troubles and illnesses are chiefly set-backs, not disasters.
One expects the sky to clear eventually.
It is hard to adjust to the closing of that long chapter:
to know that now, in the final stretch, there will be no improvements:
the clouds [v. 2b] will always gather again,
and time will no longer heal, but kill.” (Derek Kidner)

“This process leaves a person blinking in perplexity at the speed of life,
which has hurtled toward its conclusion just as it seemed to really get going.
Youthfulness leaves so quickly.
And entering old age itself is to arrive in a season
beset by all manner of difficulties, pains and sorrows.” (David Gibson)

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—

This process involves TWO parts:
First, what happens to a human BODY

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,

“The pictures of v. 6 capture the **beauty** and **fragility** of the human frame;
A masterpiece as **delicately wrought** as any work of art,
yet as **breakable** as a piece of earthenware,
and as **useless** in the end as a broken wheel.” *(Derek Kidner)*

7 and the dust returns to the earth
as it was,

“...when you [God] takes away their breath, they die and **return to their dust.**”
(Psalm 104:29)

“the unmaking of creation” *(Ian Provan)*

“Then the Lord God **formed the man of dust** from the ground
And **breathed into** his nostrils **the breath of life**,
And the man became **a living creature.**” *(Genesis 2:7)*

“...for **you are dust**, and **to dust you shall return.**” *(Genesis 3:19b)*

“Death **unmakes** what God has made.
What God has done in life becomes **undone** in death.” *(David Gibson)*

This process involves TWO parts:
Second, and more importantly, what happens to the human SPIRIT

and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

**“No man has the power to retain the spirit ,
or power over the day of death.”** (*Ecclesiastes 8:8*)

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (*Hebrews 10:31*)

**“It is appointed for man to die once,
and after that comes judgment.”** (*Hebrews 9:27*)

To give all humans one “life line”...

2,000 years ago Christ incarnated as one of us, as Jesus of Nazareth,
living perfectly in this evil world,
so he could offer himself (his body & blood) on the cross
as a substitutionary atonement for sin
so all who believe in Him, repenting of their sin against Him,
can be born again...made new...forgiven their sin...given His righteousness

Jesus Christ:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me....

“I am the way, the truth, and the life...” (*John 14:1,6a*)

“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (*John 5:24*)

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart...” (*Hebrews 3*)

**8 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher;
all is vanity.**

3 time in this closing section:

11:8 Even if you **live a long life**,
if you don't spend it focused on enjoying God & His gifts,
your life will be **lived in vain/striving after wind** (never gaining the satisfaction you desire).

11:10 Even **while you are young/strong**,
if you don't spend your life focused on God—revering, enjoying, obeying Him—
your best years will be **spent in vain, striving after only wind**.

12:8 If you spend your life on **anything under the sun**—
excluding God (and fearing, enjoying, obeying Him)—
your life will have been **lived in vain**.

Thinking about what Ecclesiastes has said today...

If you are OLD (in the second half of life)

**So if a person lives many years,
let him rejoice in them all...**
(Ecclesiastes 11:8)

**1) Rejoice that “you made it” this far. Many don’t.
Long life is an undeserved blessing.**

**“We can enter old age with our very weakness and increased dependence on God
being a lived-out sermon to the world around us
that creation is good and meant to be enjoyed.” (David Gibson)**

**2) Don't resent youth's joyfulness
but rejoice with them in an enthusiasm for life.**

“There are few things more beautiful than families and Christian communities where the young learn from the old what it means to be young wisely, and where the old rejoice in the exuberance and experiences of the youths in their midst.” *(David Gibson)*

**3) If you are trusting wholly in Jesus Christ to save you,
rejoice that you are SO CLOSE to seeing Jesus!**

Because “Jesus has ransacked the grave of its terror and power by entering it himself and emerging victorious on the other side.” *(David Gibson)* YOU will, too!

This reality is all over 1 Corinthians 15!!

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed,
we have a building from God, a house not made with hands,
eternal in the heavens.

For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,
if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—
not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed,
so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God,
who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” *(2 Corinthians 5:1-5)*

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,
and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.
Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.
But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.
Remove vexation from your heart,
and put away pain from your body,
for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.
Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth...
(Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1a)

Thinking about what Ecclesiastes has said today...

whether you are young or old

- 1) Heed God's reasoning and commands here
- 2) Write this on your heart so you will actually live according to it
- 3) May this affect/drive your choices about how you live your life
- 4) May the rest of your life (long or short) be better because you follow God's counsel

"Everyone carries in himself the sources of his own happiness or wretchedness. Circumstances have really very little to do with our inner experiences. It matters little in the determination of one's degree of enjoyment whether he live in a cottage or a palace....

A happy heart sees rainbows and brilliance everywhere, even in darkest clouds, and hears sweet strains of song even amid the loudest wailings of the storm; and a sad heart, unhappy and discontented, sees spots in the sun, specks in the rarest fruits, and something with which to find fault in the most perfect of God's works, and hears discords and jarring notes in the heavenliest music.

"So it comes about that this whole question must be settled from within. The fountains rise in the heart itself. The old man, like the snail, carries his house on his back. He may change neighbors or homes or scenes or companions, but he cannot get away from himself...

Only Christ can make any life, young or old, truly beautiful or truly happy. Only He can cure the heart's restless fever and give quietness and calmness. Only He can purify that sinful fountain within us, our corrupt nature, and make us holy. To have a peaceful and blessed ending to life, we must live it with Christ. Such a life grows brighter even to its close." (JR Miller)