



# MEANINGLESS

## AUDIO DEVOTIONS

### ON ECCLESIASTES

#### Youthfulness Is Meaningless

(Ecclesiastes 11:9-10)

*Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.*

*Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.*

*So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.*

It would be an understatement to say that our culture is obsessed with youth and youthfulness. Whole sectors of our economy are dedicated to making us look and supposedly feel younger—Botox injections, plastic surgery, laser hair removal, hair implants, liposuction, skin firming lotions, teeth whitening, vitamin supplements, energy drinks, and fitness clubs. But why do we do it? Why spend the millions and subject ourselves to such treatment? If our goal is to be good stewards of the bodies God has given us so we can better serve him and our neighbor, all is fine and good. But even for us Christians, our drive for youthfulness is often more self-flattering and fear-induced than we like to admit. Among our less than sanctified motivations can be believing that our self-worth depends on looking a certain way or possessing certain capacities so others notice or value us. In that case, we're allowing fickle human opinions to supersede the LORD's declaration of us as his beautiful and beloved children in Christ. It could be that we are just plain frightened by getting older and in denial of the fact that our bodies are wearing down and inevitably headed for death and decay. There is no magical fountain of youth in this world. We are sinful children of Adam, who was formed from the dust of the earth. We like he, are destined to return to dust (cf. Gen. 3:19). When we try to deceive others or delude ourselves into thinking we have accomplished the impossible and turned back the clock, it's no wonder that Solomon says, "Youth and vigor (literally the 'black' or 'dark hair' that one has in their youth) are meaningless"—a futile chasing after the wind.

Now that's not to say that one's youth is not a special time. As many an elder had said to a young person, "Enjoy these days because they won't last forever and will never come again!" Solomon likewise here lays down some practical advice for the young: "Be happy while you are young... Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see." These precious years full of energy, excitement, and development are prime time to have fun, to experiment and experience new things, and to discover where your interests, passions, and talents lie. However, in true wisdom, Solomon urges balance. There is no stage in life that is the "right time" to sin. Solomon warns that youth is not the time to be wild and morally unhinged, for in "all these things God will bring you to judgment." Excuses like, "My friends made me do it!" or "My hormones got the better of me!" have never passed with God. Instead, the Scriptures urge the young to keep themselves pure by living according to God's Word (Ps. 119:9).

While young people are making the mental, physiological, and social transition from youth to adulthood, it can be an especially turbulent time. As easily and quickly as their energetic impulses can turn them towards danger or ungodly behavior, the same can also draw them in the opposite direction towards grief and despair. Teenagers are experts at making little nothings into major somethings, and as a result can suddenly find themselves in very dark and lonely places.

Throughout the maturation process it is vital for our youth to have supportive, wise, understanding, God-fearing adults in their lives, but most of all the young (and the not-so-young) need the steadfastness of our Savior-God, who always loves, never leaves, and never changes, which is where we will go with Solomon in Chapter 12 next week. By faith the spring of the Spirit bubbles up in our hearts ever-new, surpassing the joy and vigor of youth, and making believers vibrant and fruitful with good works even into old age (cf. Ps. 92:12-15).

For your self-reflection:

1.) If you are young, what do you enjoy the most about life? If you're older, what do you miss most about your youth?

2.) What are you doing to "stay young"? Search your motives and ask yourself why you are doing these things. Wherever you find fear, vanity, or selfishness, seek God's forgiveness and the revaluation of your purpose and worth in Jesus Christ.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, ours is a world obsessed with the superficiality of youth and frightened by aging and dying. Forgive me when I adopt the same mindset and redirect my heart, mind, and life to glorifying you here and now. Amen.*