

**ECCLESIASTES 11:7-12:7**  
**(OT: Ps 16:1-11; NT: 2 Cor 1:3-10)**

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## INTRODUCTION

- **Jonathan Edwards** was greatest American theologian of 18C:
  - Of course, he wasn't without failure and sin.
  - But he's arguably most important American theologian of all time.
- However, as church historian Sean Lucas points out, there was a time when Jonathan Edwards wasn't Jonathan Edwards.<sup>1</sup>
  - Before his innumerable books/leadership in the Great Awakening...
  - He was just an 18-year-old pastor, ministering in a town of 10,000 people.
- But at that age he wrote a series of remarkable resolutions → He put down on paper the kind of life he wanted to live and committed to reading his list once a week.
  - He wrote 70 resolutions in total → Encourage you to read them all, you can find them online.
  - But I wonder if he'd been reading our passage in Ecclesiastes when he wrote Resolution #52: *"I frequently hear persons in old age say how they **would live** if they were to live their lives over again. Resolved, that I **will live** just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age."*
- When you're on your deathbed, how do you want to have lived?
  - Don't wait → Live that way now.
  - That's the point of our passage.

**Transition:** Organize thoughts under three headings: 1) What the passage teaches us; 2) What this teaching looks like in our lives; 3) Where we get the power to do it.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. WHAT THE PASSAGE TEACHES US.

- Main point of passage isn't hidden → Stated clearly right there in **V1: 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."**
  - First, we're to **remember**.
    - In **WESTERN** thought – the way you and I think – *remembering* means *recollecting* → Bring to mind something that happened in the past.
    - But in **OT/JEWISH** mindset *remembering* means more than that.
      - Means to participate here-and-now in those events from the past.
      - Drag events of past into present/live in light of them.
    - Think of a birthday celebration...
      - Don't merely remember the big day...
      - Enter into the memory – celebrate past for what it means now and anticipate the future.
    - That's what we're called to do here: Remember something in a way that shapes our lives now and changes how we move into the future.
  - What are we to remember? **Your Creator**.
    - Brings us back to **Gen 1:1** – very first verse of the Bible: **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.**
      - He made us from the dust → And to dust we shall return.

- But he was there before it all and remains forever young.
  - Which takes us to the third thing: Remember God, 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.”**
- Here’s the point: While you still have time, live your life in light of him.

**Illustrate:**

- **John Yates** is the former rector of *The Falls Church Anglican* in northern Virginia.
- Got to know him a little bit when I pastored in that area.
  - We called him the “Gospel Godfather” of our community.
  - Dear, faithful, godly man → Kind of guy it’s great for a young pastor to be around.
- Remember one breakfast he told me one of his ambitions was to, “*Live without regret.*”
- I think that’s a beautiful summary of what’s being taught in this text.

**Apply:**

- We know the deathbed awaits us all:
  - So don’t wait till *then* to decide the kind of life you wish you’d lived.
  - Decide how you want to have lived and live that way *now*.
- Here’s a question I ask myself every month:
 

***Are my stated priorities my lived priorities?***

  - Ask me what’s most important to me and I’ll tell you: Jesus, my wife, my kids, my family/friends, my church → A handful in that order.
  - But do I live like that’s true?
    - When you look at my calendar, my budget, my life...
    - Am I living like those are my priorities?
- What about you?
  - What would you say is most important to you?
  - Are you living in such a way to make those priorities come true?

**Summary:** Make your stated priorities your lived priorities.

***The teaching of this text is to “Live without regret.”***

**Transition:** What does such a life look like?

- That takes us to our second heading.
  - There are all sorts of things we could say...
  - But our text draws our attention to **two things** we should consider today.
- To live without regret...

## **2. WHAT THIS TEACHING LOOKS LIKE IN OUR LIVES.**

**FIRST: Enjoy life while you can.**

- Does that surprise you?
  - Were you expecting something more somber/serious?
  - Remember that this is a surprisingly happy sermon series...
- Look at the text:
  - **11:8: So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all...**

- **11:9: 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.**
  - Last line reminds us not to descend into crude life of hedonistic pleasure.
  - But thrust of section compels us to enjoy life → Bc time on earth is short.
- In poetic fashion **12:1a-7** reminds us that the time will come when we will say of our days, **I have no pleasure in them.**
  - The sun gives way to clouds.
  - Strength fades: Our hands tremble → We lose our sight and teeth → Sexual desire becomes a thing of the past.
  - We wake up early in the morning but have no passion for life.
  - Our health dissolves and then it ends in death: **V7: the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.**

**Illustrate:** Terry Pratchett (English humorist/author) once wrote: *“Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened,”*<sup>3</sup>

- Friend of mine, who’s my age, jokes that this has already started to happen to him:<sup>4</sup>
  - He used to enjoy huge meals, now he gets acid reflux and feels sick.
  - He used to enjoy rollercoasters, now he prefers to sit it out and watch his kids.
- In a small way, I understand → I feel it most when I work out.
  - Gone are the days when I could stay up till 3AM, eat a large pizza, then get up 4 hours later and PR my mile time.
  - I now spend more time warming up than I do working out.
- Our seniors will tell you:
  - Life is still full of meaning, purpose, joy...
  - But they used to enjoy doing some things that they can no longer do.
    - Some of them are simple: Hike Mount LeConte.
    - Some are more profound: Talk to their spouse who has died.

**Apply:** Bible says life is for the living → And that we should enjoy it while we can.

- Good reminder for our **savers:** Time/place to stop being so sensible and have a little fun.
- Good reminder for our **parents:** Teach your kids to enjoy life and have fun.  
[Story of Ed Bradley’s “Blue-Plate Specials”]
- Good reminder for our **church:**
  - Wouldn’t it be a beautiful witness to outsiders if we were marked by joy?
  - If they said, “Not sure what they believe but I’m intrigued bc they seem happy.”
- Here’s **key question** for us all: Something you love to do but haven’t done in long time?
  - Paint, play guitar, read some fiction, brew some beer, do yoga, go water skiing, cook that recipe, see that concert, have dinner with those friends, have that vulnerable conversation with your spouse, call your mum...
  - As an act of worship, do it this week → While you still can.

**Summary:** Live life regret → Enjoy life while you can.

**SECOND: Deal with your pain.**

- We see this in **11:10: Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.**

- **Derek Kidner** describes the vexation spoken of in this verse as “*the bitterness provoked by a hard and disappointing world.*”<sup>5</sup>
- You’ve maybe heard the quote – I’m not sure who said it first: “*Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.*”
  - Behind the smiles, everyone carries hurt and pain.
  - Remember that especially for people you find difficult: If you knew *why* they are the way they are – you’d feel compassion.
- But remember that it’s not just everyone else – it’s also true of you.
- We’ve all experienced it...
  - Might be the pain of our parents’ divorce, horror of sexual abuse, loneliness of not fitting in, or something else...
  - Sometimes we write it off bc it feels more mundane:
    - Insecurities, worries, anxieties that we tell ourselves are “normal.”
    - “That’s just how life is,” we say, “I’m fine.”
  - Can I give you freedom by saying that at one point/another → None of us are fine.
- Ecclesiastes says there’s vexation in every human **heart** and it leads to pain in the **body**.
  - There’s a wonderful book called *The Body Keeps the Score* – describes how our traumatic experiences affect our minds, our bodies, and our physical health.
  - It’s a pretty heavy read, but there’s another book called *Try Softer* by Aundi Kolber → Encourage you to check it out if you want to learn more.
  - Both books expand on what the Preacher says here: The challenges of life impact us deeply → Both body and soul.
- And we need to deal with them.

### Illustrate:

- If you leave pain unattended, it magnifies/grows → And worst of all, it takes control.
  - The **kid** who lacks confidence bc of something classmate said that was mean.
  - The **wife** who’s unable to trust her husband bc of her father left them.
  - The **dad** who’s too hard on his kids bc of how his own dad treated him.
  - The **friend** who carries bitterness over something they were unable to forgive.
  - The **addict** – to substances/popularity/work – who’s looking to other things to meet their needs.
- All these things make sense to us – they seem *right* → But all the while destruction breeds.

### Apply: If you want to live without regret...

- You need to **remove vexation from your heart** → You need to **put away pain from your body**.
- Do what it takes to do that:
  - Pour out your heart to God and find healing.
  - Read his word and find life.
  - Share your struggles with your community here at church.
  - If necessary, go to a professional counselor or a staff member here at church.
- Don’t be afraid of the work.
  - You can heal.
  - The way things have always been doesn’t need to be the way things always are.
- Here’s **key question** for us all: Something in your life you’ve not worked through?

- Today is a great day to start.
- Don't get to the end of your life and realize you lived so much of it out of hurt.

**Transition:** All this takes us to our third heading...

### 3. WHERE WE GET THE POWER TO DO IT.

- How do we hold this tension – enjoy life while you can while dealing with your pain?
- The answer, of course, is in the gospel of Jesus, God's own Son.
  - He's the only one to ever live without regret.
  - Then on the cross he dealt with all pain.
    - His sacrifice forgives us of our sin.
    - Now we are free to live for him.
- See how it's both/and → In the gospel you get to eat your cake and have it too?
  - We tend to be black and white: We can be happy or deal with pain.
  - Jesus says we can do both.
- In love:
  - He will heal you from all pain.
  - And free you to enjoy this life until he comes again.
- Go to him, dear ones → He bids you to come.

### CONCLUSION

- Here's your SIS:  
*We can live without regret by enjoying life while we can and dealing with our pain;  
 And we can do both those things in the love of Jesus, God's own son.*
- "I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live if they were to live their lives over again. Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age."  
*In the gospel, you can live without regret.*

## RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

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### Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a littler deeper.

- Arthur Brooks, *Build the Life You Want: The Art and Science of Getting Happier*.
- Michael Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*.
- David Gibson, *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End*.
- Paul Jeon, *Nothing Matters, Everything Matters*.
- Walter Kaiser, *Coping with Change: Ecclesiastes*.
- Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*.
- Tim Mackie, *The Bible Project: Wisdom of Ecclesiastes*.
- John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ: A Treatise in Which the Whole Controversy about Universal Redemption is Fully Discussed*.
- Philip Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*.
- Philip Ryken, *Why Everything Matters: The Gospel in Ecclesiastes*.
- Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See [this article](#), accessed 9/27/23.

<sup>2</sup> I owe my understanding of this passage and this broad outline to Paul Jeon, *Nothing Matters, Everything Matters – part 12*, accessed [here](#) 9/27/23.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in David Gibson, *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End*, 131.

<sup>4</sup> See the Paul Jeon sermon referenced above.

<sup>5</sup> Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, 99.