

## **ECCLESIASTES, PART 6**

Marshall Stiver, December 12, 2014

Hello brethren. It is time for Bible Study to begin and tonight we'll go through the final two chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes. We've been on this book for; I believe this is part six now, so we'll cover these last two chapters.

Last time we covered just chapter ten and in that study we saw that Solomon was prodding us, the students, on to continually live wisely in order to avoid any sin that could tarnish our character and therefore ruin our reputation. And Solomon has prodded us throughout this book in many ways.

He warned us of the way of a babbler that is driven by carnal emotion and again, you know emotion can drive us. If it's righteous emotion, it's a wonderful thing. But if it's carnal it is not good. The way of the babbler is driven by carnal emotion and they thereby fall into pit after pit, one problem after another. In essence, they don't know which way is up and that's basically what Solomon said last time.

He was prodding us to habitually, consciously, think, be thinking people. He illustrated the idea that we must get our spiritual priorities straight, not allowing ourselves to become lazy so that we become lethargic and go to sleep spiritually.

That same diligence, as he pointed out, applies to the very thoughts that we think. He was, in fact, through his example instructing the student to learn to think as God thinks, to learn to develop the mind of God within them, to be a person after God's own mind or heart as Solomon's father was.

Let's begin, then, in Ecclesiastes chapter 11 today and in verse 1. The teacher continues to prod us on to live diligently, that's really the drive of the beginning here. Verse 1 of Ecclesiastes 11:

**Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days. 2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.**

Some apply these verses to being diligent in business and certainly there is an application here, without a question. In Solomon's time, as today in many cases, shipping your product to some other part of the world and then coming back with product from that part of the world to sell at home was good business and it's still good business today, and so some call that casting your bread upon the waters. And that's not a bad reference at all.

It could be viewed that way and it certainly applies in principle but verse 2 speaks of giving which doesn't relate to buying and selling – the business of giving to others, in other words, the give way of life. In other words, Solomon is talking of investing in God, investing in God.

Christ said, **“If you've done it to one of the least of these, My brethren, you've done it to Me.”** So, the giver (no matter who we give to, no matter who we give to) the giver is in fact giving to God.

One of the commentaries I read said this, “Some say that life is uncertain, so we should eat dessert first.” My words are, that's the self-centered approach. Continuing

he says, “Solomon says here that because life is uncertain, we ought to give the dessert away.” I thought that was quite an interesting way of interpreting it. That’s the God centered approach to life. That’s the give way of life because God can bless that investment, the investment of giving. That’s what God does bless.

Solomon is teaching us to apply a God-centered approach in life rather than the self-centered one that he had lived earlier in his life. And so, he had some perspective, some very valuable perspective to give to us. And of course, what he’s talking about is what Mr. Herbert Armstrong called the give way of life which he taught us many, many decades ago.

Verse 3:

**3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty *themselves* upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.**

So the theme that Solomon’s got here of giving, of diligently giving is continuing in this verse. Give like the clouds do when they’re full of rain. And what do clouds do when they’re full of rain? They empty their rain on everything that’s under the cloud – every single particle of ground, every single person.

Let’s go to Matthew chapter 5. Christ spoke of the give way in His own manner of doing it. Matthew chapter 5, we’ll begin in verse 43. The give way is extended to everybody and Christ made this really clear. Verse 43:

**Matthew 5:43 You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (The rain clouds pass over from God, the Father and it falls on everyone.) 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.**

What Christ is saying is that we’re not to give as the world gives. We’re to give like our Father does. When we think of giving we often think of physical or financial things and that’s clearly a part of it, most definitely that’s part of it.

But the sons of God are to rain down love, to rain down love on their enemies. They’re to rain down good to those who hate them, prayers for those who persecute them and spitefully use them.

We’re to give to the just and to the unjust in order to be like our Father and therefore like our elder Brother. And, of course, this can only happen if we allow Christ’s mind to be in us. It’s not the normal way of thinking. We have to allow that mind; we have to take on that mind.

Just paying lip service to good words does nothing to enable us to think and to act as God does. Living the give way *today*, this very day, not tomorrow, not talking about it but living it today, is what matters.

The last half of Ecclesiastes 11 verse 3 says, “...and if the tree falls to the south, or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.”

What is a tree typical to us? It's typical of life; a tree represents life. It's an awesome thing to look at. It's a beautiful, beautiful plant growing up out of the ground. But when a tree falls, it dies.

Solomon's warning is that death for the living is no great distance away. It could come at any age; a tree can fall at any time.

We only have a finite amount of time to practice the give way so that it becomes what we are internally. Of course this is something that we're going through; we've been going through over this last year together. We've been talking about it and developing and honing our knowledge about how to live this way better – the give way of life so that it becomes internal. And so we have to be diligent in it and that's what Solomon is talking about.

Ecclesiastes 11 now, verse 4:

**Ecclesiastes 11:4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap.**

This is still spoken in the context of giving. All of this is following the same theme.

In Luke 12 Christ told of the multitudes and He was speaking to them and He said that they could, in fact, observe the winds and they could observe the clouds and they could know what weather to expect. And, of course, people do that all the time. We have forecasters today with more sophisticated means, obviously, but it's for the same purpose.

A person can look at the physical evidence and determine whether or not to sow or whether or not to reap, whichever the case may be. And the reason they do it is because they want the best conditions to work with. That's understandable.

But the context here is about giving, about casting our bread upon the waters. Solomon is talking about picking and choosing whom it is we want to give to, whom we want to show love to.

And we just read what Christ said in Matthew 5. He said, "**For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others**"- than the tax collectors?

Christ said we are to be perfect just as our Father is perfect, and He is a giver. The give way of life is His way of life. And so, the give way of life applies to everyone. We can't be a respecter of persons.

Verse 5:

**5As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind, Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.**

We don't know all the marvelous things that God knows. He alone knows those things. We don't know the circumstances and the choices that have made others the way that they are, all the things they've been through in their life and the things that have tweaked them the way that we've been tweaked in our own lives. We don't know all those things.

But we do know that God is love and that He desires that every person who's ever lived should come to repentance. He wants to rain down on everyone and of course, each in their own time, each in their own time.

Let's go to Galatians chapter 6 now, verse 9. Paul addresses the same issue and he shows us the balance that we should strive for. Verse 9 he says:

**Galatians 6:9** And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. **10** Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

And so, that's the instruction, do good to all and let your rain come down on everyone and especially upon the scattered brotherhood. That's very pertinent to us today because of what we've been learning about the spiritual organism. We have to let our rain come down on everyone among the brotherhood across the board without exception.

Let's go to Ecclesiastes now, chapter 11 and verse 6. Solomon continues, he says: **Ecclesiastes 11:6** In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike *will be good*.

Now the seed that's sown is the give way of life. We're to practice it when we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep at night. We're to practice it, applying it to all people, to everyone. And that gives us a lot to think about – our neighbors, people we come in contact with during the day, whoever it might be.

We could and should expand the timing stated here to the morning and evening of our entire lives, in other words, from the time that we're very, very young until the very end of our life, we're to practice this give way of life so that we come to think, eventually, just like God thinks.

What a great gift this is brethren, to teach and to model for our children. If they're not seeing this as a model, if they're not being taught this, then how can we hope they will reflect it in their own life.

In Galatians chapter 6 verse 7, Paul wrote, **“Be not deceived; God is not mocked for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”**

If we genuinely sow love to ALL others that is what God will give back to us. The practice of the give way of life is a great gift to give to our children, and as I said, to model for our children. We couldn't give them a better gift than that.

Verse 7 now:

**7** Truly the light is sweet, And *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; **8** But if a man lives many years *And rejoices in them all*, Yet let him remember the days of darkness, For they will be many. All that is coming *is* vanity.

The light that's sweet in verse 7 is typical of life itself. Life is a wonderful thing. You can also see that reflected in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verse 11 and also in Psalm 48 verse 19. Life is especially enjoyable to the godly, those who live the give way of life. It's especially enjoyable. But here Solomon reminds us that life is temporary, it's fleeting.

In Job chapter 10 verse 21, Job said this, **“Before I go to the place from which I shall not return, to the land of darkness and the shadow of death.”**

Dark days are coming; there is no question about that. No light shines into the grave where we will all eventually go. So the implication is to sow the good seed while you still can. In other words, we are to redeem the time concerning the give way of life. We're to redeem the time.

**Whatever good that our hand finds to do it should be done with our might.** That's chapter 9 verse 10 from Ecclesiastes. It should be done with our might while we still have some might, while there's still light within us, while we still have life in us.

And you know, Solomon didn't write this just to be filling space. A wise person needs to remind himself often that death will most definitely come at some point in time. We don't like to think about it. It's not a natural inclination of a human being to want to think that, someday I'm going to die. But it is a fact and it's something that we should consider at some point in time. And the benefits of considering this are numerous.

To begin with, it's humbling; it's humbling to concretely come to grips with the fact that we have no power over death. We don't control our destiny. Our Father, we've discussed in previous chapters in this book, He controls all the circumstances in our lives and He does it for the purpose of humbling us. But we need to come to grips with that fact that we don't have power over death.

So the benefit then is that we learn to walk humbly with God instead of proudly with self and forgetting about God. That's a great benefit.

Only then can we truly learn to practice another benefit of reminding ourselves of our own mortality, which is that if we're really thinking about it, we're not nearly so prone to being lulled to sleep in a spiritual sense. If we're thinking about our mortality, if it's something that we realize and we're aware of and we know and we're preparing for, we're not going to be lulled to sleep in a spiritual sense because we'll want to be ready. We'll want to be alert and attentive and on fire.

Another benefit is that contemplating our own death can greatly reduce the fear of it. It prepares us for that time that is to come, the time that God ordained for every person.

But this wisdom, or any of it in this book, isn't just to older folks. It's for the great good of the young people alike because we're all a part of the family.

Let's go to Ecclesiastes chapter 11 now, verse 9. Solomon says:

**Ecclesiastes 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 in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.**

**10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity.**

God made our youth, and thankfully so, because it's a wonderful time to go through. It's a tremendous amount of fun. It's exhilarating. But He made it to be fleeting. He made it to be transitory. We don't stay young very long. Now when we're young, we think that we'll always be young. I mean that's how the young think.

But as we age we come to see and we come to feel just how fleeting youth really is. We may think "young" for a long time. I believe that I still think young. You probably do, too. But that's as far as it goes because we don't feel that way all the time, do we?

The challenge is for the young to realize that they too must deal in reality. They have to deal in reality. They must.

Being young and full of life isn't going to last for more than 2 to 3 decades before you will also begin to notice the physical decline. Most people will admit that they noticed the physical decline in their life in their mid thirties. And so, essentially, half of our seventy years that God gives us is youth and from there we're decreasing, declining.

So redeem the time now. Make the very best use of it that you possibly can while you're young. What is the best use when you're young? Well, Solomon was talking about following and developing your natural talents and interests. Is there anything wrong with that? Well, no.

Let's go to Proverbs chapter 16 and we can begin in verse 1. I've got a couple of verses we'll look at here. There is a particular way to follow those talents and interests that we have when we're young. Verse 1:

**Proverbs 16:1 The preparations of the heart *belong* to man, But the answer of the tongue *is* from the LORD.**

And in verse 9:

**Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, (we all have plans) But the LORD directs his steps.**

Both of these verses highlight the fact that we all have thoughts, we all have interests and we all therefore have plans or hopes in life. God gives us each unique creative abilities. We all have talents of one sort or another.

But the humble, those who thank God for their natural abilities that He's given them, these will look to Him to guide their words, and to guide and to direct their steps.

As they follow those interests and those talents, they'll avoid later sorrows in life that can come upon us when we're young and impulsive. We don't have to be impulsive. I know many young people who weren't because they pursued wisdom. That's redeeming the time. That's what that means.

Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and in verse 1 Solomon writes:

**Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":**

The words, "Remember now your Creator" are intended to be very weighty words. It's not just a blasé introduction to what he's talking about. These are very, very weighty words.

"You're not the creator." This is what God is saying to the young. Remember that *you're* not the Creator. You're the created thing. David said that in the 100<sup>th</sup> Psalm and in verse 3 when he was talking about that.

But you've been gifted; all the young people have been gifted with certain talents, but not by your own power. You didn't make yourself. You didn't make your parents. God made mankind. Our talents are gifts from God.

You know, we live on an awesome planet, not made by human hands. We have these talents that we can utilize in a wonderful environment called the earth. None of these things did we make.

We were designed to live only a short space of time, roughly seventy years – some today live on up to one hundred years. But that's what God said, roughly seventy years and then there comes a time to die.

So what God does for all of us, referring to the young now, God places before you life and death, blessing and cursing. But He says, "**Therefore choose life.**" That's what Solomon's talking about here. He's encouraging the young to choose life, to choose a God-centered life. Following your interests, yes but maintaining a God-centered life.

Let's go to Proverbs chapter 8. We'll look at a couple of scriptures that support remembering your Creator in your youth. Beginning in verse 17:

**Proverbs 8:17 I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me.**

The one who is doing the loving here is wisdom. This is Lady Wisdom, the way that Solomon wrote it. The only ones who'll be loved by wisdom are those who seek her, those who seek her. And the only ones who'll seek for her are those who fear God, those who have a God-centered life.

Verse 7 of chapter 1, back to chapter 1, verse 7, Solomon says:

**Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, *But* fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

Wisdom and knowledge (which is truth) begins with recognizing God as your Creator and not you as the one who's made everything available to you, including your own life.

It begins with realizing that the talents we were born with are gifts from God.

But of course, fools despise the idea that God exists or that anybody other than self can define truth for them. A fool hates that concept, that they're not the ones who control their own destiny and call their own shots.

It's very easy, when we're young and full of energy and full of strength and full of drive, to forget God or at least to put Him on a shelf somewhere out of the way so that we can walk in the ways of our heart and in the sight of our own eyes apart from God.

But Solomon's point is that we pay for it if that's what we choose. We'll wind up paying for it. Solomon spoke from experience. He knew what he was talking about.

Let's go down to verse 28 here in chapter 1. This again is speaking of wisdom.

**Proverbs 1:28 "Then they will call on me, (and again this is wisdom) but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. 29 Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD,**

Life or death is a choice. We can have life if that's what we choose. Blessing or cursing is a choice and it's wonderful that we have the choices. Life and blessings begin by choosing to fear God, to recognize Him as our Creator and not we ourselves.

Verse 30:

**30 They would have none of my counsel *And* despised my every rebuke.**

**31 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies. 32 For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them; 33 But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil."**

Learning to listen early in life is the same as remembering the Creator in your youth, learning to listen and to absorb and to crave to learn the principles of life that are real and true.

Solomon, as we've seen in Ecclesiastes, knew full well the emptiness of life apart from God. And so, he is urging the young to choose better than he did, to choose an abundant life centered in God.

Now, does that mean that if a person is called in their later years, is that a bad thing? Well, no, coming to repentance is a wonderful thing if it's late in life. It's a wonderful thing. The angels shout for joy (we know that) when anybody comes to repentance, they shout for joy.

But to commit our lives to God when we're young and full of energy and drive and ability is better (in one sense) in terms of how we're able to be useful to God and to be useful to man as we follow godly interests and develop our talents.

This is what Solomon grew away from. He started out well in his youth but he didn't continue in that until later in life again. He wasted a lot of years and that's what he's

trying to avoid for young people now. He's trying to get young people to avoid wasting the majority of their life.

He urges young people to do this because the difficulties of old age are coming. Those coming days are ones in which a person will say, I have no pleasure in them, no physical pleasure.

Let's go to 2 Samuel now, chapter 19, verse 32. An old friend of King David makes the very same point here that the physical pleasure goes by the way. Beginning in verse 32:

**2 Samuel 19:32** Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man. **33** And the king said to Barzillai, "Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem." (Barzillai had given to David and now David wants to give back) **34** But Barzillai said to the king, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? **35** I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king?"

Barzillai had been faithful to his king for many years and had been very generous to him when he was in need. He'd lived a very productive life, without a question, a long and productive life and in the course of it had found physical pleasures just as we all do.

But he was 10 years past his 3 score and 10. He'd lived a long time. He knew his time was short because the physical pleasures were ceasing, which they do when we get to that final stage of life. His sense of taste was gone. He was very, very hard of hearing. No doubt other many of his other physical pleasures were gone as well.

But he was at the stage that Solomon was describing in Ecclesiastes 12. But there's something we should look at here in regard to Barzillai, and that is that even though the physical pleasure was gone, he doesn't sound distressed over it. He doesn't sound like a man who is crying in a corner. He doesn't sound anything like that.

Notice what's on his mind here when he's talking to the king. He's still concerned about others. He's still concerned about the give way of life. He's concerned about the king and if we read on a little further he's concerned about his son Chimham providing service to the king as well, in his stead. "Let Chimham come and help you."

And so, the physical pleasures are gone but he's still casting his bread upon the water. This is a wonderful thing. This is how old age is meant to be. When the physical pleasures cease there are still the spiritual things we can do and be productive in. He's living the give way of life.

Let's go to Isaiah chapter 46 and beginning in verse 3. God takes care of those who love Him. Verse 3:

**Isaiah 46:3** Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, Who have been upheld by Me from birth, Who have been carried from the womb:

He's taken care of you from day one and in our case, spiritually speaking; it's from the time of our calling, from the time of our conversion. Verse 4:

**4** Even to your old age, I am He, And even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver you.



And again, when we read that from the spiritual perspective it's incredibly encouraging to us. God will carry us, be with us to the very end of our life. It doesn't mean He will take away the aging process. He won't, because we all go through it. David went through it. Solomon went through it. We all do.

But God will be with us. He'll carry us and deliver us when we're old and when we're weary if we've chosen to know Him and to bow down to Him, if we've recognized Him as our Creator from the time of our conversion, from the time of our calling onward.

In this there is tremendous spiritual pleasure that replaces the physical when the physical has failed us.

But now let's turn our focus to the physical failure of pleasure as Solomon goes through in chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes. Let's go to verse 2. These next several verses are full of metaphors concerning old age.

The imagery that Solomon uses here, I think, contributes to the effectiveness of these verses. It's very effective because it's somewhat vague and therefore it's a very broad way of interpreting what he has written here regarding the aging process. In other words, what he's written is going to apply to every elderly person in some way and likely in many ways.

Verse 2, and again, this is after the verse 1, of remembering the Creator in your youth.

**Ecclesiastes 12:2 While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain;**

The sun, light, the moon and stars are all sources of one particular thing and that thing is illumination. They all radiate light.

It's a likely reference our outward appearance. What in our outward appearance radiates for us? Well, the eyes do, our complexion, our expressions, our body language, all these things radiate an outward appearance don't they. These things, when we're young, radiate life and vigor.

And of course, all of that diminishes with age. And so we're to remember the Creator before that stage of life. Remember Him before the clouds return after the rain.

So what is he referring to there? And again, you know, this is subject to broad interpretation because Solomon didn't just make it real clear. It's something that we can think about and learn to apply in our own lives. But the clouds returning after the rain is likely a metaphor for having one sad or difficult experience after another, the clouds returning after the rain.

You know, the death of a friend, the death of a mate, those things are like clouds returning after the rain – one physical pain after another – and how well we know that. Maybe the knee starts going bad or then later it's a shoulder or some other ailment that we have.

The recovery time between trials gets shorter and shorter as we age. It's all so very true, isn't it? At the time our body is failing we're learning humility through one trial after another.

Verse 3:

**3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim;**

We could assign different body parts as to what are the ‘keepers of the house’. The commentaries do, you’d see various comments on that.

But it’s very likely that the keepers of the house are our hands or our arms. ‘Keepers’ comes from the Hebrew word *shamar* and it means to guard, to protect or to attend to. Men use their arms and hands. If they’re guarding or protecting, what do they do? They’re using their arms or their hands, very much so. But you’d use them in any of these endeavors.

Women attend to the interior of the house with their hands and their arms. It’s the most effective tool in going about doing the things that you do.

And in advancing age there will be more and more trembling, as the strength continues to fail there’s more and more trembling in these ‘keepers’.

The ‘strong men’ likely refers to the strongest part of the human anatomy which would be the thighs and the legs. And of course, perhaps we’ve experienced it ourselves; the legs will become bowed over time, which furthers the loss of strength, which can also promote the wearing out of joints and so on.

The ‘grinders’, or the teeth, for many will have to come out with age. They will just naturally come out with age. And of course due to our modern dentistry, they come out at night; they will come out at night. It’s not that we can avoid it but today we have access to things today that can prolong life to a certain degree.

And of course the eyes that look out of the windows can be darkened with cataracts or other eye problems that are related to aging. There are many difficulties with vision. And vision itself breaks down as we go through life. I mentioned earlier we begin that decline at around age thirty five.

Generally around the age of forty a lot of people begin to need bifocals and then some time after that, they’re going to wind up needing trifocals and then sometime shortly after that they’re going to just have to do a lot squinting or else get a magnifying glass. I know many brethren; Mr. Armstrong was one of those who had to use a magnifying glass to read in his final years.

You know, we resist it at every step but there is no stopping the inevitable.

Verse 4:

**4 When the doors are shut in the streets, And the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low.**

Now, regarding doors, David said in Psalm 141, verse 3 he said, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”

So the lips stay shut in the streets, that’s what is being said here but what do the ‘streets’ then refer to? Well, in verse 3 Solomon was using the imagery of a house, and so that has continued here. In proximity to a house, the streets are external. They’re outside the house, aren’t they?

And of course, a house has both internal and external doors. The doors of our lips are external and when a very elderly person chews his or her food, the doors stay shut so we don’t lose what it is we’re chewing. A lot of young people may not even realize that it’s a difficulty. But it’s a fact of life. It’s a fact of life.

And the sound of the teeth grinding is low because of they are few or infirm teeth or because of a lack of hearing. But even with false teeth, as good as they are today; care must be taken to keep them in the mouth when chewing something harder because

they will come out very easily, especially as more years go by and our body begins to shrink.

His words are a much kinder way to express the difficult reality that he's describing. I'm making it more plain but he was very, very kind in how he wrote this.

Insomnia is often a problem in aging so that the afflicted are easily awakened if they're able to hear the crow of a rooster, for instance, or a bird or just the natural nighttime sounds of the house. They awaken very easily.

But hearing can also be greatly impaired so that enjoying music, which is a wonderful thing or the sounds of our grandchildren, or our great grandchildren, which is a wonderful thing, or the conversations that we so much enjoy with those whom we're around. That can lose its former pleasure when we can't hear.

But all of this breakdown is by God's design. It has a purpose and there is a completeness to the process.

But let's continue Solomon's definition of the physical slide involved in aging. Let's go to verse 5.

**Ecclesiastes 12:5 Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets.**

Heights become a fearful thing. When we're young, we climb trees just because they're there. I assume that's still so in some of the bigger cities today. I hope it is still so. But when we're young we just climb a tree because it's there. It's fun to do.

And when we descend the tree, we might come down very carefully up to a point and then we bail out several feet above the ground, just to speed up the process because it's fun.

It's an incredibly simple and pleasurable thing to do when your ankles and your legs and your arms and your back all work together as a giant shock absorber. That's how they used to work, in my case. It's a piece of cake for a child and there's no fear associated with it.

But to a brittle-boned body that's stooped and is stiff and is weakened with age it is a very fearful thing not to even consider jumping a few feet but just to step down off of a ledge. It can be a fearful thing.

A fall can mean a broken bone, most typically for the elderly it can be a broken hip. Now there's a lot of pain associated with that, obviously. But there's another type of pain that comes with it. And that is the loss of independence. That is, I think, one of the greatest sorts of pain that an elderly person can experience and that is that loss of independence. No one wants to lose it.

So fear is a factor and it's not just of heights. It can be of ungodly people who make it their habit to intimidate others. As a man, we may not feel as powerful and vigorous and able to defend, to take care of our wife in such a circumstance.

We can fear this thing of not being able to do some of the simple tasks that we once did, maybe just maintenance around the home because of a lack of strength or a lack of energy, or maybe it's a lack of confidence that you still know how to do it. And I've seen the elderly, those whom I've known well, lose some of that confidence toward the end. Where there were tasks that they could have done in their sleep, when they get to a certain age or a certain stage of life, they lose the confidence and they kind of forget how to do it.

Solomon spoke of the almond tree flourishing. What was that to represent? Some believe it means that the appetite fails in conjunction with the teeth so that hard things like almonds aren't consumed and so the tree flourishes in a symbolic sort of way. It's not being harvested, it's not being used.

Others believe that the almond tree's white blossoms are typical of the gray or white hairs of the elderly. This is likely what Solomon was referring to. I found it very interesting in researching this that the almond tree blooms in the winter. It blooms in cold weather, when it's in a leafless state.

It kind of parallels the physical dormancy that we experience in old age. It's interesting isn't it? This is a very close similarity. Either scenario, whichever one you choose, paints the same picture of physical decline.

Now there are various opinions as to what the grasshopper being a burden means. One thought is that a bug as small as a grasshopper can be seen as a burden when one's physical strength is so diminished. For a gardener to see a grasshopper you would naturally squash it. You would exterminate it so it would not eat your crop.

But something as small as that, when your strength is diminished, could be quite a burden. We get another clue when we understand that the word translated grasshopper comes from the Hebrew word *Khaw-gawb* which means a locust.

Most of us know what a locust looks like as compared to a grasshopper. Now the two both consume foliage. They do the same thing. The grasshopper hops around, leaps around, but a locust is a much rounder, much stiffer looking in appearance and have much spindlier legs than a grasshopper does. A grasshopper has very powerful back legs.

So, another common interpretation is that the body with its stiffened and swollen midsection, as it often becomes toward the end of life, is much more immobile, especially given that it has spindlier appendages, you know, arms and legs.

Again, either picture is one that lacks physical pleasure. There is no pleasure in it.

Another pleasure that fails is of the sexual sort. The word desire in "desire shall fail" actually means caper berry. Now the caper berry is an aphrodisiac, so we understand very clearly what it is that has failed.

The end of it all as we see in verse 5 is that a person goes to his grave as others mourn his or her death.

Let's go to verse 6 now.

**Ecclesiastes 12:6 Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well.**

Whereas verses 1 through 5 speak to the physical evidence of old age, this verse speaks about what takes place in the body to bring about death. And again, imagery is used.

The silver cord likely represents the spinal cord which is also a striking silver/gray color. The spinal cord is attached to the brain through which the nerves all transfer, go through, and the loosing of it is when signals cease from the brain

The brain, as it sits in the cranium, resembles a bowl. And when it ceases to function it is in effect, broken.

The fountain would be likened to the heart pumping throughout the body. When it stops, the fountain is broken. We know how a fountain looks. We see fountains in

picturesque settings and they continually pump and water comes cascading down. It's the same way with the heart. When the heart stops the fountain is broken.

The cistern, some liken to the aorta which is the main artery used to distribute blood throughout the body. It is a tremendous reservoir for the body. But when blood ceases to move as it should, it becomes stagnate and causes internal breakdown. The organs will fail and then death follows.

Verse 7:

**7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it.**

In all of these last verses, 1 to 7, Solomon has been very gentle with the reader. He could have used very plain and very graphic language as he could have right here in this verse and he didn't.

But let's put it into plain language, as we have been with the rest of it. In order for a physical body to return to the dust, something has to happen. Decomposition has to happen before that can take place. That of course isn't a pretty or a pleasant-smelling process. Not a pleasant thing at all.

The whole process of old age and of decomposition that takes place after death are incredibly humbling. I don't know if we could any of us could probably find the proper or the right words to express how utterly powerless we are of and by ourselves.

What we come to is this, brethren, when we get toward the end of our life and right to the end of it, we come to this. God is God and we are not.

But we have the hope and the promise of the resurrection. That's what those who remember God in their youth do have. They have the hope of the resurrection. They have the hope of immortality, of a vibrant, ever-living, spiritual body at the resurrection – and entry into the family of Elohim.

For those of the spiritual organism who die before Christ's return, their bodies which aren't immortal will return to dust and the spirit that God gave them will return to Him.

Now, for the young among us, you might jot down Genesis 1:21 and Genesis 2 verse 7 where we see the word *nephesh* translated as "creature" in chapter 1, and I'm referring to the King James Version now. It's translated as "creature" in chapter 1 and as "soul" in chapter 2.

*Nephesh* means a breathing creature or an animal, something that's alive. It's a physical living creature or soul that is subject to eventual death and decomposition. It's not, as many claim, an immortal soul.

Scripture tell us that Christ poured out his soul (*nephesh*) (and this we find in Isaiah 53 and in verse 12) He poured it out unto death. In other words, He died. He died.

Let's go to Psalm 146 now. We'll begin in verse 3. We'll read verses 3 and 4 here. We know that the spirit that God puts into man gives us understanding, gives us the ability to reason and all those things. Verse 3:

**Psalm 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom *there is no help.***

And so as we've been discussing, don't put your confidence in yourself or some other man, because *God* is God and we are not. Verse 4:

**4 His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.**

From the day that the silver cord is loosed, his living soul dies and his thoughts perish. And the spirit God gave us returns to Him, the spirit that He put in man. And so there is no immortal soul.

But there is the hope of the resurrection to immortality, just as Christ before us died and was resurrected.

Let's go back to Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verse 8 now. Solomon comes back to this. He says:

**Ecclesiastes 12:8 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “All is vanity.”**

One of the meanings of *heh-bel*, which is translated here as vanity, one of the meanings is transitory. In other words, it only lasts for a short time. This physical life is transitory and because it is it's a very humbling life. As Solomon said earlier, God humbles us through this short life.

Verse 9:

**9 And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out *and* set in order many proverbs.**

**10 The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and *what* was written was upright—words of truth.**

So in this book Solomon has put down his thoughts in the form of truth in such a way as to make us think, to try to convey something to us. He's put man into perspective with God, which is where wisdom and understanding begin, that we're nothing but God is.

Verse 11

**11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.**

Now, a goad, (we've all been goaded at one time or another) but a goad is a sharp pointed object that can be used to prod or to poke a creature into action. Cattle are often goaded when they're being herded or being loaded into some, today, into a truck or whatever the case may be. It's a prod, it's a goad.

So the words of the wise, if we choose it, they can goad us. They can stimulate us to action. And the words of the wise can, if we allow it, if it's something we really desire, the words of the wise can be attached in our minds as if by nails into wood. In other words, it's something that's going to stay there.

And as Solomon said, all true wisdom comes from one source. It comes from God.

Verse 12:

**12 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh.**

This is a carry-on thought to verse 11. We're to learn from, we're to be admonished by, the words of wisdom that have come from the Good Shepherd, that Solomon has written down for us in this book.

Solomon makes a very clear distinction between God's wisdom and that which we find in thousands or even today, I'm sure, millions of secular books that have a mixture of good and evil. We can find, most clearly, some good in many of the books that are out there. There are books that are full of philosophy; there are books that are all about opinion or theory that, frankly, are wearisome to us because all we really have to do is go to the word of God and follow the principles of it and we can live a good life and a fulfilling life.

I want to read verses 13 and 14 of Ecclesiastes 12 here from the King James Version. He says:

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

Solomon (it's interesting) has saved his specific purpose statement for the very end. Now, it takes a lot of experience to be able to do that. We could actually do that in a sermon or a sermonette. We could bring our SPS into it at the end, but it's a more difficult process and it's, perhaps, a bit more difficult for the listener as well.

But Solomon was able to do it very well here. He's brought it in at the end. Each chapter that's come before it has contributed to this very purpose statement.

When we look at this statement itself, we need to realize that the word duty was an add-on by translators. It was not in the original text. Not all translations have it, but if yours does have it, you need to realize that it greatly diminishes what is being said. I think it grossly diminishes it.

A duty sounds like something that's put upon us, whether we like it or not. In other words, it's something that we can, at least in our day today, think of a duty as a burden.

What Solomon actually said is **"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man."** This is what constitutes our whole being in this transitory life. This is what it's all about.

Fearing God and obeying Him automatically implies a humble mind. Such a person will find real joy in their accomplishments because they credit their Creator for their abilities.

They'll find joy in their own trials and test, because joy is God's gift to the faithful. Now we might find greater joy in good times, you know, but we will find contentment also. It's that gift that God gives to those who fear Him; in our trials, we'll find contentment.

They'll stay steady in their own circumstance despite seeing the wicked prosper or seeing them living a long life, a long and healthy life. It won't take away from their purpose in what they're doing.

They'll admit their sins and turn from them and perhaps admit them to others for the benefit of what can be taught, as Solomon did in this book and if you think about it that was an amazing thing that Solomon did in this book. He admitted a lot of errors in his life for our benefit.

Those who fear God and obey Him will teach their children humility so that they will remember their Creator in their youth, which is one of the things Solomon was so intent upon here, so that when they grow old to where life is no longer physically pleasurable, they'll still have a pleasure in the spiritual aspect of life.

Brethren, such is the fate of those who fear God and who live the give way of life. They will have pleasure when the physical pleasure is gone.

To live the give way despite all the circumstances and all the pressures of life is in fact the whole of man. That person lives a meaningful and a purposeful life.

Let's go to Psalm chapter 92 and we'll read verses 12 through 15. Here David speaks of the very same thing, a meaningful, purposeful life. Verse 12 he says:

**Psalm 92:12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God.**

Those who are planted, it's like from the point in time which we are called, we were converted, They're **planted in the house of the Lord. They shall flourish as they grow in the courts of our God.**"

**14 They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing,**

They obviously can't be on a physical but they will be on a spiritual level.

**15 To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.**

Those that bear fruit from their youth on through old age, those who live the give way will flourish spiritually to the very end as they wait for the best that is yet to come. And that, of course, is the resurrection into the family of Elohim after their time of judgment.