



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Save the Best for Last

THE GOOD LIFE

Ecclesiastes 12

Tim Badal | December 4, 2022



Turn in your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12. We've made it. We're at the end of yet another series out of another book of the Bible.

If you're new to Village Bible Church, this is what we do. We start at the beginning of one of the books of the Bible, then verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, we work through it. We are now at chapter 12 of this fall series that we have called "The Good Life." We have picked up this book that King Solomon wrote, this regretful and remorseful king, who for the last 11 chapters has in essence told us that his life was filled with foolishness. He also observed that he wasn't the only one who lived foolishly. In fact, apart from God we all will live foolishly, pursuing the things of this world instead of pursuing our Creator.

Now in chapter 12, Solomon has saved the best for last. Let's face it; we do that as human beings. Musicians leave their best, their most famous and favorite songs, to the end of the concert. Firework presenters make sure that, at the last moment, there's always the "Grand Finale." We stick with TV shows to get to the season ending show. We do this when we watch sports. Who care what happens in the first and second quarter, but we really want to know what happens in the last moments of the game. That's going to define the win or the loss. We do this in relationships. Many times, the most impactful words we share are when we're saying our goodbye's. We save the best for last.

For the last 11 chapters, Solomon has proven his singular assessment regarding life here on earth. He has said that to live foolishly is to pursue the things of this world. Sadly, some of you find yourselves living there today, thinking there's enough pleasure, prestige, possessions, and parties in this world to satisfy you, to bring you the fulfillment your heart is longing for.

Solomon says to us, "Been there, done that." He uses a phrase "All is vanity" or "All is meaningless" 79 times in this book. Friends, you and I need to understand this truth today: living your life apart from God is a vain, meaningless and purposeless endeavor. Solomon tells us, "I've proven this over and over again. Do you want the good life? Do you want what God intended the good life to be? Then you need to live with Him in mind."

Notice what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 12:13: *"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."* Do you want to know why you were created? Do you want to know why you're here on this earth? Do you want to know why you are where you are today, doing what you are doing, living life with whomever you're living life with? The answer is so you will fear God and keep His commands because that is your duty here on earth. That is it. You were created to fear God, obey His commands, and do that as your duty. But, here's the problem. Since the Garden of Eden, we have said, "No God, we will not do that. We will go it on our own."

So with the words we have left in this incredible book, Solomon says there are three things we should not do in order to not live lives of foolishness. Let's look at them quickly this morning.

Don't forget to take God with you.

My wife and I are living in the chapter of our lives where we have a house with teenagers—one in college, two in high school. In the comings and goings of our teenage boys' lives, it is altogether a common occurrence for Amada and me to be uttering a litany

of warnings, commands, encouragements, reminders, and expectations as they're leaving the door. Whether they're going to school, going out to church, going with friends—whatever they're doing, whether they're near or far—there's always this litany of things as they're leaving. The reason we want them to hear those things is it is our hope that they will take our words with them. I would imagine for many of you parents it's the same thing; it is your hope that your kids will "take you with them." Now, we don't want to actually go with them; we want our words of wisdom to go with them.

Here's what Solomon is saying: "I want you, in my closing statements, to remember to take God with you." Notice especially the first word in our text today: "Remember." This is where our English translations sometimes fail to help us understand the full-orbed nature of the Hebrew word in front of us. Solomon uses a Hebrew word that is translated "remember," which we read to mean, "Keep it in the back of your heads." Well, that's not what I want my kids to do with my exhortations. I want them in the front of their heads, not in the back of their heads. I don't want it to be a memory of theirs; I want my words to go before them. This is what this word in the Hebrew means. Solomon is literally saying, "You are to regard God for Who He is, responding to Him in a way that is fitting to Him."

Now, we did that this morning already. We sang a lot of songs, but we sang a particular song that was all about Jesus and His attributes. Here is this Jesus and we're extolling Him. He is God. He has the most beautiful name. He is exalted. He is great. He is wonderful. But that regard moved to a response. It moved to an ideal. It moved to a purpose statement. It moved to a point of action. There's a reprise in the song. After talking about the excellencies of Jesus, we exclaimed, "You have no rival. You have no equal. Forever, God, You reign. Yours is the Kingdom. Yours is the glory." As we regard God for Who He is, it will lead us to respond. This is what Solomon wants us to do. As we recognize Who God is, it changes how we go about living life.

So, here's the dichotomy. In verse one, we are introduced to God, our Creator. Then in verse seven, we are re-introduced to ourselves. Notice, God, our Creator—that's high. Then notice the depths to which we go—we are dust and will return to the dust from which we came. Wait a minute. The dichotomy is that God is infinite and immeasurable, almighty and powerful, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent in every way, in every place and at every time. But we are lowly. We are finite. We are the dust of the ground. It was God Who created us, Who took up the dust of the earth in His hand and blew life into it. From those specks of dust you and I are here.

So if we are low and God is high, then surely He should hold the highest place in all our lives. If we are low and He is high, then would it not be of great wisdom for us to take that infinite God wherever we go? Is it not foolishness for us to try to live this life apart from the God Who created us? Here we have this God Who created you, Who knows you better than you know yourself. He knows things about you that you don't know about yourself. He's the One Who knit you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13) and Who allows every circumstance that befalls you. This is the God Who knows the number of hairs on your head (1 Samuel 14:45) and Who has numbered your days (Psalm 90:12-17). This God, the Creator God, deserves first place in your life. He demands first place because we're nothing and He's everything.

Solomon kicks off this last chapter by saying you need to take God wherever you go. A fool lives life on his own; a wise man takes the infinite Creator God with him. That means, with every dollar he spends, God goes before him. With every word he shares, God goes before him. With every hour of work he does, God goes with him. When he goes to school, God goes with him. When he's at work or at play, God goes with him. In the good, the bad or the ugly of life, God goes with him. God is the One Who leads and guides us every step of the way. The world says there is no God, and in that very statement we see the foolishness it represents, because it disregards the Creator Who created them. We need to take God with us.

Now, we might ask, "Why? Why do we need to take God with us?" Solomon doubles down as he answers that:

¹ 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.

What in the world is Solomon talking about? Here's what he's saying: "You need your Creator God with you and here's why." We see in verse one he says to remember God "in the days of your youth." He doesn't say "years of your youth." It's short-lived. It's days. For the young people in here, you think your youth will last forever. It will go like a twinkling of an eye. Like all of us, you will soon be old. Then in the days when you're old, you will learn to say of your days, "I have no pleasure in them." There will be issues and struggles. Solomon now works through a litany of what these are. Let's go through them:

- In verses two through seven, he gives us a description of life. Youth is fleeting. You're going to start to break down.
- In verse two he talks about the hard times of life, about darkness and rain. This is the body breaking down.
- In verse three he says your strength is going to leave you. He mentions the "keepers of the house" trembling and the "strong men" being bent. The person is a hunchback. His back doesn't work because of the years of labor it has seen.
- Verse three continues by saying you're not going to grind your teeth because you won't have them. Your eyes are going to be like dimmed windows; you won't see well. Your hearing is going to be so bad that you won't hear the knocking on the door.
- According to verse four, you won't be able to sleep, because the slightest song of a bird will wake you up. How many old people have trouble sleeping? We're there. We struggle with that. Young people sleep without any trouble at all. We won't have the lung capacity, even if we wanted to sing.
- Anxiety will rise because we're so frail. Things we once did we'll no longer take the opportunity to do. I hear this report from the older people in our congregation. A lot of our small groups meet during the day, because the older people don't want to drive at night. What's wrong with driving at night? I drive at night all the time. But when you get older, driving at night becomes more precarious. Your eyesight isn't as great. Your senses don't work as well. There's a lot more desolation and you don't want to be caught in the dark. Things you once did that you never thought twice about are now sources of anxiety for you.
- Solomon continues by saying, "In your old age, you're like a tree in the fall. All its leaves fall; for you, it's your hair. You're like a crippled grasshopper. You once jumped to great heights, but now you limp along."
- He then says something that is more clear in the Hebrew. Your sexual appetite that once burned with passion is gone. The body doesn't work like it used to.
- Then after all this takes place, you die. This is life. So enjoy the handful of days you have in your youth, then all these hard things will come, then you'll die and return to your Creator.

The whole point here is that we are finite, flawed and broken. We are small, but God is real, so our job is to take Him with us wherever we go. Amen?

Don't fight a losing battle.

Look at verses 9-12:

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.

Solomon is telling us, "I have the credentials to write this book. I'm wise." Now, we can think of that as being boastful, but it's like a parent saying, "Just trust me; I know what I'm talking about." He's saying, "I've carefully considered these words and I know they're true." Solomon is talking to his son, someone younger than he is, saying, "Don't make the same mistakes I did."

Parents, isn't this how we are in our parenting? We don't want to see our children fall for the same traps we did. We don't want to see them get into the same problems or make the same mistakes we did. We teach them, trying to give them wisdom. "Don't go that way; it's no good. It's not going to work for you. That path is foolish."

Solomon says it this way: "*The words of the wise are like goads...*" (verse 11). What's a goad? In the Old Testament, a goad was a long stick with something sharp on the end of it. A man who was directing livestock would use that stick to poke or prod the

animals to keep them moving, perhaps moving the plow or wagon. Wisdom is that poker that is telling us to keep going. But the problem was that the animals hated that prodding.

In Acts 9 we read about Saul who was journeying to Damascus. When he encountered Jesus, Jesus said to him, "Saul, why are you kicking at the goads?" Jesus was prodding Saul and like the rebellious animal, Saul was kicking back. Essentially he was saying, "Stop doing that. I don't like that. I don't want to do what You want me to do."

I keep bringing up teenagers because that's where I'm living right now. Just the other night my middle son came to me and said, "Hey, Dad, a couple of friends are getting together at so-and-so's house. Can I go?" I looked at the time and it was kind of late. I said, "Who's going to be there?" He started listing people and his mom and I started to count. Ten, 12...82, 83, 84... This wasn't a get-together; it was a party. That raised some more questions. "Are the mom and dad there?" "Yeah, yeah, they'll be there." "Okay, what's going to be there? Will there be alcohol?" "Dad, you know what—don't worry about it. It's okay. It's just a group of people getting together." "You know if there's anything we're not okay with, you need to find an excuse to get out of there." "I know, Dad. You don't need to tell me."

He was kicking at the goads. "I don't need to hear it, Dad." He left the room and my response was, "Did you see his face? We're just trying to be his parents. We said, 'If you get caught with this or that, you're going to disappoint us, which is going to come with consequences.' He said, I know, I know...."

Those same responses, those same faces which are new to us as parents, are new because we couldn't see those faces when we did it to the older people in our lives when we were young. It is our nature that when confronted with wisdom, we kick back at the one who's dispensing it.

God says, "You're a fool. Here I'm giving you wisdom, but you're kicking it away. You're making faces. You're getting angry, but I'm putting wisdom before you." James 1:5 says, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach.*" But we're kicking at it all the time. Solomon is saying, "Stop kicking at these things. These prods are for your good."

Then notice at the end of verse 11, if you apply wisdom, it's like putting down nails "*firmly fixed.*" The picture is you're setting up a tent and you stake it down. Why? Because at some point the winds of life are going to come and blow your tent away. Wisdom is like staking it down so when trouble comes, you're firmly established and rooted.

The life of the wise, verse ten says, will find delight. How many of us here who are older would say the foolish decisions we made didn't bring delight? We remember the heartache and pain, so we wish we could tell the younger generation what the older generation told us when we were young and didn't listen. Every generation tells the next, "Without wisdom, you're fighting a losing battle."

Some of you right now are fighting a losing battle. You're fighting a losing battle in your marriages. You're fighting a losing battle in your parenting. You're fighting a losing battle with your money. You're fighting a losing battle in your relationships, at work or school. You're fighting a losing battle because you consider foolishness more important than wisdom. You're kicking at it. God says, "I want you to be firmly established, so that when trouble comes you don't fly away."

Don't fear anything but God.

Finally, Solomon saves the best for last by telling us, "Don't fear anything but God."

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

Solomon closes out this book by answering every foolish thought of man and woman. What is the chief end of man? To fear God. The problem is we fear everything else. Let me give you three things we fear.

We fear outcomes more than God.

Some of you—and I say this with all grace and sincerity—are fearful and your anxiety rules the day. You're worried about the what-ifs of life. Listen carefully. Every anxious thought comes from a place of "what if?" Can we be reminded that instead of fearing the what-ifs of life, we fear the God Who says there are no what-ifs?

Did you hear that? Instead of being filled with anxiety about the what-ifs of life, fear the God Who says there aren't any what-ifs. This Book tells us over and over again that every circumstance we face is under the control of God Himself. Whatever comes your way has happened under the express consent of God Himself. You'll need to know this on some Tuesday morning when your world caves in around you.

So if God is in it, then we have nothing to be anxious about. That's why Jesus says, "Be anxious for nothing, but instead pray to the God Whom you fear" (Philippians 4:6). God is not a God of what-ifs. Don't fear outcomes; fear God.

We fear the obstacles of life.

We fear the what-ifs that come true. Bad medical news. Runaway kids. Issues at work. Death of a loved one. These times of trouble do come our way; Solomon has told us they would. But we need to remember what Paul says in Romans 8:28—that all things happen for our good. Even the bad things. Even the ugly things. So we fear the God Who says, "I take the worst situations from an earthly perspective and bring heavenly meaning to them."

We fear others over God.

What about people's opinions. Their thoughts. When we're younger, we call it peer pressure; when we're older we call it codependency. We strive to be faithful to people. We make sure we fulfill commitments to people. We try to please people. One of my favorite books is When People Are Big and God Is Small. What a great title. Some of us this morning are living in a world where people are big and God is small. We've elevated people and their opinions and thoughts of us instead of God's.

Outcomes should never trump God. Obstacles in life should never trump God. Others should never trump God and here's why. Look at verse 14. It's not outcomes, not obstacles, not others, but God alone Who will *"bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."*

Why do we fear God? Why do we revere and respect God? Why do we put God first and foremost in our lives? Because when your eyes close for the very last time and you return to the earth, the text says you will return to your Creator and stand before Him. Maybe the people around you didn't know how you were living. Maybe they didn't see all you were doing in secret. But God does and He says, "I'm going to unveil every one of those things." That's why Jesus told us not to fear the person who could kill you with a sword, but rather fear the One Who can consign you to hell. We need to fear God. That means we respect and revere God to the extent that we will obey whatever He says.

If you want to know if you're fearing God, look back over the last week and ask yourself, "Did I take God with me every place I went? Did God redirect my thinking, my priorities, my commitments? Was God the priority in my checkbook, my calendar and my conversations? Or was it something else?" Verse 14 of Ecclesiastes 12 takes us back to where the whole book started, which is that you and I are called to evaluate whether we're living foolishly or wisely. .This is our week to celebrate communion and what a fitting place to end this series and be reminded that wisdom came in the flesh in Jesus Christ. He is the wisdom of heaven. So what did we do with Him? In foolishness we rebelled against Him. But God in His great love and mercy sent Jesus to die on the cross so that the fools of this world could be made wise through His sacrifice.