

**The Family:
The Gift of Youth
Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:3
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday Morning, April , 2009**

Open your Bible to Ecclesiastes 11.

For the past few weeks, we have been talking about God's design for life in the family. Week one, we talked about marriage—the critical relationship between a husband and a wife, the one flesh miracle that takes place through a promise and provides stability in the home.

Last week, I spoke to the dads, and we explored some of the key ingredients for the home in child rearing: consistency, integrity, hands-on training and concern for our kids.

Today, I want to preach to the kids, to the youth, to everyone that this world would call “the young.” Listen to what Solomon has to say to all of the teenagers, preteens, and children who walk upon the earth.

Read Ecclesiastes 11:7:-12:3.

There are certain things in life that seem impossible to keep. Some face the challenge of trying to keep up with their taxes. Some people struggle to keep track of their keys or wallet. Some people have a hard time keeping their house and removing the clutter. Taxes, wallets, and kitchens may be a challenge to keep, but there is nothing more difficult than keeping a healthy perspective in our lives.

With all the responsibilities we face, the pressures we feel, the to-do lists that we create, how does a person stay light on his feet?

One person said it this way...

“In order to keep a true perspective of one's importance, everyone should have a dog that will worship him and a cat that will ignore him.” --Unknown

Perhaps it is your pet that makes you smile after the stress of a long day. If so, that's a blessing from God. But sometimes people ask me: with all the pressures of pastoring and the responsibilities of ministry, how do you stay happy? How do you keep perspective? My answer is simple: I have 4 young'ens.

Ava, Max, Miles and Jack. These four children keep me from the web of self-importance and self-pity. There is something special about the innocence and the joy of kids. They keep us “young” and they remind us of the simple joys and pleasures of this planet. There is much joy to be had in...

- Mud. These photos were taken yesterday.
- Ice cream cone. (Tell the story about Max's shots and the chocolate dipped cone.)
- Stickers.
- Max and the crab.

I thank God for kids and the perspective they bring to my life. But here is a question: if kids and grandkids keep adults smiling, then how does a child or a teenager keep life in perspective? That's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk to young people about the proper way to live out your youth.

The Lord says in Ecclesiastes two key words should mark your childhood years. Are you ready for them?

Rejoice and Remember. Rejoice and Remember.

Let's look first at this command to rejoice...

How Youth Should Live

1. Rejoice.

11:7-8 says this...

V. 9...

People tell you this all the time and you do not believe it. The 8th grade is over in a snap. You never get it back. High school seems like forever when you're in it, but it seems like blur when it's complete. College years feel like an eternity when the final exams and term papers keep coming like hurricanes in season. When we are in the midst of our youth, we feel like its forever. But then you get older, and guess what? You wish that you knew then what you know now. Being a kid has some serious benefits.

Solomon says, "Remember the days where sunshine abounds because cloudier days will come." Now, adults, before you get depressed, let me be sure that you understand what he's saying. He's not saying that youth have no problems, because that's not true. And he's not saying that adults have no joy. That's not true either. What he's saying is, being young should be lots of fun because a child is free from greater responsibility.

I remember when I was in college, I thought it was ridiculous that I had to take an 8:00 class. 8:00? Are you serious? Who gets up that early? So I would set my alarm for 7:50 AM, get out of bed, brush my teeth, throw on a hat, and run off to the class. Man, I would love, LOVE, to start my day out at 7:50 AM right now.

When we were in college, we hosted poetry night one night. We had all of our friends come over to our apartment. You couldn't get in unless you brought your own original work of poetry. Everyone had to wear black, the lights were turned off with candles, and instructions were given

that if you appreciate another man's work, then you do not clap your hands. You shut your eyes and snap your fingers. And we laughed that night until our sides hurt. Guess what? I haven't hosted poetry night in 9 years of marriage.

Those are the kinds of things you can do when you are younger that you don't do when you're older. Take advantage of the season and don't wish your life away.

Now, pay attention to the end of v.9, because life isn't one continuous party. *"Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment."* That doesn't mean that God is going to punish you for having too much fun. God is a fan of fun. What it does mean, though, is that you will be held accountable for how you spend your time.

I like the way I heard it said once, "Fun is fun the day after you do it." So whatever "fun" you have, it's not good for you if it leaves you feeling guilty, if it leads to you lying to your parents or others, if it leaves you with regret. Let us not forget the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. He took his father's money and had a whole lot of fun with it. The pleasure of food, the pleasure of drink, the pleasure of throwing parties, but some time later, the Bible says, "he came to his senses and he longed for home." His "fun" was no longer fun. In fact, his hasty choices created a big mess.

Rejoice in the years of your youth, but remember your Creator. You will be held accountable. This leads to the second point...

2. Remember.

12:1 says...

That idea of remembering means that privileges must be balanced with personal responsibility. Pay attention to God and put away some of the sinful attitudes that come with youth.

Let's talk first about what it means to "remember" God.

How To Remember God in Youth

- **Make time to talk to the Lord.** In this generation of technology, most of you spend hours a day composing text messages, responding to your Facebook friends, sitting in a lobby and making small talk. Relationships require conversation. In fact, without conversation, relationships grow cold and stale like food left out on the table. The same is true in your relationship with the Lord. Very few young people keep it fresh. They don't pray regularly unless there is some kind of crisis. But when you stop in the middle of your day, or at the start of your day, or at the end of your day... and you talk to the Lord, you pay attention to him. And the Lord loves it when His people pay him honor.

- **Make time to hear from the Lord.** I'm talking about being in the Word. God speaks to us primarily through his Word. So when a teenage boy establishes a devotional life, he becomes like the athlete who runs a few miles a day and over the course of time, becomes a marathon runner. Daily exercise makes a man physically fit. Daily Bible reading will make you spiritually fit. When I was in middle school, must have been 7th grade, started doing a small devotional at night before I went to bed. When I say small, I mean that it was three paragraphs and a Scripture. I had my Bible and that devotional book sitting right next to my bed and no matter how tired I was, I would read that little booklet and I would read over that Bible verse and I would pray. I believe that simple routine made a huge difference in the choices I made in junior high and high school. Make time to hear from God.

And parents, let me take a moment to recommend a great resource for you and your children. This is the best Children's Bible that I have come across. **Show pic of Jesus Storybook Bible.**

- **Make the most of the local church.** Here's the deal. You can choose to hate church or you can choose to love church. It's your choice. If you make your parents drag you here every week, and you complain about the programming, or teacher in a class, then you will get nothing out of it. Listen, I went to a church as a child and we had no youth pastor. The church was too small to afford that. My two brothers and I were the youth group. I had the same Sunday School teacher for ten years. We didn't have a room; we had a little divider on wheels that rolled around and gave us a section of a room. That little church in Northwest IL had no money and no staff other than a pastor. And yet, the Lord used that little band of believers greatly in my life. I would not be a pastor today if it weren't for those precious saints in Tampico Baptist Church. Very few young people have any interest in the church, but the wise ones do. You know why? Because the church is the bride of Christ, and the Lord loves his Bride. Don't wait until you're older to see the value in the church.

Now, these are just three things that we should remember. We should pay attention to the Lord through prayer, through Bible Study, and through worshipping with believers in the church.

Now, if those are the things that we should pay attention to, Solomon also says that there are things that we should forget.

What A Young Person Should Watch Out For

- **The worry that steals your joy.**

V. 10...

Young people spend way too much time worrying about the future. If you are walking with God, and doing those things I just mentioned, and living in the revealed will of the Lord, you don't have to sit around and worry. Anxiety about tomorrow will rob you of the joys of today.

Can I just confess? When I was a child, I did a lot of worrying...

- When I was in elementary school, I worried about being teased for my smallness.
- When I was in middle school, I stayed up all night once because the P.E. teacher had announced that we would have a wrestling tournament the next day and I was going to be wrestling Billy Phillips in the 85 lb weight class. I was so worried that Billy was going to pin me like a paper on bulletin board.
- When I was in high school, I worried constantly about girls and why they didn't seem so interested in me as they were in the other boys that were bigger and stronger.
- When I was in college, I worried constantly about my major. I changed it three times and I never could find that perfect fit for me. So I just lived with constant anxiety about the future.

This is why it's so important to have a living relationship with the Lord. If finding friends, and finding a life partner and choosing a life calling is on my shoulders, then there is great reason to fear. But, if my relationship with the Lord is strong, then I have a shepherd that guides me in paths of righteousness for his Namesake.

And let me just tell you what Jesus said about this, about worrying, "Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to his life?" The answer is obvious: no one can. So don't sit around and worry. Trust the Lord and enjoy the journey.

#2, watch out for...

- **Destructive sins and attitudes.**

v.10b...

There are certain attitudes and behaviors that are so common among youth and yet so destructive to the family. I want to run through some of these and I hope that you hear my heart today. I'm not accusing you, youth, of having these attitudes. I don't see you at home, so I don't know. These attitudes represent the average young person today. So here we go...

"It's my life." Sometimes young people say this when a parent or a teacher or a coach confronts them about their behavior. This is a very immature way of dealing with your failures, and very ungodly. For two reasons...Number one, it's not your life. The Bible says this

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Cor. 6:19-20

You might think that your life is yours, but the truth is, your life belongs to God. Every day you have is like a loan from the Lord and one day, you'll have to give an account for how you used your time. So it's not your life.

And not only that, but your choices impact the entire family. When one child decides to rebel against his parents, it impacts Mom and Dad, of course, but it impacts brothers and sisters as well. When you make bad choices, everyone loses.

My kids love to jump on the trampoline at our neighbor's house. My youngest son is 2 and he can barely walk on that tramp without falling over. Well, his big brother Max loves to get on that thing and jump as high as he can. And his little brother is over there about to break his neck. And I say, "Max, you can't do that when Jack is on there?" And he says, "Daddy, I'm not bothering him." And he really believes that. Sometimes young people have this mentality that they can do whatever they want and it doesn't affect others. We "grow up" when we realize that we're all in this together.

"Whatever." Let me tell you what "whatever" means. "Whatever" is a nice way of saying, "You're a fool and you should stop telling me what to do." So your dad says, "Son, I need you to be home by midnight." And you say, "But Dad, everybody else is staying out till 2." And he says, "I know, but I said, "Midnight." And you say, "Oh, whatever." What does that word mean? You're a fool. It's very dishonoring to your parents and God doesn't bless young people who dishonor their parents.

I received an email this week from a young woman who is now married. She heard that I was preaching on this subject and she writes...

As a teenager I thought that my parents had no business in my personal relationships or in my personal life. I was a "grown-up", I knew everything and that they had no right in my private life and I let them know that every chance I got! Teenagers are great at shutting the door on their parents and doing anything to distance themselves from them. Now as an adult, I wish that they had been more involved in my personal life and I wish we would've had a more open relationship. I feel like I missed out on a lot of good advice and guidance.

How you view your parents is completely up to you. If you view them as your enemy, rolling your eyes and saying "whatever," you will miss out on a very important blessing. If you choose to listen, and to respect them, even when you disagree, guess what happens? God will bless you and bring great joy into your life.

Now, one more destructive attitude that is common among youth...

I've got to be the best.

Young people today put a lot of pressure on themselves. There is such competition going on between young people in school, in sports, in everything. A's aren't good enough, I have to be Valedictorian. It's not enough to be thin, I have to be the thinnest in the class, and this leads to so many eating disorders. It's not enough to make the starting team in basketball; I have to score the most points and be the best player on the team.

Do you realize, that when you get to heaven, God is not going to give out an award to the best looking person in class, or the smartest person on earth, or the most athletic person to grace a field? Do you understand that God does not expect or even desire for you to be THE best. Now, HE wants you to give it your best, but if you choose to be joyful only when you are the best, you will live your life in complete discouragement.

Perfectionism can be an idol. You want to be perfect so that people will think that you're really something. And so you constantly put pressure on yourself to outperform others. And so your whole life will feel like a race and you will constantly be looking over your shoulder, to see who's catching you.

So breathe in deep. Enjoy your years as a student. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, and be happy while you are young. Let your heart give you joy.