

# How to Not Waste Your Life Whether You're Young or Old

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- [ 0 : 00 ] We're coming towards the end of our series in Ecclesiastes. Just a few more verses to go. It's the last chapter in Ecclesiastes. And Solomon is finally turning to look at what advice can he give people.
- He's been looking at how the world works. And we've seen all the ups and downs of everything that the world is. There's something deeply wrong with the world. But he wants to address his son.
- He's going to speak to young people. But there's going to be something for all the people as well to think through and to hold on to. And we want to listen carefully to what Solomon is saying here.
- Because young people don't often get addressed in the scriptures as directly as it does in our passage today. But now, as we start, we've got to think carefully about young and old.
- Because some people take offense at being told they're not young anymore. So I've got a scientific, a more or less scientific way of working out who's young and who's older in the congregation. So hands up if you go to sleep with no pain and wake up with no pain.
- [ 1 : 12 ] John Hall, well done. I knew you. I knew you. That's my cut off for whether you're young or old. Okay, it might not be that scientific. We'll try another one.
- Anyone younger than me is going to fall in the younger category. And anyone older than me is going to fall in the older category. Not old as in you're old.
- Just older. I'm not, I actually don't know where I am. I'm definitely not young anymore. But I don't feel like I'm older. But when I, that scientific test of feeling a bit achy in the mornings, that's definitely something that's been happening to me.
- You maybe want to ask a question about whether you're young or old. How you face life. You've got a nagging feeling that you're wasting your life. You're not quite sure whether you've lived your life well.
- I think especially if we're older and maybe retired, you're thinking, gosh, what am I supposed to do with my life now? It's a, it's a, until you get there, being retired is, is, is, it's a, it's a big thing.
- [ 2 : 21 ] It's bigger than you think. I've got friends who went through that and they had to really rejig their life. But what about when you're young and you're looking ahead and you're unsure of what life is going to hold for you?
- You don't know how to make the most of it. Or maybe you're looking back, you're not sure if you've lived your life to the full. You might have this terrible feeling of you've missed out, you've wasted opportunities, you've missed chances.
- Well, this is a perfect place in the book of Ecclesiastes to think through those questions, because Solomon is going to speak to both young and old, and will give us the best possible advice for not wasting our lives, whether we're young or old.

He's going to look at Proverbs. Well, we're not looking at Proverbs, but Ecclesiastes falls into the wisdom type of literature. Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs, which is all about making a success of your life.

Ecclesiastes is like wisdom literature, but it's, it's living your life in the real world, where things don't always work out like you want to. And so you want to listen carefully to what we, what God is saying through his word today.

[ 3 : 32 ] And the first thing we're going to see is that the key to not wasting your life, the key to not wasting your life is to remember your creator, to remember your creator.

So you're in the book of Ecclesiastes. That 12 verse 1 kind of sums up what's going on in front and ahead of it.

And Solomon writes, remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I don't find pleasure in them.

Or the days of evil is some translations, days of trouble. Remembering your creator. But it's not just for young people to do this, it's also for us older folks.

Perhaps especially when we get older, we need to remember our creator before we die. So if you drop your eyes down to verse 7, this whole section says you must remember him before.

[ 4 : 37 ] Verse 7, the dust returns to the ground that it came from, and the spirit returns to God. And so it's worth unpacking for a few minutes what it means that God is our creator.

Solomon chooses this word here. It's not a word that is often used of God. In fact, it's used maybe four or five times in the Old Testament. Yes, God is our creator, our maker.

But this is the special Hebrew word that is used in Genesis chapter 1 of when God makes creation, when he actually brings everything into life. And so Solomon is saying that our lives will be incomplete, that we cannot live a meaningful life if we do not take into account the being who gave us the life that we're living.

So Psalm 139 says that God knows us best. No one knows us like God so that we can completely trust him. It's a well-known few verses.

I'll just read it. Psalm 139 from verse 13. You created my inmost being. You created my inmost being. There's that creator word. You knit me together in my mother's womb.

[ 5 : 47 ] I praise you because I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. So the fact that God is your creator knows that he knows you best, and therefore you can trust him more than anyone in your life.

You only trust people who you know, and who know you. You don't just trust anyone on the street, especially if they don't know you. And so with God, because he's made you and because he knows you, you can trust him completely.

And then secondly, he's our redeemer. Because he's our creator, it means that he's our redeemer. How does that work? Well, he gives us life, but because he's made us, and because we're precious to him, he gives us renewed life.

So we don't need to fear anything that can rob us of the life that he's given us. So I'm just going to read from Isaiah chapter 43. This is what the Lord says, He who created you, the one who made you, the one who formed you, Israel, yes, he's talking about his people, but for us, that's us Christians, do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

I've summoned you by name, and you are mine. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.

[ 7 : 05 ] Don't be afraid, for I'm with you. And so because God is our creator, we are precious to him. He will defend to the utmost our lives.

He will do everything necessary, even to the point of taking someone else's life, to make sure that we don't live, that we can enjoy unrestricted life with him.

And friends, this is exactly what God has done for us in Jesus. The fact that he's our creator, that he knows us in our inmost beings, and that he's saved us and redeemed us, and given us a new life, taking on all our mistakes and wrongdoings, ties us much more closer to God and to Jesus.

So, our Colossians, Colossians chapter 1, you can stay in the Old Testament for now. It should be up on the screen. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, which is Christ, and then through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

And you can only have a solid foundation in your life if you've been reconciled to your creator through Christ, and he's the only one who can do that for you. We've all gone astray.

[ 8 : 28 ] We've all done something wrong to mar, to break, to strain that relationship with God, with our creator. And the wonder of the gospel is that the creator himself comes down and reconciles us to his father.

It is Jesus who gives us the foundation to live a life that is not wasted, but full of meaning, whether we're young or old, and no matter what our past failures or our future uncertainty.

The first key to not living a wasted life is remembering our creator. But specifically, let's talk to the young people now for a bit. So remembering your creator when you're young, and if you're feeling young at heart, you can put yourself in that category.

It won't go amiss. Remembering God as your creator, so young people, the young ones, is vital if you're going to live a life that lives up to its potential.

Remembering God as your creator is vital if you're going to live a life that lives up to its potential. So, chapter 11, verse 9 and 10.

[ 9 : 48 ] Ecclesiastes. Chapter 11, 9 and 10. Be happy, young man, while you're young. Let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see.

But, know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. However, banish anxiety from your heart.

Put away pain from your body. For youth and vigor are meaningless. Well, God is saying to young people, to everyone, go and live your life to the full.

Be happy. If you want to do something, go and do it. Don't let anything hold you back. But, don't go overboard.

There's still a God and whatever you do, there will be consequences. So, if you're young, he's saying, go ahead, push the limits. But, don't go over the edge.

[ 10 : 53 ] Don't underlive your life, but don't overlive your life. Don't sell yourself short, but don't overdo it. And so, just spend a few minutes thinking about what that means to don't underlive your life.

Don't, don't let anything hold you back. And that's at verse 10, which says, banish anxiety and frustration from your heart and put away pain from your body for youth and vigor are meaningless.

So, don't be ruled by bad things that have happened in the past or fear of the future. That doesn't mean that you mustn't let bad things happen to you. You can't stop it. But it's saying, don't let those things rule over your life, stopping you from enjoying being young or going to get things done.

Now, some of you have gone through some very bad things in your short life. Many of us have. And many of us older people have gone through and are going through difficult things.

In fact, Solomon here says, age itself is a major problem. It's not an easy thing to get old and to be old. But God doesn't want you to let your fears define your way of life.

[ 12 : 08 ] In fact, He demands that you don't let them rule over you. God wants His people to live free of fear and free from anything that holds them back. I'm not saying it's easy to do that, but there's no reason to hold on to these things, especially if you get older.

And there are many people who grow up holding on to something that happened in their past years and years and years ago. Yes, deep things happen. Painful things happen.

But there's healing and hope in Christ and we've got to access that because to the degree that we don't is the degree that life is going to pull us back. Does that make sense? Which is why we need the gospel.

Which is why God sent Jesus so that we can live the life He's telling us that we should live. Just two verses, I'm not going to go to them, they should be on the screen. John 10, 10 is a well-known verse. It's a brilliant verse to base your life on.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy to rob you of anything that gives you life. Jesus says, I have come that they may have, that you may have life and have it to the full.

[ 13 : 25 ] Life in abundance. Romans 8 says, the spirit you received does not, Romans 8 verse 15, the spirit you received, the Holy Spirit doesn't make you slaves so that you live in fear again.

Rather, the spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And it goes on to talk about how that means you're an heir of all things, specifically of eternal life. Eternal life.

And all good things in between now and when you fully inherit it later. And so friends, young people, anyone dealing with anything bad in your life, the gospel promises that any wounds you pick up as you go through life, and we all do, as deep as they are, and many of us have been cut deep, all those wounds can be healed, can be bound, can be redeemed by Christ.

Because remember, by His wounds, your wounds are healed. And that takes time, it's not an easy thing, that's why it's important to be in community, because we've got to help each other deal and heal our wounds.

Just like if you've done yourself a bad gash, you can't fix it yourself. I'm not talking about a scrape or something, I'm talking about like a serious wound, car accident type wound.

[ 14 : 49 ] You can't fix it yourself, you've got to get help. And so wounds are best healed in community, not just by yourself. But there is healing, coming to Christ, and letting God's people help you.

But there's an opposite temptation waiting for us as well, and one that Ecclesiastes warns us about. Don't underlive, but likewise don't overlive, don't overdo it.

Don't push the limits and go over the edge. Don't be ruled, for example, by the fear of missing out. And so that's in verse 9.

We saw it earlier, be happy, young people, young men, young women, while you're young, let your heart give you, Ecclesiastes 11 verse 9, give you joy in the days of your youth.

Follow the ways of your heart. Do what your eyes see. If you stop there, you say, oh, but that doesn't sound like a Christian thing. In fact, how many times are we told not to follow our heart? And Solomon says, no, you can follow your heart.

[ 15 : 52 ] Go for it. But, know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. Follow your heart. Live life to the full while you can.

Your body's not always going to be able to do the stuff that you think it's going to do, and sooner than you think, it stops doing all the fun stuff. It doesn't stop entirely, but evil is more difficult.

Enjoy life to the full, but don't be stupid, or rather, in Ecclesiastes terms, don't be foolish.

What does that mean? Oh, I don't know. You know exactly what it means. Don't do things that God says is not good for you, especially for young people in the area of sexuality.

You need to know that the number one predictor of poverty, of having a hard life, is falling pregnant outside of wedlock, and making someone pregnant outside of wedlock.

[ 16 : 55 ] So, messing around. The number one predictor of having a hard life, across all the social metrics, is messing around and getting someone pregnant, and falling pregnant.

You say, okay, I don't fall pregnant. But you're doing damage to yourself, and damage to others. Again, so don't overdo it.

Have fun, but just be friendly. Don't overdo it. Don't get drunk. Don't do the drugs. Don't, don't, you can leave all that stuff. It's not, that's not going to help you not waste your life.

In fact, doing drugs, drinking hard, and partying hard, is going to, you're guaranteed to waste your life if you do that. But this is why we need to know Jesus as our creator when we're still young.

Because he's the only one worthy of our allegiance. I'm going to jump to Colossians, but it will be up on our screen. Just look at how it describes who Jesus is, as someone worthy of following and emulating and drawing life from.

[ 18 : 12 ] Because look, look, look what he, look, look who is he? The son, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible, invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. This kind of awesome being is much more worthy to be following in your heart than the latest TikTok trend or influencer on Instagram or someone else calling you to live a life that you know is not going to help you and be healthy for you.

Rather, follow a heart that has been changed by Christ, that is loved by God, that this person knows and calls his friend and pours out blessing to you if you follow and obey him and says, I'll help you live life.

Don't do that on your own. Be thankful for the blessings. You follow this person, that will set you up to have the most amazing adventure in life you can imagine.

[ 19 : 35 ] So much for the young people, I hope that's helped. What about us oldies? Well, there's not a lot of good news in this passage. Okay, so what's the problem with getting old?

Well, that's the problem. Oh man, remembering your creator when you're old. You don't stay young forever.

What are you supposed to do when life begins to change and your body doesn't do the things it once did? A friend of mine remembers vividly the day his son got stronger than him.

He couldn't open his garage door. Had to call his son to give him a hand. Oh, it was a big story. I was like, whatever dude. He spoke about it for weeks. It was, they're for guys, you know, it's a thing.

And then he went out to the gym and got himself stronger again so he could lift the garage door. But we want to be useful. We don't want to be useless. It bugs us when we can't do stuff because we're not created for that.

[ 20 : 39 ] It's a curse thing. This is what it means to live under this fallen world. And Solomon goes on to describe in a devastatingly real way what it's like for young people to get older.

So now, young people, you can't just like turn off your ears, oh, it's for old people now, it's not for me. No. We were all your age once. We all looked like you with straight teeth and shiny eyes and long hair and a body that was athletic and could see far and do stuff.

I mean, I thought old people were born that way. It's like sham. They get old, you know. And now, blink, what's on earth has happened?

So, so, chapter 12 from verse 1 down to verse 8, really, it's just a litany of things that are going wrong with us. Now, I guess, let's just go through it as quickly as we can.

So, just to let you know, it's a picture of everything going dim, of things getting darker, of things not working, more difficult to keep going, of blindness and weakness and hearing loss and losing teeth and fear setting in.

[ 22 : 01 ] So, remember your creator, verse 1, in the days of youth, before the days of evil, the days of trouble come. Not external trouble, just the trouble that happens as you age. And the ears approach when you'll say, I don't find any pleasure in them, grumpy old man syndrome.

Okay, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, you, everything is dark when you can't see. We've got guys in our church who are struggling to see.

and the clouds return after the rain when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men stoop when your muscles don't work and you walk.

Oh, I knew I was getting old when I got out of bed like this. Oh. When you can't literally put one foot in front of the other and I just make myself walk extra steps now, just do.

When the grinders cease because they're few, your teeth are your grinders. Oh. Oh. Who knew your teeth were just going to fall out? Oh, and it's expensive to put them back in.

[ 23 : 13 ] When the doors to the street are closed. When opportunities are missed because things are now shutting down. When you want to sleep but verse 4, when people rise up at the sound of birds, 4 o'clock in the morning you're trying to sleep and there they go.

But all their songs grow faint, you can't even hear them. And there's danger everywhere when you're afraid of heights. Ooh. You start worrying about this height here, these steps.

You look at them funny like, where must I go up those things now or must I go down them? It's dangerous for people at that age. Okay, the almond tree blossoming, it's a picture of the almond tree when it blossoms goes white.

You get that lovely mane of white hair or no hair. The grasshopper who's jump, jump, goes, jumps, is now dragging himself along. Can't be bothered.

And then, death. Phew. People go to their eternal home and the mourners go about the streets and everything is shattered.

[ 24 : 26 ] Death, friends, is not a good, easy thing. Yes, in one sense it's a release, but here it's described as breaking things. It's bad because it breaks life.

We're all busy dying. We don't die one day and we don't live until we die. We die until we die. death is never seen as a good thing in the scriptures.

It's a terrible curse and aging is a terrible curse. Verse 6, 7 and 8. Everything just gets broken. The golden pitch is broken. The bowl is shattered.

And the dust returns to the ground that it came from. That's why Solomon says, yep, it's pretty meaningless. Okay, well, how are you supposed to live a life that's not wasted when that's coming for you?

Well, God is our creator so he knows that this is happening to us and so in one sense we've got to accept our limits.

[ 25 : 40 ] We know that our body's not going to be able to do the stuff we used to be able to do. I decided to get fit. This is a bad idea. I went jogging. I don't need to warm up.

I've jogged before. Three steps in. Something tall. Could be walking for weeks. In fact, I was just warming up.

I tore something warming up to go jogging. Yes. So now, I've got to warm up to warm up. Yeah, it just takes more time.

It mustn't be hard-headed. We need to allow ourselves to ask for help and to accept it. And don't get frustrated with your limits that you give up doing anything at all.

I can't do what I used to do, so it's not worth doing at all. That's not true. You've still got a lot of worth doing things in a different way.

[ 26 : 47 ] Don't not do anything at all. And don't go to the other extreme and spend all your remaining money on cruises and trying to squeeze the most out of the last few years. Trying to see everything before you die.

Or just spending time on your own joys. A famous book by John Piper is Don't Waste Your Life. It tells a story. This is very worth reading, young or old.

Very excellent, excellent. John Piper says, I'll tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider the story from the Reader's Digest.

A couple took early retirement from their jobs in the North East in America. He was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in a retirement place in Florida, where everyone goes to retire because the weather is nice, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells.

just picture them before Christ at the great day of my judgment. Look, Lord, look at all my shells. Now that is a tragedy, a life not lived, because you can't live it, you don't think you can live it to the full.

[ 28 : 03 ] So that living with God, remembering God as your creator when you're old is know your limits, accept your limits, but still be active in the kingdom.

Active in the kingdom, not active in your retirement and just spend your life on your own little hobbies. Try not to withdraw back.

Yes, it's going to happen a little bit, but don't withdraw all the way back and just come to church. Coming to church is great, come to church, but there's more. You've still got lots to offer. Our church needs your advice, our church needs your care, people need your prayer, we need your wisdom, we need your good works.

Yes, spend time on your hobbies, but do it to share with others. We've got excellent examples of ladies in our church who've got a home, that they've opened their home, a beautiful home, and they've opened it to anyone who needs help.

Don't just make it a little home for yourself, make it for helping others. So we need you to be involved in church, all the older people. We need your wisdom, don't just retire and do nothing. I sent a little survey out to my Monday group and also to my mom's church, she's got the same age group, she's in her 70s now, and I just said, just ask, what did you wish that you had known when you were younger?

[ 29 : 30 ] What advice can you give to our young people based on your life experiences, and I gave them a list of stuff. So I got some really good answers back. So this is the kind of thing that I'm talking about that we need, that young people can't get unless we're helping them.

So first point about getting old, well, it's inevitable really, a real challenge and comes along much quicker than you think. What you learn when you age, your health falls and you get frail, but your dependence on the Lord is what gets you through it.

one person said, my one regret, I asked them, what are your regrets, is I didn't spend enough quality time with the elder members of the family, and before you know it, they're gone.

I've got a few aunts left, and now I try. They have heaps of wisdom. And this is not from a young person, this is from someone who's still learning about wisdom, even though they're on a news.

A bit of advice for time, always bookend your days with God, and a simple pleasure, coffee. So no matter what day you're going to have, it starts and ends well.

[ 30 : 39 ] But money, you will never lose what you give to God. He borrows it, and you will get it back in the most unexpected way. That's worth remembering. Here's an important one.

Embrace on getting old, embrace the road that God has chosen for you. Every child is meant to conform your more to the image of Christ. God is not interested in your comfort as much as in your conformity.

But getting old is hard, and it will eventually end in our deaths, and your body is going to continue giving you hassles. I think we as a church need to understand that it's not easy getting old.

So if you're young, just realize it's not easy. No one asked for it. We all want to be young and stay young. Okay? But have patience and respect and honor those who are getting old.

It takes a lot of hard work to stay alive when you get old. Yes, our lives are going to end in death, death.

[ 31 : 53 ] But, and then for many it's a disaster. That means it ends all meaning, and in one sense it does. Death ends everything that we hope for.

But except we're in Christ. Because if you're in Christ, you have life. Because your life doesn't end in death. It ends in life.

Not because of going to heaven, but as we've heard recently, Nick's sermon on death and life a few weeks ago. But every time we talk about this, you should by now, if you've come to St. Mark's for any length of time, you should by now know that the antidote to death is not to stay dead and to live a ghostly life in heaven, but to come back to life again in a body that's working on planet earth where you can enjoy everything that you're supposed to be enjoying.

That's a far better real and more certain promise for us to hold on to. And we can be sure of that because of Christ's resurrection for us. Now, I don't want to end in the New Testament.

I want to end in Isaiah 65 because it speaks about creation, but about a new creation. So turn with me to Isaiah 65 and we'll end there. I think you got to turn forward, don't you?

[ 33 : 18 ] towards the New Testament if you still know that is in Ecclesiastes. Isaiah 65 from verse 17, a famous passage on which Revelation 20, 21, 22 and many other passages in the New Testament are based.

the new heavens and the new earth. See, behold, God says, you guys are in trouble now, he's writing to the Jews, 700 BC, but you're not going to stay that way.

I've got something new coming for you. And it's true of us. We also face trouble in this world. And God says, don't worry, I've got something new coming your way. I will create, I will make, I will give life.

It's the create word. Genesis 1, creation is going to explode at some point in time. A new heavens and a new earth and the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create. For I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

[ 34 : 35 ] I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. That's us, that's Christians. And the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard no more.

Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years, meaning it's going to, long life is going to be the order of the day.

And what are we going to do in this new place? You're going to live a life that's not wasted. They will build houses and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and eat the fruit.

No longer will they build houses and others live in them or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will the days of my people be. For my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.

And in the middle of verse 23, it says, they will be a people blessed by the Lord. So, friends, you don't have to worry about death and dying and not seeing the places that you're going to see, not fulfilling your life now.

[ 35 : 44 ] None of us fulfill our full potential, but we can live a meaningful life that's not wasted and it's going to continue and be completed and continue to be completed. It's going to grow.

It's never actually going to be perfect, if I can put it like that. It's just going to develop and grow. We'll get to see the places we never did. Your body will function again like it did when you were younger.

You will be able to finish those projects you wanted to. You will be able to make amends and live not just in peace and harmony but with meaning and purpose on a level that we can't begin to comprehend or understand.

Well, that's worth looking forward as difficult as it will be. Shall we pray?

Let's pray. Lord Christ, you are the firstborn from the dead. You are the creator of heaven and earth.

[ 36 : 44 ] You are our redeemer and our savior. You are our creator and Lord and you love us and you know us and you promise us this magnificent future.

Lord, we struggle with life now. We're sorry, Lord, for holding on to things that diminish life, that draw us back. We're sorry for overdoing life under the sun and looking for stuff that we shouldn't.

We're sorry for giving up too easily and being grumpy and over worrying about our old age instead of trusting you and seeing how much work and how much effort and how much good we can still do, Lord, for you and your kingdom.

Help us empower us by your spirit to live lives that are not wasted but meaningful and helpful and good. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.