



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Going Down Slow

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Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

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*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";<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> 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—<sup>5</sup> 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—*

*(Pastor prays)*

What a passage. There is not another text in the Bible that gives as vivid and clear and raw a description of the aging process. Here is Solomon as an old man looking back and giving some final words of advice about life. Here is the longest treatment of our own mortality in a beautiful sequence of word pictures.

This made me think of one of the great bluesmen of the late 20th Century named B.B. King and his guitar named "Lucille." He had great songs like "Chains and Things," "Sweet 16," and "The Thrill Is Gone." He had lesser-known songs like "No One Loves Me But My Mother...And She Could Be Living Too."

This passage made me think of his song "I'm Going Down Slow" because in this passage there is a picture of us, men and women, going down slow. The description is of a downward decay in

life resulting in the finality of death. We know it and we fight the aging process. We exercise and eat right, although last night my supper consisted of six sausage balls. We use Botox, we get detox, and we wear Reeboks. And yet the process continues. The preacher says you are wasting your time. Here is the lot of every human who's ever been born: You are going to die. Instead of fighting that or pretending it's not going to happen, the preacher suggests a joyful surrender to the good grace of God early in life so that you might be able to rejoice in all of life.

## **Every Stage of Life is a Gift From God – Use it Wisely**

### **Love God in the prime of life**

Once again the preacher addresses men and women who are young but expands it to the prime of life. I say that because of what he says in verse 1, “before the evil days come.” That is when you are close to dying. So from 10th to 11th grade and through still working or able to work, that is the prime of life. What is the command? Let's read it and let's break it down.

*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”;* The command is to *remember*.

There is a sense of urgency. It's to establish quickly the direction of your life and change it if you need to. “Remember” means to drop your pretense of self-sufficiency and commit yourself.

“Remember” means passionate fidelity and intense loyalty. The psalmist said, “let my tongue cling to my mouth if I don't remember.” To remember is you trusting God when it's terrible.

Obeying God when it's hard. Walking with God when no one else will. Loving God when you are hurting and lonely and have questions. Thanking God even when it doesn't seem fair.

He tells us why, look at it. Remember your creator in the days of your youth and prime.

Solomon could have used any word for God, YHWH, Elohim, Adonai, but he chose the word “Creator,” reminding us of God's absolute prerogative to do with us whatever He desires to do. It reminds us that He is the potter and we are the clay.

Paul reminded us of this in Romans 9: 20-21. *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”* <sup>21</sup> *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?* This is a great reminder of the joy of surrendering to the Lord by faith in Christ. It's what happens when you believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul says we are re-created.

In Ephesians after the heartfelt passage that talks about how we are saved by grace through faith and not by works. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* This means we are to find great contentment in Christ regardless of where you find yourselves.

Tommy Nelson of Denton Bible Church says to live a godly life means you need to get up and spend time with the Lord. You need to read through the Bible each year and go on mission trips. You are to love your family and invest in the church and get to know your neighbors and share Christ with them. He says you need to read three to four Christian classics each year. In other words, love God in the prime of life. The prime of life goes quickly and brings me to the decline.

### **Enjoy God in the sunset of life**

Let's go to this poem in verses 3-6. It's the longest treatment of physical decay in the whole Bible, and it's a reminder that what you are experiencing is by design. <sup>2</sup> *before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,* <sup>3</sup> *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,* <sup>4</sup> *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—* <sup>5</sup> *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—* <sup>6</sup> *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,...* Every ache is a tap on the shoulder that, today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.

There is imagery in verse 2. All the light givers, the sun moon and stars, go dark, and the rain does not give way to a beautiful sunny day. When you're young the sky is going to clear up and there will be a better day. It's hard to adjust to knowing that here in the final stretch, there's not really any improvement. The clouds gather again and time no longer heals, it kills. Now in verses 3-4 the picture changes. It's not nightfall and storm and winter, it's a great house in decline.

Now it's probably best to take it as a whole but let's look through each part. Verse 3 says the “keepers of the house trembled.” That is arms and hands that have been the provider and protector but can't do it anymore. “Strong men that are bent” means, your back and legs hurt and when you walk you shuffle. When it says the “grinders cease because they are few” that means your teeth are no longer useful. And when the passage says “those who look through the windows are dim” it means your eyes are weakening and you have reading glasses in every room of the house. Add when it says the “doors on the street are shut” that means you can't hear and you shout into the phone.

When Solomon speaks of the “sound of grinding being low” he means you can only eat soft foods and may be getting most of your nutrition from Ensure. But the irony is, when we see the passage say that “when one rises up at the sound of a bird” Solomon is saying you can't hear but small sounds wake you up. “The daughters of song are brought low” means you now have a raspy voice instead of your strong one. And in verse 5 when he talks about “they are afraid of what is high,” Solomon means that you can no longer balance and at a certain age you don't need to climb on the roof. When he talks about “terrors are in the way,” Solomon means the road and walking is treacherous. There's a danger of falling and falling can have devastating effects. “The almond tree blossoms” means your hair turns gray or white or just turns loose. “As the grasshopper drags itself along” shows us the joints stiffen. Now how can I say this? Desire fails. Now remember Solomon had all those wives and concubines, but at this point he would rather just lie down and watch “Jeopardy” or take a nap. And as he talks about how man is “going to his eternal home” and “mourners go about the streets,” Solomon is planning a funeral. All of this is here: God providentially reminding us to put our faith in the One who died and rose from the dead. Every stage of life is a gift from God. Use each one wisely. Love God in the prime of life. Enjoy God in the sunset of life.

### **Know God in all of life**

Let's take a look at verses 6-8. <sup>6</sup> *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,* <sup>7</sup> *and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.* <sup>8</sup> *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.*

The preacher ends his writings the way he started by saying “vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” But back up with me to verse 6. There the final act of dying is pictured in four expressions showing the irreversible nature of death and the value of life.

In verse 7 he uses the word “dust.” This is where the Gospel shows up: *7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.* God takes us back to Creation. Genesis 2:7 says, *then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.* God created us in His own image.

And then let's look at Genesis 3:19. *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.* Sin has separated us from God and we live under a curse. The dust reminds us of the astonishing grace of God found in Christ. The psalmist says in Psalm 103:14, *For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.* And as such we can't save ourselves. We need a savior. Grace is that God so loved the dust that He gave us His son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

Every stage of life is a gift from God. Use it wisely. Love God in the prime of life. Enjoy God in the sunset of life. Know God in all of life through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*(Pastor prays)*