



"The most important thing in the world that makes young people civilized is good old people."

—William D. Poe

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Wisdom for the Young (Part One)

For the past sixty years, America has been dominated by one particular generation of its citizens, the many millions born just after World War II, also known as the "Baby Boomers." Unfortunately, among the Boomers' most dominant attitudes has been a kind of narcissism, an over-indulged self-[love](#). Their narcissism, however, comes with a twist in that it seems to be focused specifically on their collective youth. For example, they have convinced most of the nation that the decades of the 1950s and '60s—when they were young and made their early mark on society—were America's Golden Age. In trying to recapture that Golden Age, they have created and sustained what sociologists call a "youth culture," which is a society that caters to, panders to, overprotects, and essentially worships its young people.

The main objection to the youth culture is that it teaches wrong principles to children. It gives them bad ideas, chiefly to have a "me first" attitude, passing narcissism on to the next generation. It also preaches that youth is a time of carefree fun because others are supporting them—because parents, the school, and the community are doing the heavy lifting. Young people are encouraged to "live it up" while they are young because adulthood is serious, full of trouble and work, and boring. So they hear, "Sow your wild oats

while you're young," and "Extend your youth as long as possible, for you'll never pass this way again."

Despite being considered conventional [wisdom](#) in our culture, this is a huge serving of baloney! From a biblical perspective, it is utter nonsense, though it contains just enough truth to make people believe it and swallow the lie. However, youth should *not* be a time of wild abandon. It is *not* a stage of life to be prolonged because adulthood is so dreary. It is *not* an inconsequential period of irresponsibility. It is in reality a very critical time that sets the stage for the rest of life!

Wise Solomon was interested in the questions of life. He had a great thirst for understanding the reasons behind people's actions—what made them tick, as it were—and from his conclusions he would fashion pearls of wisdom that are still valuable today. Notice [Ecclesiastes 11:9-10](#); [12:1](#), which is aimed at young people:

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 these things [God](#) will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come. . . .

Halfway through verse 9, we could have argued that Solomon was an early advocate for the youth culture, promoting the idea that young people should be happy-go-lucky and do whatever their hearts desire. But Solomon was much wiser than the modern supporters of the youth culture. In the last half of the verse and the next, he adds the proper countering wisdom. Yes, Solomon does say, "Have fun. Enjoy your youth. Pursue your desires," but he adds *three major qualifications* to what may seem at first blush to encourage self-gratification. These qualifications take the form of warnings and provide the proper perspective.

The first warning is **be aware that God is watching, and He will surely bring us into account for our sins**. This greatly modifies his admonition to pursue [joy](#) and cheer. There is good amusement and sinful excess. The good

times Solomon tells the young to seek must be proper fun, enjoyment that is wholesome and productive. He wants them to be happy and find worthwhile pleasures but not the kind that will return upon them with some sort of penalty later.

The second caution, which appears at the end of verse 10, is to remember that **childhood and youth are vanity**. The years up to adulthood pass like a snap of the fingers. Yet, this is not all that Solomon means. It can mean that, not only do the years fly by, but that they are also, in most people's cases, useless, futile, unsatisfying, or unproductive. In other words, our early years are not the most important of our lives. It is an interesting way of looking at our young years. If all we do is have fun, then our lives will indeed be futile, unproductive, unsatisfying, useless. However, if we use our youth in the right way, then those years become meaningful and productive. Something good will transfer from our immaturity to enhance our adult years.

Notice that Solomon prefaces his conclusion that youth is vanity by saying, "Remove sorrow from your heart." To us that means, "Let's party!" but that is not what he means. More exactly, he instructs us to get rid of those things that will *cause* us sorrow, the urges and desires that will trip us up and produce grief later. In other words, he advises us to use our younger years to learn how to avoid and rise above heartache-producing lusts. That is a tall order!

He parallels this with "Put away evil from your flesh." This defines what he means by "remov[ing] sorrow from your heart." Solomon, however, first approaches the problem on the level of the heart, one's mind and emotions—character—where the removal of wrong desires must begin. Once we set our minds to do what is right, evils of the flesh are more easily controlled.

Solomon's third admonition appears in [Ecclesiastes 12:1](#): **Seek God early, and life will be so much better**. He counsels young people to use their youthful energy, ambition, and mental acuity in His service, in doing what is right, before the human machine starts to wear down and lose its idealism, vigor, and zeal. Because of life's experiences, people become tired and jaded

as the years progress. If we seek God when young, it is often easier to embrace Him with our whole being. And when those darker days come, we will have the strength to bear them.

He urges young people to seek God *before* experiencing the world—and accumulating the baggage and penalties of [sin](#) and flawed character. It is far easier not to get into a bad habit in the first place than to have to overcome one. So, he says, "Don't even go there!" Many adults in God's church would give anything not to have lived so long in [the world](#) because, despite their later conversion, they still suffer the consequences of sins they committed in it. Never going out into the world at all can save many tears.

For some people, having seen the world, they are so disgusted by it that their revulsion to it acts to keep them from it, but it does not work that way for most people. Once people "enjoy" the lusts of the flesh and the eye and the pride of life ([I John 2:16](#)), they are more easily drawn back into them. Solomon asserts that by [seeking God](#) when young, a person will avoid many troubles and live a more fulfilling life.

Solomon will tell us more about seeking God when young in Part Two.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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by Mike Ford

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