

When A Young Person Grows Old

Unless thwarted by the Lord's return, or an "untimely" death, all young people will eventually grow old. Regardless of how many creams and rinses are used, the aging process takes its toll on most members of the human family. Aging is an irreversible part of life, for if you live at all, you get older. The curse of our generation is an inordinate preoccupation with youth. No one wants to be old. At least, no one wants to look old. People do not mind feeling old as much as they detest looking old. But while the human family may take such a grim view of aging, the Bible does not so regard the aged. In fact, a special and significant honor is bestowed on the "hoary head" (Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31). God enjoins us to "rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man." And "a silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness."

When a young man grows old, there are some definite changes which take place. Solomon gives a detailed description of the aging process in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7. Old age is called the "difficult days" in v. 1. These days of difficulty are brought through hampering physical maladies which make it hard to really enjoy living. When our hands are racked with arthritis; the legs cease to carry our weight; our teeth are few and brittle; and our eyes grow dim, it is a "difficult" day indeed (v. 3). Even worse, the slightest of noises awakens us and robs our tired bodies of needed rest. Our ability to make melody with a clear, strong voice is gone (v. 4). And we are now frightened easily by heights and are more prone to worry about the dangers in our path. Sexually, we are either powerless or completely devoid of desire. Our physical strength wanes, and even the weight of a "grasshopper" is a burden too heavy (v. 5). In the difficult days of old age, the "silver cord" (nerves/spinal cord) is loosened and the "golden bowl" (brain) is broken, and senility takes hold. The heart and circulatory system is "shattered" and "broken" and death is not far behind (vv. 6-7). A more complete and graphic description of what happens when a young man grows old has never been penned! But Solomon was not writing to an old man about something he was already experiencing in his aging body. There would be little value in telling an old man that his dusty frame was returning to the earth. He would know this without being told, being in the midst of the process himself. Solomon addresses the young who are not yet to this point of life. He said to the young, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'."

Solomon addresses the young man before he wastes the precious time of his youth on frivolity. He is hoping that the young man will listen to wisdom and do something constructive with his days of brightness and strength. Solomon urges that the young "remember" the Creator, but this involves more than a mere mental recall of God. Consider what God did when He remembered Hannah (1 Samuel 1:19). God did something for her. He gave her a son. Likewise, the young are to remember God by serving Him with the strength and vitality of their youth. This will also keep the young man from looking back on his youth with regret, as he remembers how he forgot God and wasted his time with vanities.

To be sure, it does not miraculously become easier to serve God as we get older. In fact, there is no time in life when worldly things automatically lose their appeal. Solomon advises that we get ourselves on target early in life. He labors to get us to see that it is ridiculous to put off commitment to God until later in life. While we may think the young deserve a chance to have their fling with life and settle down to spiritual things later, Solomon teaches just the opposite. In fact, age may work against us in our struggle to shun the world and obey God. And when we look back on a youth misspent — what a sad, empty, haunting gaze it will be.

Adapted from Mark K. White