

Foresight, not Hindsight

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Dennis Legaspi

May 17, 2026

It is easy to fall with love with Ecclesiastes 12 with its beautiful prose, metaphors and word pictures. But it would be foolhardy to see it nothing more than enchanting literature. Let us see through this literature's serious intent using the three 'befores' in the text as natural outline.

"Remember" in the original Hebrew is a straightforward imperative. It is a call for action, not for mere cognitive recall. Solomon is telling us to learn foresight rather than hindsight. The conjunction 'also' is a reference to all the preceding chapters of this book and simply bridges what was set off in Chapter 12. Solomon is exhorting us to 'remember now'.

The first 'before' in verse 1 leads us into the beginning outer marker, those days of our youth. The exhortation is to "Keep God in your face" early, because youth and the prime of life are fleeting.

The 2nd 'before' in v2 is an intermediate marker, a clearly defined period that runs inside the span of time defined as "the days of our youth" (Ecc. 11:9-10). This would be the age starting from 12-13 (Hebrew's Bar Mitzvah age, when they become accountable) to young manhood and the prime of life. The image of fading light and disappearing clouds refer to vibrant, sunny days of youth that will not last forever. The text is calling us to put God front and center while naturally strong. Forgetting God in your early years is foolishly courting serious consequences. It can even shorten your life. Conservative scholars say Solomon died of natural causes in his early 60's. That is 10 short of his father David!

The 3rd 'before' in v6 sets off a time when we are no longer young. You are past midlife. The metaphor used here starts with images of a house weathering the years. The "watchmen over the house tremble" are pictures of arms and hands beginning to show arthritis creeping in. The "mighty men stooping over" are pictures of legs, knees, shoulders, even spine and pelvic joints weakening, forcing one to walk bent over. The "grinding ones standing idle because they are few" obviously picture multiple teeth decaying that have been pulled out. "Those who look through windows growing dim" obviously picture eyes becoming increasingly impaired. The imagery of "doors on the street are shut" take us from the still word pictures in v3 to surrounding scenery outside in early light, of houses, arranged somewhat like where some of us live today, with gates shut securely. They point us to how personal surrounding space gradually shrinks as we move into our later years. Close friends pass, perks and entitlements we take for granted are withdrawn, sometimes abruptly. Personal independence is lost. For instance, whereas before you can drive fast and fearlessly but not anymore because of impaired eyes and slower reflexes.



To continue, “one will arise at the sound of a bird” refers to decreasing time asleep. “The sound of the grinding is low” is an onomatopoeic picture of impaired hearing. Sleep deprivation is juxtaposed with pictures of “songs brought low”. The latter are pictures of how every little sound startle and awakes older people as they sleep.

Verse 5 writes of how fears creep up on us in later years, and other arresting illustrations. Imagine almond trees blossoming or turning white from pink, and what were once hopping grasshoppers are now straining and dragging themselves along. And what of caperberries? These berries are common to the Mediterranean region and are pickled and used as condiments to stimulate appetite. They’re primarily aphrodisiacs, which at some point become unusable.

The meticulously chosen objects in v6 are used to paint what happens at the point of death. The body gradually decays and turns to dust. But life is much more than dust. For God breathed His likeness into man, and that breath has to return to God. It is the underlying reason the passage challenges young people to remember the Creator in their youth. It was to encourage preparing for their spirit’s return to God.

This big picture about life is also captured in Psalm 90. The Psalm starts by painting the right view of God (Ps. 90:1-2) and then writes of how consequences of bad choices bring accountability in our later years (Ps. 90:3), that leads to a sincere, heart-rending appeal (Ps. 90 v12 onwards). But note God’s gracious response tucked in Ps. 90:5-6, which is one of hope and celebration and not the usual default we kept seeing.

Amazingly, this Psalm gives us insight into the length of years given to man, which is 70-80. But we know there are ‘outliers’ who lived beyond this longevity boundaries cited. That included Moses who died at the age of 120, his vigor unabated (Deut. 34:7); his brother Aaron, who died at age 123 (Num. 33:39); Joshua who died at 110 years old (Jos. 24:29). The key really is to have a right view of God. Then our best hope is that God would sovereignly choose to sweep the effect of years and at times even the inevitable effects of poor choices; that He extends His favor, and you just might be able to happily look back in your later years and see His handiwork in your life.

We see a clear illustration of this in Caleb’s life. The Bible highlights Caleb’s life primarily between the ages of 40 and 85, emphasizing his unwavering faith and physical vigor. While his exact age at death is not recorded, those 45 years portray him as a warrior who never retired from serving God. Caleb was among the Israelites who came out of slavery in Egypt. He witnessed firsthand God’s hand of protection over His people through the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. Caleb, with Joshua, stood apart from the other spies in trusting God’s promise that they could conquer Canaan (Num. 13). Caleb witnessed the remarkable event recorded in Num. 21:4-9, when God sent venomous snakes among the people. Jesus later referred to this account in John 3. The bronze serpent lifted on the pole pointed forward to Christ on the cross to bring salvation. It was undoubtedly these experiences that helped shape Caleb’s choices in life and made him a mighty warrior able to stand against the giants in the land.



May we give our hearts to God all the days of our life. May we have foresight and hear your call to “Remember You”.

