

The Book of Ecclesiastes, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Remember Your Creator; Fear God and Keep His Commandments

Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Help the class see that 12:13–14, Fear God and keep his commandments, is the deliberate climax and key of the entire book: the Preacher has shown that life under the sun, cut off from reverent obedience to the Creator, is vapor, and that meaning is found only above the sun in fearful, obedient relationship with God who judges every deed.

Establish from 12:7 and the New Testament that the spirit returns to God at death and that every person will give a conscious account in judgment (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10), guarding against soul sleep and annihilation, and pointing the class to Christ the wisdom of God and the appointed Judge.

Move every student to remember the Creator now, in obedient faith, and to name one concrete way the whole study of Ecclesiastes has reshaped how they live before God today.

Question 1

Student Question:

In 11:7–10 the Preacher tells the young to rejoice in their years yet remember the days of darkness and the coming judgment. What does it teach us about God that joy and accountability are commanded together in the same breath?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Preacher turns from his riddles to a tender charge to the young. Light is sweet, and it is good to see the sun (11:7). After chapters of weariness he affirms that the ordinary gift of being alive is genuinely good. God made the world to be enjoyed, and gratitude for daylight is not naive; it is wise. But verse 8 immediately adds the shadow: let a man rejoice in all his years, yet remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Joy is real, and so is the coming night.

Verses 9–10 hold the two truths together in one sentence. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes, the Preacher says, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. This is not permission to sin; it is permission to live, fenced by accountability. Enjoy your strength, your friendships, your work, your laughter, but remember that the God who gave them keeps account of what you do with them.

This combination is the heartbeat of biblical wisdom. The same God who fills the table also sits as Judge. Removing either truth distorts life: forget the joy and faith becomes grim; forget the

judgment and joy becomes reckless. The Preacher refuses both errors and hands the young a way to be glad and serious at once.

Notice the audience. The Preacher speaks to the young because he has learned, the hard way, that the patterns set early decide the harvest later. He is not robbing youth of pleasure; he is protecting it, teaching the young to enjoy God's gifts as gifts from a Giver to whom they will answer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God commands joy and accountability together; biblical faith is neither grim duty nor reckless pleasure (11:9–10).
- Enjoying life is good and God-given; the created world is meant to be received with gratitude (11:7).
- Judgment is not an afterthought but a fence around every choice we make with God's gifts (11:9).
- Old Testament wisdom written before Christ still teaches us today (Romans 15:4); the New Testament confirms that all give account (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- Personal accountability is taught here, not inherited guilt; each person answers for his own deeds (Ezekiel 18:20).

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you treated joy and seriousness as opposites rather than partners, and how does 11:9 correct that?
- What is one good gift of God you have been enjoying without thanking the Giver?
- How does knowing God will bring every deed into judgment actually make our joy deeper rather than smaller?

Question 2

Student Question:

The Preacher says, Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, yet know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment (11:9). Where are you tempted to enjoy God's gifts while quietly forgetting that you will give an account for how you used them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question presses the same nerve the Preacher touches: enjoying the gift while forgetting the Giver and the reckoning. It is easy to receive health, money, time, and pleasure as if they simply belong to us, and never connect them to the day we will answer for them.

The phrase God will bring you into judgment is meant to follow us into ordinary places: how we spend a free evening, what we look at on a screen, how we treat the people we are not trying to impress. The Preacher is not trying to steal our enjoyment but to anchor it, so that our pleasures are clean and our consciences clear.

Help the class be honest about the specific gift they are tempted to misuse, whether comfort, leisure, relationships, or success. The goal is not guilt for its own sake but a glad realignment, enjoying God's gifts in a way we will not be ashamed of when we stand before Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgetting accountability tends to corrupt even good gifts into idols.
- The hidden uses of our time and money are exactly what 12:14 says God will judge.
- Conviction here should lead to gratitude and repentance, not despair.
- Each person answers personally for his own use of God's gifts (Ezekiel 18:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Name one gift of God you are tempted to enjoy while forgetting you will give an account for it.
- What would change in how you use that gift this week if you pictured the judgment clearly?
- How can the class encourage one another to enjoy God's gifts without forgetting the Giver?

Question 3

Student Question:

What does the command Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (12:1) actually call a person to do, and why does the Preacher attach such urgency to doing it now, before the evil days come?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (12:1) is the command the whole poem hangs on. To remember in the Hebrew sense is not merely to recall a fact but to act on it, to live in light of who God is. To remember your Creator is to order your whole life around the truth that you are made by God and accountable to Him.

The word Creator is deliberate. The Preacher does not say remember your duty or remember your end; he says remember the One who made you. Meaning is found in relationship to the Maker, not in the things He made. This quietly answers the whole book: the reason life under the sun feels like vapor is that it was never meant to be lived apart from the God above the sun.

The urgency is in the timing: in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them. The Preacher knows that a heart hardens

with neglect and a body weakens with age. The best time to seek God is before decline sets in, while strength and clarity remain. Tomorrow is promised to no one.

This is not a denial of God's mercy to those who turn to Him later; Scripture is full of grace for the latecomer. But the Preacher, having wasted so much himself, pleads with the young not to gamble on a deathbed. Remember Him now. Build your life on the Creator while you still have the strength to build.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- To remember the Creator is to live in obedient relationship with Him, not merely to acknowledge He exists.
- Meaning is found in the Maker, not in the things made; this answers the book's verdict of vanity.
- Now is the time; delay hardens the heart and shortens the opportunity (12:1; cf. Hebrews 3:13).
- God as Creator establishes our accountability to Him; we are made and owned, not self-defined.
- Christ is the wisdom of God in whom this remembering finds its fullness (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like, practically, to remember your Creator on an ordinary Tuesday?
- Why is youth or earliness such an advantage in seeking God, according to 12:1?
- How does seeing God as Creator reframe the search for meaning that the whole book describes?

Question 4

Student Question:

Reading the poem of aging and decline in 12:2–5, how does honestly facing the days when you will say I have no pleasure in them shape the choices you are making today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The poem of 12:2–5 describes the slow shutting down of the body with images of a house and a town growing old. The keepers tremble (hands), the strong men stoop (legs and back), the grinders cease (teeth), those at the windows are dimmed (eyes), the doors on the street are shut (failing hearing or withdrawal), the almond tree blossoms white (gray hair), the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails. It is a portrait of aging drawn with unflinching honesty.

The Preacher will not let the young pretend they are exempt. The days will come when you say, I have no pleasure in them. Facing this now is not morbid; it is clarifying. People who honestly reckon with their own decline and death tend to make wiser, less trivial choices in the strength of their youth.

This question asks students to let that honest reckoning shape present choices. What we build, who we become, the habits we form, all of it is being decided now, in the years before the house grows old. The poem is a mercy: it tells us the clock is running so we will spend our hours on what lasts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honestly facing aging and death is wisdom, not morbidity; denial makes us foolish.
- The choices of strength determine the character of our decline (Galatians 6:7–8).
- Our culture hides death; Scripture sets it before us so we will live wisely (Psalm 90:12).
- Remembering the Creator now is the Preacher's answer to the coming days of no pleasure.

Discussion Prompts

- How does our culture train us to avoid thinking about aging and death, and what does that cost us?
- If you pictured yourself at the end of the poem, what would you wish you had done with these years?
- What is one choice you can make today that your older self will thank you for?

Question 5

Student Question:

In 12:5–7 the Preacher says man goes to his eternal home, the silver cord is snapped, the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. What does this verse teach about what happens to a person at death, and why does it matter that the spirit returns to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 6–7 reach the moment of death itself with two fragile images: the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, a lamp falling and shattering, the light going out. Then the plain statement: the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. This deliberately echoes Genesis: God formed man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. At death the loan is recalled.

The two halves of a human being go two directions. The body, the dust, returns to the ground to decay. But the spirit returns to God who gave it. Man is not merely a body that stops. There is a

spirit that came from God and goes back to God, and that is no annihilation and no unconscious sleep; it is a return to the One who will judge.

This guards us against two errors. Ecclesiastes is not teaching that death is the end of the person, soul and all, vanishing into nothing. Nor is it teaching that the dead simply cease to exist. The spirit returns to God who gave it, and the New Testament makes the meaning clear: it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27). We will appear, consciously, before God.

So this verse, far from being bleak, is one of the most hopeful lines in the book. The grave is not the last word, because the spirit returns to God. Everything in the book that felt like a dead end opens here onto the One who made us and waits for us. The question is not whether we will meet Him but whether we are ready.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- At death the body returns to dust and the spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7; Genesis 2:7; 3:19).
- This affirms conscious accountability beyond the grave, not soul sleep or annihilation (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
- Man is body and spirit; death separates them but does not erase the person (Luke 16:22–23; Philippians 1:23).
- The spirit returning to God means we go to meet our Maker and Judge, which gives weight to every life.
- The resurrection and final judgment by Christ complete the picture (John 5:28–29; Acts 17:31).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the spirit returns to God who gave it, and why does that exclude the idea that death is simply the end?
- How does the New Testament fill out what Ecclesiastes states briefly about life after death?
- If your spirit returns to God who gave it, what does that change about how you measure a successful life?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you picture the silver cord snapping and the golden bowl breaking (12:6), what does the certainty of your own death stir in you, and what is God inviting you to do with that feeling rather than run from it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-reflection question invites students to sit with their own mortality rather than flee it. The silver cord and golden bowl are tender, beautiful images of how delicate life is, a thread that can snap, a lamp that can shatter. Most of us spend enormous energy not thinking about this. The Preacher gently insists.

The point of facing death is not fear for its own sake but readiness and reorientation. When we let the certainty of dying register, the trivial loses its grip and the eternal comes into focus. Petty grudges, anxious comparisons, and hollow ambitions shrink, while love, obedience, and our standing before God grow large.

Encourage the class to bring this feeling to God rather than bury it. The honest awareness of death is meant to drive us into the arms of the Creator who gave us the spirit and will receive it back, and to make us serious about obeying the gospel of His Son now, while there is time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Awareness of death is meant to produce readiness, not paralysis.
- Mortality clarifies what matters and exposes what is trivial.
- The proper response to facing death is to turn to the Creator and obey Him now (Acts 17:30–31).
- For the faithful, death is gain because the spirit returns to God (Philippians 1:21–23).

Discussion Prompts

- When you honestly consider that your own life could end, what suddenly looks smaller, and what looks larger?
- Is your instinct to run from thoughts of death or to bring them to God? What would changing that look like?
- What is one thing you would want settled with God before that day, and what is keeping you from settling it now?

Question 7

Student Question:

After everything, the Preacher cries again, Vanity of vanities; all is vanity (12:8), and then calls his words goads and nails given by one Shepherd (12:11). How can the same book be both a brutal verdict on life under the sun and a gift from a caring Shepherd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the poem the Preacher repeats his refrain one last time: Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity (12:8). It frames the whole book, opening it and closing it. Apart from God, everything under the sun is vapor, fleeting and unable to bear the weight we put on it. He has not softened that verdict.

Yet immediately he describes his own work tenderly. He taught the people knowledge, weighed and arranged many proverbs, and sought to find words of delight and uprightly written words of truth (12:9–10). Then comes a striking image: the words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd (12:11). A goad prods a stubborn animal forward; a nail holds something fast. Wise words sting us into motion and fasten truth in place.

Most important is the source: given by one Shepherd. Behind the human teacher stands the divine Shepherd, God Himself. The hard sayings of Ecclesiastes are not the cynicism of a burned-out man; they are the goads of a loving Shepherd driving His sheep toward the only safe pasture, life lived in the fear of God. The book stings because the Shepherd loves us too much to leave us comfortable in vanity.

So the same book is both a brutal verdict and a gift. The verdict, all is vanity, is the goad. The aim, fear God, is the pasture. A Shepherd who only soothed and never prodded would let his sheep wander off a cliff. This Shepherd prods us home.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- All is vanity remains true of life lived apart from God; the refrain frames the whole book (1:2; 12:8).
- Wise words are goads that move us and nails that hold us; they sting because they save (12:11).
- The one Shepherd behind the words is God Himself, making this Scripture, not mere human opinion (12:11; 2 Timothy 3:16).
- The hardness of Ecclesiastes is the love of a Shepherd, not the bitterness of a cynic.
- Christ is the good Shepherd in whom this Shepherd's voice is fully heard (John 10:11).

Discussion Prompts

- How can a verdict as harsh as all is vanity be an act of love when it comes from the one Shepherd?
- Where in Ecclesiastes has a saying functioned as a goad, prodding you forward, or a nail, holding a truth fast?
- What does it mean for how we read this book that its words are given by one Shepherd?

Question 8

Student Question:

The Preacher warns that of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the flesh (12:12). What in your own search for answers, advice, or information has left you weary, and how is God redirecting that hunger?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh (12:12). The Preacher is not condemning learning; he has just praised the wise words of the Shepherd. He is warning against the endless, restless pursuit of more, more information, more opinions, more answers, that never lands anywhere and only wears us out.

We live in the age this verse foresaw. There is always another article, another expert, another voice promising the insight that will finally satisfy. And yet the more we consume, the wearier we often grow, because no quantity of human words can give what only the fear of God provides. The Preacher cuts through it: you do not need endless books; you need to fear God and keep His commandments.

This question helps students notice where their own searching has become weariness, whether in self-help, endless advice, anxious research, or the noise of constant content. God is not against knowledge, but He is calling that restless hunger home to Himself, to the one Shepherd whose few clear words are worth more than a library of vapor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Endless searching for human answers wearies us and never satisfies (12:12).
- The problem is not knowledge but restless accumulation that never rests in God.
- A few clear words from the Shepherd outweigh an endless pile of human opinion.
- The cure for weariness is to rest in the fear of God and obedience to His revealed word (12:13).

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your search for answers become a weariness rather than a rest?
- What human voices or sources have promised satisfaction and left you more tired?
- How does fixing your attention on the Shepherd's clear word quiet that restless hunger?

Question 9

Student Question:

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13–14). Why is this the key that unlocks the entire book, and how does the New Testament show that this same God now calls all people to fear Him, obey the gospel of His Son, and stand before Christ in judgment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the climax of the entire book, and the key that unlocks every locked door we have passed: The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret

thing, whether good or evil (12:13–14). Everything the Preacher has said about vanity has been driving toward this. Life under the sun is vapor precisely because meaning is not found under the sun at all; it is found above it, in reverent, obedient relationship with the Creator who judges.

Fear God is the foundation. This is not cringing terror but awe-filled reverence, taking God seriously as God, the Maker before whom we live and to whom we answer. And keep his commandments is its inseparable fruit. The Preacher will not separate fearing God from obeying Him; reverence that does not obey is not the fear of God at all. This is the whole duty of man, literally the whole of man, the thing we were made for, the answer to the riddle of our existence. Strip away the vapor and this remains: a creature made to revere and obey his Creator.

And the reason is judgment: God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. Nothing is hidden, nothing forgotten, nothing too small to count. Every secret thought, every private act, every concealed motive will be brought into the light. This is what gives weight to a life that otherwise feels like vapor. Because there is a judgment, what we do matters infinitely. The fear of God is simply living now in light of that certain day.

The New Testament takes this same God and this same demand and makes them gloriously clear. The God who calls all to fear Him now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He raised from the dead, Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30–31). We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done (2 Corinthians 5:10). The fear of God now wears the face of obedience to the gospel of His Son.

And that obedience is not a vague sincerity but the response the gospel itself defines: to hear the word, to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, to repent of sin, to confess Him before men, and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins, rising to walk in newness of life (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4), and then to keep his commandments faithfully to the end (Hebrews 3:12–14). This is the whole duty of man brought to its fullness in Christ. Ecclesiastes ends where the gospel begins: fear God, obey Him, and be ready for the judgment, for in Christ, the wisdom of God, the vapor of life under the sun is finally answered with the meaning we were made for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear God and keep his commandments is the deliberate climax and key of the whole book; meaning is found above the sun, not under it (12:13).
- The fear of God and obedience to Him are inseparable; reverence that does not obey is not biblical fear (12:13; cf. Mark 16:16).
- This is the whole duty of man, the very thing we were created for, which answers the book's verdict of vanity.

- God will judge every deed and every secret thing, good or evil; nothing is hidden (12:14; Hebrews 4:13).
- The same God now commands all to repent and obey the gospel of His Son and will judge the world through the risen Christ (Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; John 5:28–29).
- Gospel obedience is defined by Scripture: hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized for the remission of sins, and remain faithful (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Hebrews 3:14), not a private feeling or faith only.
- Christ is the wisdom of God in whom life finds its true meaning (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3).

Discussion Prompts

- Walk through how Fear God and keep his commandments answers the whole book's complaint that all is vanity.
- Why can the fear of God never be separated from obeying Him, and how does the New Testament define that obedience (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16)?
- If God will bring every secret thing into judgment, what in your life needs to be brought into the light and made right before that day?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole book of Ecclesiastes, name one specific way the Lord has used this study to form you, one habit, fear, idol, or hope that has changed because you have learned to seek meaning not under the sun but above it, in Christ.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers up the whole study. Ecclesiastes has functioned like a long series of goads, prodding us off the dead ends of life under the sun and toward the fear of God. The aim of the entire book, and of these nine weeks, is not information but transformation: that we would actually seek meaning above the sun, in Christ, and live as people who remember our Creator and will stand before Him.

Invite each student to name one specific change, a fear that has loosened its grip, an idol of money or pleasure or reputation that has lost its shine, a hope that has shifted from the temporary to the eternal, a habit that has begun to bend toward obedience. Specificity matters. The book has been concrete and honest; our response should be too.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ. Everything in Ecclesiastes that ached for an answer is answered in Him, the wisdom of God, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, the one who turns vapor into meaning by giving us back the relationship with the Creator we were made for. To remember the Creator now is, this side of the cross, to come to Christ, obey His gospel, and live ready for the day He brings every deed into judgment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of the study is transformation, not just information (James 1:22).
- Seeking meaning above the sun in Christ is the practical fruit of the whole book.
- Christ answers the ache of Ecclesiastes as the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:3).
- Remembering the Creator now means obeying the gospel and living ready for judgment (Acts 17:30–31).

Discussion Prompts

- Name one fear, idol, habit, or hope that has actually changed in you through this study.
- How has learning to seek meaning above the sun, in Christ, reshaped an ordinary part of your week?
- What is one concrete step you will take now to remember your Creator and live ready for the judgment?