

Ecclesiastical Conversations

Jordan and I took the kiddos to Great Wolf Lodge for a mini vacation. This is the third time we've been as a family over the past few years. It's always a good time. They love tubing all the water slides, which proves to be a challenge even for us adults with deteriorating equilibrium. But this year, since they're older, Jordan and I were able to let them go by themselves for chunks of time while we selfishly enjoyed the hot tub. It's where all the parents whose kids are old enough hide out - haha.

At one point, Jordan and I made our way into the hot tub, and there was complete silence. Then a couple older than us hopped in, and I couldn't tell what they were saying, but I began to imagine what their conversation may have been about. Jordan and I would chat, but for the moment our silence seemed comical - two middle-aged parents who went quiet in the hot tub because they're trying to get a breather compared to two grandparents who were relaxed and full of energy. It was really funny, but then I started thinking about the conversations we all have over the years.

Youthful Conversations: Ecclesiastes 11:9 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 the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

- Reality: You should rejoice. Your responsibilities aren't as great yet. Your self-awareness is not as strong as it will be in the future. Your conversations aren't necessarily as deep, yet you understand God and consequences. Enjoy your youthfulness, but know it isn't an excuse for foolishness. If you're old enough to be a fool, you're old enough to take hold of some wisdom.
- Encouragement: Begin to study God's word. Bring Him into your life and your circle. Do this now before you do it for someone else. Don't do it for a friend or spouse. Build a desire for Jesus now, and He'll be your greatest friend forever.

Green Light Conversations: Ecclesiastes 9:9-10 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

- Reality: Your conversations are exciting and full of plans and ideas! It's time to get to busy! Go for it! It may be time to begin a career. It may be the beginning of a marriage. It may be your first permanent residence outside of your parents' home. Maybe the very first kiddo. It's time to go, but remember you're still green. There's lots to learn. If you keep God at the center of your life, this will build a strong foundation for years to come. Whatever you choose to do, have an "if the Lord wills" mindset, and please ask for advice.
- Encouragement: It's exciting to listen to you. You may be green, but your energy and drive may perhaps produce some of the greatest hits of your life. Don't let the stumbles keep you down. A stumble is not a fall, and even if you fall, you can get back up. These years

offer great opportunities for growth and learning - embrace them all. God will give you increase!

Sober Conversations: Ecclesiastes 12:11-12 The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

- Reality: We've got to pay attention to the shared counsel over the years, because more than likely your decisions are affecting others (spouse, children, co-workers, family), because your position carries more weight due to your experience. You appreciate how the Proverbs are directed towards the son, because you see their need for your own children. They're not babies anymore. They need more. They need direction. Your spouse needs you to pull your weight. Don't waste your time on what doesn't matter and isn't pressing. If you haven't taken God's word seriously, it's time to wake up and make a change before your opportunities for influence fade away.
- Encouragement: You are bringing meat to the table. Though responsibilities are greater, you've got a wonderful mix of energy, zeal, and wisdom. You're firing on all cylinders right now. So many look up to you, and you bring many people closer to God. You're molding young hearts and establishing deep bonds with spouses and friends.

Troubling Conversations: Ecclesiastes 2:14-15 The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

- Reality: I haven't reached this stage, but I want to share my observation. This represents men and women whose children are late teens or out of the house for the first time. Perhaps some kiddos are newlyweds or first-time parents. Here's what I've seen. Moments of fear and uncertainty creep in. Frustration and disappointment can be greater. Why? Because you may be doing the right thing, but it didn't turn out right. Perhaps your plans didn't come to fruition, the timing is off, and the future is uncertain. This could be financial burdens, worries over children or their future, and the fight against Satan may not feel victorious. You've been wearing the armor for a long time, and there's a temptation to throw it off, though you know better. It's time to dig in and trust what you've been teaching your whole life. It's time to keep swinging. Don't take the bait. It's a trap and a snare is waiting for you on the other side. Continue to pray. Do your part. Fight! It's not all futile. There's purpose to it all.
- Encouragement: I know you've got a lot on your plate. Those younger are looking up to you, and those older than you have deteriorating tents, so they're leaning on you. Pressure is caving in. But you are needed. We need you. Those of us a little younger, who have others looking to us, need you. You give us hope. Show us the fight around the corner and how to be victorious. Show us that it's not just talk. Show us what God does for those who trust in Him. Show us what a warrior looks like. Swing! Your example means more because of what you're shouldering. Remember to keep things in perspective and lean not just on what you've read, but what you've experienced: it will be okay. The Lord hasn't deserted

you - He's just letting you fight longer because He knows what you're made of. He's perfecting you.

Peaceful Conversations: Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

- Reality: You seem to have made it through the chaos and see how God works things out in His time. This doesn't mean there's no heartache - you certainly know better. But you've got a way of taking things with strides. You've truly learned how to prioritize life. You've got grandkids running around, turning corners, and you see yourself in them. You know that relationships is what's most important, and being in fellowship with God is the most powerful. God has brought you peace that surpasses all understanding. This may be the closest to "living the dream" before you depart this world.
- Encouragement: You may have retired from your career, but not your faith. Your grey hair is well deserved. Your physical strength may not be what it was, but Satan seems to flee from you more often than he used to. You're what street racers call a "sleeper", may not look fast, but it'll smoke you. Your joyful demeanor gives us all hope. We see the end result. Your speech offers insight, and your questions pull from deep waters. You know the road we're walking and where it leads. Don't stop counseling. Know that those with wisdom invite yours. Those who don't appreciate it . . . well, you've learned how to help them as well. Thank you for all you do!

Finally . . . **Ecclesiastes 12:1** 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"; Listen, we don't blame you. This life is not meant to last forever. The body is groaning and waiting to be liberated. Praise God for redemption and the glory that awaits us all on the other side.