

# Biblical Guidance Through the



# Stages of Life

By Kyle Pope

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**Guardian of Truth Foundation**  
PO Box 9670 • Bowling Green, Kentucky 42102  
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By Kyle Pope

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All Biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted are taken from the *New King James Version*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984.

A special word of thanks goes to DeeDee Vinson, a member of the Olsen Park church of Christ for proofing and offering grammatical and editorial advice on this manuscript. Her assistance was invaluable.

# Preface



**B**iblical Guidance through the Stages of Life was first presented as a special series taught at the Lenexa church of Christ, in Lenexa, Kansas during the ten years I worked with that congregation. A few years later I organized the material into book format and distributed it in connection with the series when I preached it again at the Olsen Park church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas. At the suggestion of brother Mike Willis, the present work was organized into workbook format with study questions for use in Bible classes.

Having worked for over twenty years with Christians struggling through each of the various stages of life, it appeared to me that there was a need to isolate specific teachings in Scripture as they relate to the distinct challenges and opportunities faced during each stage.

Passage through the stages of life is an experience common to all mankind. Those sound in faith and those in error all face similar challenges. That means that both may be able to offer insights into particular areas of life. A number of secular and religious writers are quoted in this book. This should not be taken as an endorsement of the faith (or lack thereof) of the particular writer. Such references are intended to show that the struggles which humans face are common to all.

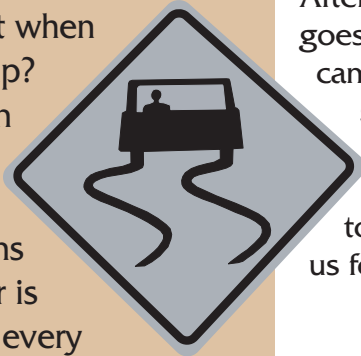
In addition to this, having written this material in my forties, I fully recognize that if this study was nothing more than a discourse on my own opinions and experience it would be of very little value. While I might dramatically differ with a particular writer quoted on matters of salvation, the church, and the authority of Scripture, where voices have spoken words which are sound, practical, and instructional I have used them to illustrate and support points that are being made.

My hope is that in this study, the reader will recognize that it is the Bible that is the ultimate authority for all of human life, experience, and worship. While we are grateful for the many valuable written works which human beings have produced, they could all turn to dust tomorrow and with the Bible we would still have all that we need!

Kyle Pope, 2010  
Amarillo, TX  
kmpope@att.net



**A**dults remember well when we first sat behind the steering wheel of a car and began learning to drive. Everything was a challenge. Do you press the brake or the gas? What gear does the car need to be in to go forward? Should the brake be pressed while you shift? Do you turn to the left or right when you back up? Then, when that magic moment begins and the car is in motion, every movement is sensitive. You give it too much gas and the car lunges forward. In panic you slam your foot on the brake—only to jolt the entire car (and your instructor) bringing the car screeching to a stop!



Every stage of life is filled with challenges. Every bend we come to in the road of life is a stretch of road we have never before traveled. The first bumps we hit feel like the hardest things in the world—as well they should.

## Childhood



“It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth”  
(Lamentations 3:27).

After all, we have never traveled this road before. As time goes on we hit some potholes, run over some obstacle that came upon us too quickly, or perhaps one day we have to slam on the brakes just in time to avoid a major accident. Eventually those first bumps pass from our minds or we begin to see them in perspective. Yes, they were hard to handle but we survived them, and they helped prepare us for what came afterwards.

Childhood is the beginning of life’s journey. Everything is new. All the sideroads leading to the highways of adulthood seem so long, and so hard. But a time will come, if God is willing, when the racing highways of adulthood make the short sideroads seem so small. Yet, before that comes the road which leads from our own driveway to the highway is the entire world to a little person. That short road can be so important. A wrong turn can put us on the wrong highway. Bad choices can put us in jeopardy, whatever road we eventually take. Parents, teachers, older siblings, friends, and Christian co-workers need to do all that can be done to help that young person start his or her journey in the right way.

### The Challenges of Childhood

**E**very soul born as the offspring of our grandparents Adam and Eve has gone through childhood. That should mean that all of us are experts in this stage of life, right? The problem is that, as we grow, it is very easy to forget what the world was like when we were children.



Have you ever gone back to a school you went to when you were a child? Those halls that seemed so long and wide seem to have shrunk. The ceilings have dropped and the teachers who seemed so old all look like kids themselves. Although we as adults may have forgotten what it felt like to stare out at a huge world with awe and wonder, all around us are little people who are just beginning this adventure. We must understand the challenges they face to understand how God would direct their ways. Consider some of these challenges.



### **Limited Choices – Lots of Things You Can't Do**

One of the most exciting things about becoming an adult is gaining freedom of choice. You can decide when to go to bed. You can decide what to have for dinner. You can decide what to watch on television. As a child, most of these choices are made for you. That can be very frustrating. “Why is it that Mom and Dad can stay up and I can't?” they say. Or, “Why do you get coffee and I can't have any?” Ironically, many of the choices our Christian parents make for us as children, we will

make for ourselves when we have the liberty to do so. Yet, now, it is hard to yield to someone else making choices for us.

### **No One Understands You**

As children, our interests are much different from those of our parents. Parents are concerned about bills, obligations, and schedules. They watch the news and read the newspaper. They don't seem to understand at all the kinds of social pressures that children face. They don't seem to realize how important certain things are in a child's life. In truth, it may not be that our parents don't understand us. It may be that they understand us better than we think they do. They may see some bigger issue that we haven't considered. They may be trying to help us over some obstacle, or to avoid some danger that isn't apparent to our little eyes. Even so, when Mom and Dad say, “No,” when we ask to get that game that all our friends have, or those shoes that everyone is wearing, it is easy to feel like we don't even speak the same language our parent do!

### **Time Takes So Long to Pass**

I can remember as a child thinking how long an hour seemed. If I was grounded to my room, given a task, or an assignment in school for an hour, it seemed like an eternity. The further life goes along, an hour seems shorter and shorter.

A number of years ago, I heard a very reasonable explanation for this. Each minute, hour, day, week, month, or year that passes becomes an ever increasingly smaller portion of your life.



When you are one day old an hour is  $1/24^{\text{th}}$  of your life. When you are a week old it is  $1/168^{\text{th}}$  of your life. At one year old it is  $1/8760^{\text{th}}$  of your life, but since at that age you have slept through about  $2/3$  of that time it feels more like  $1/2920^{\text{th}}$  of your life. At thirty years of age, however, one hour

is 1/262,800<sup>th</sup> of your life and by now you're not getting anywhere near as much sleep as you did as a child, so it feels like about the fraction of time which it is. At eighty years of age an hour is 1/700,800<sup>th</sup> of your life, and even if you need to sleep a little more now, it never seems long enough!

When parents and children look at periods of time, they both see the time in question differently. When a child is grounded for a week, the parent may see seven days of no chauffeuring kids, no answering phone calls, and no activities to shuffle. The child, on the other hand, sees a major portion of his or her life brought to a stop. Sometimes that is just what needs to happen, but it is important to realize how different things will seem to the parent and to the child.

### **Everything Seems So Hard**

I remember the first girl I ever had a crush on. It was fourth grade, and she was in my class. Back then, if two kids liked each other, and they wanted to consider each other "boyfriend" and "girlfriend" the boy would ask the girl to "go with" him. They weren't really "going" anywhere—they were too young to date, but that was the way they

said to each other "I like you and you like me!" My kids tell me now it is called "going out." When my parents were young it was "going steady."

Whatever the name they still don't go anywhere, its just a different name for the same thing.



I called this girl in my class a few times to set the stage for asking her to "go" with me. We had a couple of good visits, then one day I called and asked her if she would "go with me," but she said no. I was crushed! I was rejected! I was heartbroken! I'm not sure how much my parents knew about this, but for me it was devastating. In the whole scheme of my life events, as I look back now, that wasn't really a big deal, but at the time it felt like the whole world had fallen around me.

Many things for us as children will seem this way. Cleaning our room feels like having to organize a warehouse. Doing homework feels like writing a thousand page novel! Getting our feelings hurt feels like being run over by a MAC truck. None of these things are as hard as they feel (in the long run), but that doesn't change how they feel at the time.

## **Biblical Guidance to Children**

**W**hat guidance can the Bible offer us through these challenges? It is really amazing how much the Bible has to say about children. One reference book I looked through to put together this study had four columns on two pages in small print of book, chapter, and verse references under the heading "children." The *New King James Version* of the Bible uses different forms of the word "child" 1842 times! Obviously God has some things to say to and about children.

In this study, we will not attempt to comprehensively examine everything the Bible teaches about children. We will limit our consideration to five major instructions which God gives to children.

*As a child cleaning our room feels like having to organize a warehouse. Doing homework feels like writing a thousand page novel!*



## 1. Seek Wisdom – Proverbs 4:1-11

1 Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; 2 For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. 3 When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, 4 He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live. 5 Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. 9 She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you. 10 Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many. 11 I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths (Prov. 4:1-11).

Childhood is the seed and root from which life blooms. It is the clay from which the pot is formed. It is the thesis upon which life's work is written. It is the canvas upon which the painting is brushed. In the Jewish Mishnah, "Elisha, son of Abuya, said, 'If one learns as a child, what is it like? Like ink written on clean paper. If one learns as an old man, what is it like? Like ink written on blotted paper'" (*Perke Aboth*, 4.25).

The years of childhood are so vital to proper development that some have seen them as the most important. The Jesuits have a saying: "Give me a child for the first seven years and you may do what you like with him afterwards." Nikolai Lenin, expressed the same in a speech to the Commissars of Education in 1923: "Give us the child for eight years, and it will be a Bolshevik forever."

The text above begins with the wise man urging his son not to forsake "my law" (v. 2). When Christian parents are striving to bring their children up in the "training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), the "law" which they are teaching their children is the law of God. The wise man teaches his son

that this began for him when he was "tender and the only one in the sight of my mother" (v.3). Have you ever noticed how a mother is around a young child? The world can spin all around her, but her focus is on that child! Is it safe? Is it fed? This is not talking about a time when a child is old and mature, when the mother can occupy herself with other things. Instead, the wise man says, of his father, that at a time when he was very young, "He taught me" (v.4).

What did the wise father teach his son, which in the text, the son (now a father) is teaching his own son? "Get wisdom!" (v. 5). This "way of wisdom" is set parallel with "the right paths" (v. 11). This is not, as Paul would say, the "word of human wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:4).

What man alone has to say matters very little. That kind of wisdom, as James declares through the Holy Spirit, is "earthly" and "sensual" (Jas. 3:15, 16). The kind

of wisdom the wise man taught his son was the "wisdom that is from above" (Jas. 3:17, 18). It begins with a reverential fear of God. The wise man said, "Get wisdom! Get Understanding!" (v. 5). Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge

*Have you ever noticed how a mother is around a young child? The world can spin all around her, but her focus is on that child!*

of the Holy One is understanding.” Job declared, “...to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’” (Job 28:28).

Children, above all other things—good grades in school, a good position on the team, friends, popularity, nice toys, nice clothes—you must seek heavenly wisdom. As the wise man declares, “wisdom is the principal thing” (v. 7). With it comes a number of assurances. Wisdom will “preserve” and “keep” you (v. 6). Wisdom will “promote” and “bring you honor” (v. 8). Finally, wisdom will give you an “ornament of grace” and “a crown of glory” (v. 9). The child who in his early years sets himself to seek the heavenly wisdom which is to be found in Jesus Christ, can have the assurance that he, one day, will receive “a crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (Jas. 1:12).

*Children, above all other things—good grades in school, friends, popularity, nice things—you must seek heavenly wisdom.*

placed in the young tree (Lawson). When the “precious jewels” of God’s word are stored in the heart of a child, like the tree, they can preserve them shining and new throughout the child’s entire life.

Some have imagined that you should wait until children are older to call them to realize their accountability before God. The text above, points out the very simple truth that there is no better time than youth for one to “remember your Creator” (v. 1a). This should happen before, “the difficult days come” (vs 1b). Life brings difficulty. It is easy for these difficulties to distract us from service to God. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warns of the seed sown among the thorns which is “choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life” causing the person to bring no “fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). God would have us, in youth to remember our Creator.



## **2. Remember Your Creator – Ecclesiastes 12:1**

1 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” (Eccl. 12:1).

The story is told of a nobleman who was banished from the kingdom where he lived. On the night before his departure, he gave one of his stewards a chest filled with precious jewels for safekeeping. As the years went by, the steward’s health began to fail and he looked for a place that he could safeguard the jewels in the event of his death. The steward found a young tree, cut a hole in the tree, and placed the treasure under its bark. The steward told the nobleman where he had placed the jewels and sometime later the steward died. As the years passed, the nobleman was allowed to return home and found the tree had grown into a mighty oak. The tree was cut down, and there, in the heart of the tree were the jewels, as bright and shining as the day they were

What is involved in *remembering* our Creator? First, we recognize that we are a creation. The Psalmist observed:

13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that

my soul knows very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them (Ps. 139:13-16).

As children, we should recognize that we belong to God. He made us, He sustains our life, and He has the right to direct our actions. Beyond that, remembering our Creator means establishing the proper place for Him in our lives. *What is the most important thing in your day?* Recess? Video games? Playing? Watching your favorite TV show? Whatever it is, I am certain that you always make sure that you fit it into your day. *What place does God have in your life?* Do you pray – when Mom and Dad don't ask you to? Do you study your Bible when it's not just studying for your Bible class lesson? You must "remember your Creator" by your own choice.



ber what God wants you to do and it will guide your steps without you having to stop and think, "What does God want me to do?" God's commandment is a "lamp" and "light" which leads in the "way of life" (v. 23).



### 3. Obey His Commandments – Proverbs 6:20-23

20 My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother.

21 Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep, they will keep you; And when you awake, they will speak with you. 23 For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life (Prov. 6:20-23).

As we noticed in Proverbs chapter four, of the father, here the "father's command" and the "law of your mother" (v. 20), for the godly is God's word. The same language that God uses when He instructed the Israelites is used here—they were to "bind" His commands close to them (v. 21, see Deut. 6:8; 11:18). This is not just to be when it is easy. Instead, as children we are to follow God's instructions when we "roam" and when we "sleep" (v. 22a). When obedience to the Lord is such a regular part of your life, His word "will speak with you" (v. 22b). In other words, you will remem-

Do you as a child want to be a good man or a good woman when you grow up? Do you want to be the kind of person that is pleasing to God and will go to heaven? It starts now! Milton, in his famous *Paradise Regained*, declared "childhood shews the man, as morning shews the day" (bk. iv, l.220, 221). If someone is unwilling to obey God as a child, it will not become any easier as

an adult. Obeying God now sets the stage for the kind of adult you will become.

*Do you as a child want to be a good man or a good woman when you grow up? Do you want to please God and go to heaven? It starts now!*



#### 4. Honor Father and Mother – Ephesians 6:1-3

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: 3 “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:1-3).

Here, Paul through the Holy Spirit, refers to one of the Ten Commandments which is restated in the Law of Christ—Honoring Father and Mother. He adds, what should be understood as an obvious element of honor to parents: obedience. Children, if you “honor” your parents, it means that you treat them special—you treat them respectfully. You can not do this by disobeying them. To honor, you must obey. That doesn’t mean that you always agree. Sometimes parents are wrong. *Does that mean you don’t have to obey them?* Only if they are demanding that you disobey God. In that case, Scripture always teaches that we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Otherwise we must obey our parents. When we do, we have the promise that it will be “well” with us and we will “live long on the earth.” That isn’t a magic formula to long life, but it is a general truth upon which we can depend.

Little children, we live in a time when children are allowed to speak to their parents (and other adults) in a very disrespectful way. You will hear children talk back to their parent’s instructions. You will hear children insult their parents or tell them they are “stupid.” It doesn’t matter how accepted this becomes—how many of your friends at school or in the neighborhood act this way, it is wrong and you must choose not to behave like that!

*When I was a child, children did not address adults by their first name. To do so was a sign of disrespect.*



God expects all people to show respect and honor to their parents and to those older than them. “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.” (Lev. 19:32). My wife and I have tried to teach our children to say “yes, Ma’am” and “yes, Sir” to adults who speak to them as a demonstration of respect. When

I was a child, children did not address adults by their first name. To do so was a sign of disrespect. That is changing now. I hear even the children of Christians call adults by their first name. I’m not certain that it is intended with disrespect, but it is a trend that makes me uncomfortable.

Obedience and honor to parents was a big deal in Bible times. Under the Law of Moses, a rebellious and disobedient son was to be stoned to death (Deut. 21:18-21). One who cursed his father or mother was to be put to death (Lev. 20:9). Jesus cites this in His own teachings (Matt. 15:4). In the list in Romans chapter one of ways that man has turned from God, “disobedient to parents” is listed among man’s sins (1:30).



## 5. Keep Yourself Pure – Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

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 in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. 10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity (Eccl. 11:9-10).

There are a lot of fun things about being a child. You can play and pretend and use your imagination to take you wherever you can dream. You have your food and clothes provided for you. You have a roof over your head with no rent, utilities, or insurance payments. You can go to bed at night without fearing that you could lose your job, be transferred, or become disabled— your parents take care of everything for you. Even so, many children spend many of their waking hours wishing they were bigger! I remember thinking, “If only I was big, everything would be perfect!” “I can’t wait,” I said to myself, “until I’m a man!” That is how it should be to a certain extent. The text above says “childhood and youth” are “vanity” (v. 10c). The word here in Hebrew means “breath” or “vapor” (Gesenius). You won’t be a child forever, and many people bring on a lot of troubles for themselves when they try to stay children forever. Yet, this text reminds us, as

we let our heart “cheer” us in our youth, we must remember that we will come into judgment for what we do (v. 9).

Don’t get too worried about things that happen to you in youth—“remove sorrow from your

heart” (v. 10a). That broken heart will heal. Those hurt feelings will pass away. What seems like the end of the world will not seem as important ten, twenty, or thirty years from



*“Experience is the child of Thought, and Thought the child of Action.”*

now. What you should concern yourself with is doing right— “put away evil from your flesh” (v. 10b). You are an example to others around you. Even as a child, others are watching you. There is a cemetery with a child’s grave that bears on the headstone this inscription, “A child of whom her playmates said: ‘It was easier to be good when she was with us.’” Would your friends and schoolmates say that about you?

Children are of the nature and disposition of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1-5; 19:13-15), but that can be changed so quickly. If those that are responsible for children or if children themselves

make the kinds of choices that let it happen, that beautiful nature and disposition can be destroyed. Benjamin Disraeli, the 19<sup>th</sup> century British statesman and novelist, wrote: “Experience is the child of Thought, and Thought the child of Action” (*Vivian Grey*, bk. v, ch. 1). What you choose to think about and do now will shape who you will become. Keep yourself pure, so that choosing to do what God wants you to do is not more difficult as an adult than it has to be.





# Childhood Study Questions

1. In the beginning of this chapter, life is compared to the process of learning to drive. What are some other life experiences which might illustrate the challenge of passing through different stages of life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why is it often difficult for adults to understand the challenges children face? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What are some ways that adults might be able to help children face some of the challenges of childhood? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. If the explanation offered in this chapter for why time seems to pass at different rates during different stages of life is correct, how might this help us endure some long term trial? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How many times are forms of the word “child” used in the *New King James Version* of the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the “law” which the wise man teaches his son in Proverbs 4:2? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Why does he call it “my law?” \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. When did the wise man first begin to learn this “law” (Prov. 4:3)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What does this indicate about when to begin teaching children? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



8. List six benefits which the wise man says will come if his son will “get wisdom” (Prov. 4:7-9):  
 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
 4) \_\_\_\_\_ 5) \_\_\_\_\_ 6) \_\_\_\_\_
9. The writer of Ecclesiastes urges the reader to, “Remember your Creator” before the “difficult days come” (Ecc. 12:1). What are some types of “difficult days” which could come in life that might make it harder to acknowledge God if we have not done so in our youth? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
10. What are some things involved in remembering God as our Creator? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
11. For followers of God, what shapes the “father’s command” and the “law of your mother” (Prov. 6:20)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
11. What does Solomon mean by commanding his son to “bind” his commands and the “law” of his mother “continually upon your heart” (Prov. 6:21)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
12. How will remembering such things “speak with” the one who “binds” them upon his heart (Prov.6:22)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
13. What do each of the Scriptures below indicate about the importance which God places upon honoring our father and mother?  
 Deuteronomy 21:18-21: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Leviticus 20:9: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matthew 15:4: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Romans 1:30: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
14. What does the writer of Ecclesiastes urge the reader to remember, as one lets the heart “cheer” you in “the days of your youth” (Ecc. 11:9)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
15. What does the Hebrew word translated “vanity” in Ecclesiastes 11:10 mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# Biblical Guidance Through the *Stages* of Life



**Kyle Pope (1963- )** preaches for the Olsen Park church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas where he conducts a preacher training program and serves as an elder. He has been

preaching the Gospel since 1987 in churches in Missouri, Arkansas, Alabama, Kansas, and Texas. Kyle holds a B.A. in Humanities from the University of Alabama (1997) and a M.A. in Greek and Latin from the University of Kansas (2000). He has written numerous tracts and booklets, including *A Harmony of Second Samuel Kings and Chronicles; The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart, How Does the Holy Spirit Work in a Christian?* and *Romans in the Bible Text Book Series*. He is working on the Book of Matthew for the *Truth Commentary* series.



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