

# Ecclesiastes 10 Commentary

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KJV Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:1 One dead fly makes the perfumer's ointment give off a rancid stench, so a little folly can outweigh much wisdom.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:1 μιαι θανάτου σαπρίο σιν σκευασάν λαού ὁ σματός τιμιον ἄγον σοφίας πρὸ ὧν φροσνῆς μεγλής

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:1 Pestilent flies will corrupt a preparation of sweet ointment: and a little wisdom is more precious than great glory of folly.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies make a perfumer's oil ferment and stink; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:1 As dead flies cause even a bottle of perfume to stink, so a little foolishness spoils great wisdom and honor.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies cause a perfumer's perfume To send forth a stink; The precious by reason of wisdom -- By reason of honour -- a little folly!

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:1 One dead fly can spoil the scent-maker's oil: a grain of stupidity outweighs wisdom and glory.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a foul odor; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:1 More weighty than wisdom or wealth is a little folly!

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies will make a bottle of perfume stink, and then it is spoiled. A little foolishness outweighs wisdom and honor.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies make the oil of the perfumer give out an evil smell; more valued is a little wisdom than the great glory of the foolish.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off an evil odor; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

- **the ointment:** Ex 30:34,35
- **a little foolishness:** 2Ch 19:2 Ne 6:13 13:26 Mt 5:13-16 Ga 2:12-14

#### **Related Passages:**

Proverbs 22:1 A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.

1 Corinthians 5:6+ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that **a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?**

Galatians 5:9+ **A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.**

James 3:5-6+ So also the tongue is **a small part of the body**, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (ONE TINY SPARK IN THE FOREST CAN SPARK A DEVASTATING FIRE!) 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Song 2:15+ "Catch the foxes for us, **The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards**, While our vineyards are in blossom."

## A LITTLE FOLLY BRINGS A LOT OF DAMAGE

**Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink** ([baash](#); Lxx - saprizo = make rotten, to decay from [sapro](#)) - Literally “makes stink makes bubble up” or “causes stench pours forth.” The picture is someone opening the bottle expecting sweet smell of perfumed oil, but instead receiving a stench that overwhelms the senses. The lesson is clear -- just a small amount of foolish behavior can outweigh (or undo) a life of wisdom and honor. The banner across this proverb should be **BEWARE!** ([See the tragic illustration](#)). Beloved, be especially alert when you begin to reason “Well, it's not that big of a deal...” That logic has destroyed the lives of many a person! This verse recalls Solomon's words in Ec 9:18 that “one sinner destroys much good.”

**David Jeremiah** points out that “The use of a tiny fly as the image has a reason. We can be ruined by something just as relatively small. We don't have to make a huge mistake to be brought down; it can be something small, but senseless and foolish....Often we'll hear someone complain about being in trouble for something they did: “It wasn't any big deal ...” All it takes is a “little deal” to ruin an otherwise good life.

As an aside this passage is the likely source of the famous saying [“a fly in the ointment.”](#)

The truth of this proverb is seen in the corrupting influence of a “little foolishness” in the following Biblical examples...

- [Achan's sin](#) (Josh. 7) brought defeat to Israel.
- [Moses' one act of disobedience](#) (Num. 20) kept him from entering the Promised Land.
- [David's sin with Bathsheba](#) (2 Sam. 11) brought lifelong consequences, despite his wisdom.
- [Uzziah's pride](#) (2 Chr. 26) led to downfall after years of faithful leadership.

**NET NOTE** on **stink** - The verb שָׁאַשׁ (ba'ash) means “to cause to stink; to turn rancid; to emit a stinking odor” (e.g., Exod 16:24; Ps 38:6; Eccl 10:1); see HALOT 107 s.v. 1 שָׁאַשׁ; BDB 93 s.v. שָׁאַשׁ. It is related to the noun שָׁאַשׁ (bé'osh, “stench”; Isa 34:3; Joel 2:20; Amos 4:10); cf. HALOT 107 s.v. שָׁאַשׁ; BDB 93 s.v. שָׁאַשׁ. The verbal root נָבַע means “to ferment” or “to emit; to pour out; to bubble; to belch forth; to cause to gush forth” (HALOT 665 s.v. נָבַע; BDB 615 s.v. נָבַע). The two terms יָבַעַשׁ יָבִיעַ (yav'ish yabbia', “to stink” and “to ferment”) create a hendiadys: a figurative expression in which two terms are used to connote one idea: “makes a rancid stench.” Several versions treat this as a hendiadys (Old Greek, Symmachus, Targum, Vulgate); however, the Syriac treats them as separate verbs. Most translations treat these as a hendiadys: “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor” (KJV); “Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink” (NASB); “dead flies give perfume a bad smell” (NIV); “Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off an evil odor” (RSV); “Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a foul odor” (NRSV); “Dead flies cause a perfumer's perfume to send forth a stink” (YLT); “Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a foul odor” (NRSV). Others render both separately: “Dead flies make the perfumer's sweet ointment rancid and ferment” (NEB); “Dead flies turn the perfumer's ointment fetid and putrid” (NJPS).

**David Jeremiah** - They say the devil is in the details, and that can be very true. On the big days and big events of life, we're more likely to be on our guard. It's the details that trip us up. We witness the downfall of this politician or that well-known Christian and wonder how such a little thing, something so avoidable, brought down a big man. All it took was the perspiration on Richard Nixon's lip to ruin his televised debate with John F. Kennedy....No big deal, we think, It's just a little thing. A “little” relationship, a “little” flirtation at the office, a “little” edge in the tone of voice, a “little” padding on the expense account, a “little” experimentation in the wrong area—just a little thing. ([Borrow](#))

**Tommy Nelson** - It's an ancient science to be a perfumer. It takes a lot of skill, patience, and time to make perfumer's oil. Solomon describes how one dead fly in a bowl can ruin all of the perfumer's work. One commentator has said, “A little folly can display itself as mightier and more glorious than wisdom.” (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Puritan William Secker** said that “Little sins are not like an inch of candle which soon expires, but they resemble a trail of powder, which takes the fire until at last the barrels burst asunder.”

*Little deeds, not miracles or battles, or one great heroic effort  
or martyrdom, make up the true holy life.*

**Horatius Bonar** on the importance of small things - A holy life is made up of a multitude of small things. It is the **little things** of the hour and not the great things of the age that fill up a life like that of the apostles Paul or John, David Brainerd, or Henry Martyn.

**Little words**, not eloquent speeches or sermons; **little deeds**, not miracles or battles, or one great heroic effort or martyrdom, make up the true holy life. (See [God's Way of Holiness](#))

*Fidelity in trifles, and an earnest seeking to please God  
in little matters, is a real test of devotion and love.*

**Jean Nicolas Grou** - Little things come daily, hourly, within our reach, and they are not less calculated to set forward our growth in holiness, than are the greater occasions which occur but rarely. Moreover, fidelity in trifles, and an earnest seeking to please God in little matters, is a real test of devotion and love. Let your aim be to please our dear Lord perfectly in little things.

**So a little foolishness** (sikluth; Lxx - [aphrosune](#)) **is weightier** ([yaqar](#); Lxx - [timios](#) - precious) **than wisdom** ([chokmah](#); Lxx - [sophia](#)) **and honor** - Note that “**fool**” (foolish, foolishness) is a key word in Ecc 10 occurring 7x in 6v. Clearly study of this chapter will help us understand a fool, and by application to seek to be the antithesis, to be wise. The idea is not that a little folly is more valuable than much wisdom, but that a little folly can have more influence than great wisdom. Just a small dose of foolish behavior can outweigh (or undo) a life of wisdom and honor. The corollary is to be very careful in associating with foolish people, thinking you will bring them up. The more likely scenario is that they will bring you down!

*The idea is not that a little folly is more valuable than much wisdom;  
but that a little folly can have more influence than great wisdom.  
It only takes one little mistake to ruin a life of great wisdom.*

**NET NOTE - weightier** - Heb “carries more weight than”; or “is more precious than.” The adjective יָקָר (yaqar) denotes “precious; valuable; costly” (HALOT 432 s.v. 2 יָקָר) or “weighty; influential” (BDB 430 s.v. 4 יָקָר). The related verb denotes “to carry weight,” that is, to be influential (HALOT 432 s.v. 2 יָקָר). The idea is not that a little folly is more valuable than much wisdom; but that a little folly can have more influence than great wisdom. It only takes one little mistake to ruin a life of great wisdom. The English versions understand it this way: “so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor” (NASB); “so a little folly outweighs massive wisdom” (NJPS); “so a little folly outweighs an abundance of wisdom” (MLB); “so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (RSV, NRSV, NIV); “so can a little folly make wisdom lose its worth” (NEB); “so a little folly annuls great wisdom” (ASV); “a single slip can ruin much that is good” (NAB); “so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor” (KJV). The LXX rendered the line rather freely: τιμιον λιγον σοφι περ δοξαν φροσυνης μεγαλην (“a little wisdom is more precious than great glory of folly”). This does not accurately represent the Hebrew syntax.

*The truth thus conveyed is that a little thing  
can bring about unacceptable results.*

**William Barrick - Ecclesiastes 10 A Final Reflection about Folly.** In conclusion, the Preacher determines to fear God, obey God, and enjoy life (Eccl 9:1–12:14) Having discoursed on the nature and examples of wisdom (Eccl 9:10–18), Solomon turns to its opposite, foolishness in Eccl 10. The first verse of the chapter picks up where chapter 9 leaves off—with a comparative statement regarding wisdom and foolishness. In Eccl 9:18 he uses the “better than” type of proverbial statement to bring out the contrast between the success of wisdom and the destruction of good by foolishness. In Eccl 10:1, an illustrative proverb depicts dead flies corrupting the perfumer’s oil. In general, Eccl 10 reveals that the wisdom literature topic of the two ways (e.g., Psalm 1 contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of the wicked) applies to nations as much as to individuals.(1 Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes.) **Recognizing Fools** (Eccl 10:1–4) Whereas Eccl 9:18 refers to a community situation in which one sinner destroys what is good, Eccl 10:1 looks only at an individual situation.(Borrow [Eaton, Ecclesiastes](#)) The phrase “**dead flies**” could mean “deadly flies.” However, the proverb does not focus on their deadliness, but on their effect on the perfumed oil. (Borrow [Eaton, Ecclesiastes](#)) Since that is the obvious intent of the author, it means “**dead flies**.” (Borrow [Murphy, Ecclesiastes](#)) Flies were persistent pests in the ancient Near East. Landing on the surface of perfumed **oil** might result in their entanglement and death. The **dead flies** would spoil the **oil**. ([Barton, Ecclesiastes](#)) The text literally reads, “makes stink makes bubble up” or “causes stench pours forth.” That is, when someone opens the bottle of perfumed oil, the foul smell pours out of it, overwhelming the senses. Since ancient peoples used such oils to disguise the smell of decaying bodies (cp. 2Ch 16:14), the picture here might be that the oil itself exudes a fouler stench than even a decaying corpse. (7 Provan, Ecclesiastes) The fool’s “small mistake makes the smell of his folly greater than the fragrance of his wisdom.” (Borrow [Eaton, Ecclesiastes](#)) The truth thus conveyed is that a little thing can bring about unacceptable results. Other ways to express the proverb include: “an ounce of folly can destroy a ton of wisdom”; (Borrow [Murphy, Ecclesiastes](#)) “it takes far less to ruin something than to create it”; (Borrow [Kidner, A Time to Mourn](#)) “it is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness”;(11 Kidner, A Time to Mourn,) or, “wisdom is acquired at great expense . . . but stupidity comes easy.” (Borrow [Kelley The Burden of God](#))

**“Guard the Oil”** The sweet perfume of your life—your testimony, your wisdom, your legacy—can be spoiled not by a war, but by a small compromise: A careless word, A secret indulgence, An impulsive moment. “Dead flies” don’t come with fanfare—but they bring stench nonetheless. So Solomon urges you: Be alert. Be humble. Don’t justify “small” sins—they are the enemy of wisdom’s

fragrance. Wisdom is precious, but easily corrupted. A small amount of foolishness can undo great honor. Guard your heart, especially in the little things. Reputation is fragile—handle it with care. Godly wisdom requires daily vigilance. Take small sins seriously—they can lead to big consequences. Maintain your integrity even in private, unseen moments. Don't rest on your past wisdom—stay alert to present temptation. Restore what's been spoiled through repentance and renewal in Christ. Pray daily for God to guard your mind and mouth from folly.

*Pray daily for God to protect you from becoming the "fly"  
in the ointment of your life or someone else's life!*

David Jeremiah adds "If we do something really destructive, it's usually because we've tolerated smaller instances of foolish behavior. Asking God for wisdom daily can keep little "foolishnesses" from becoming big ones—whether in personal behavior, leadership, the work setting, or our words."

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**Stink** (grow foul, stink)(0887) **baash** means to have a bad smell or to stink. To be repulsive. It denotes a bad physical smell (blood in the Nile - [Ex 7:21](#)) or odor of spoiled manna ([Ex 16:20](#)). In a figurative sense, it speaks of a person who becomes strongly revolting to another, a metaphorical "stench in the nostrils."

**Louis Goldberg** - When Moses struck the water of the Nile, the fish died and the river became foul (Ex 7:18, 21). After the plague of the frogs, the land was foul (stank). When some tried to save their allotted share of manna, it bred worms and emitted a stink (Ex 16:20). But the double portion gathered on the sixth day did not become foul (Exodus 16:24). This term, stink, is also used by the Hebrew foremen of the Israelite slave force who complained to Moses and Aaron that they had made Israel's savour odious in Pharaoh's presence (Ex 5:21). Other usages for stink or foul: David cried out because his wounds were foul and festering on account of his folly (Ps 38:5). Jacob exclaimed to Levi and Simeon that their actions caused him to be odious to the people of Canaan with drastic consequences (Ge 34:30). Qohelet says that dead flies ferment and make perfumed oil stink (Eccl 10:1). The idea of abhorrence is seen in David's decision to fight for the Philistines. They thought that David had made himself odious to the Israelites (1 Sa 27:12). The affair of Absalom and his father's concubines was calculated to make Absalom abhorrent to David and to bring about misunderstanding between father and son (2 Sa 16:21). Other shades of meaning are seen in the actions of wicked men who are loathsome (or act disgustingly, Pr 13:5). Thus this word either describes objects that have a foul odor, bad relationships between people creating abhorrence, and the general principle that evil deeds are so rotten that they have a bad smell in God's nostrils. (See [Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament](#))

**BAASH - 16V - acts disgustingly(1), became foul(3), become foul(2), become odious(2), grow foul(1), made(1), made themselves odious(1), made yourself odious(1), making me odious(1), odious\*(1), stink(2), surely made(1), surely made himself odious(1).** Gen. 34:30; Exod. 5:21; Exod. 7:18; Exod. 7:21; Exod. 8:14; Exod. 16:20; Exod. 16:24; 1 Sam. 13:4; 1 Sam. 27:12; 2 Sam. 10:6; 2 Sam. 16:21; 1 Chr. 19:6; Ps. 38:5; Prov. 13:5; Eccl. 10:1; Isa. 50:2

**Foolishness** (05531) **sikluth** (from sakal - to be foolish or a fool) means folly or foolishness. Folly is a way of life devoid of wisdom, God, self-understanding, or an understanding of others. Wisdom exceeds folly, and evil is attached to folly (Eccl. 2:13; 7:25); foolishness and folly are corrupting (Eccl. 10:1, 13). Septuagint translates with [aphrosune](#).

**Louis Goldberg** - (See [TWOT online](#)) Consideration of the way of wisdom and the way of folly raises philosophic questions (Eccles. 2:3, 12-13). In Eccles. 2:1-11 folly appears as an unrestricted accumulation of pleasures and things. But, as qôhelet gained maturity, he found the answer, "Wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness." Wisdom is the way of the moral and spiritual man while folly is the way of a man with twisted values. One other association of siklût (foolishness) with madness (Eccles. 7:25f.) is pictured by the sinner who allows himself to be entrapped by an immoral woman. The one who would be wise and pleasing to God escapes from her clutches.

**SIKLUTH** - folly(5), foolishness(1). Eccl. 1:17; Eccl. 2:3; Eccl. 2:12; Eccl. 2:13; Eccl. 10:1; Eccl. 10:13

See [ISBE article on Folly, Foolishness](#).

**Weightier** (03368) **yaqar** means precious, rare, splendid, weighty. The root verb (also spelled "yaqar") and its derivatives are employed 65 times. It comes from a Semitic root which conveys the idea of "heavy," "honor," "dignity." An object is considered precious or valuable either because of its intrinsic worth or its rarity.

**Gilbrant** - The adjective yāqār, meaning "precious," is derived from yāqar (HED #3479), "to be precious." It is exclusively coupled with stones (gemstones and foundation stones) and with life, instructing us regarding its

precious value. The Temple was financed with precious stones (1 Chr. 29:2) and had precious stones laid in it (2 Chr. 3:6). The Queen of Sheba gave King Solomon gifts, including precious stones (2 Chr. 9:1, 9f). By extension, the adjective is used to describe a variety of valuable objects, including speech (Jer. 15:19) and the moon (Job 31:26). In 2 Sam. 12:30, *yāqār* emphasizes value over weight or volume: "And he took the crown from off their king's head. Its weight was a talent of gold, with a precious stone in it. And [he] set it on David's head." In the same way, the solid foundation stone laid by Yahweh in Zion is called a precious cornerstone (Isa. 28:16). The cornerstone is the most valued and important, for it rests on bedrock. Since most every edifice in Jerusalem is built on steep hills, only one corner, side or portion rests on bedrock. Literally, the cornerstone is the most stable of the entire structure. One recently discovered foundation stone of the Jerusalem Temple complex weighs an estimated 600 tons, and beside it is another one weighing over 400 tons. If these two stones were to shift, the entire complex would collapse. To hew out, square and transport such stones was not cheap. Certain stones in Solomon's Temple were known as "great stones, costly stones" (1 Ki. 5:17). Peter applies this passage and concept to Christ as the most precious in the sight of God (1 Pet. 2:4-8) as does Paul (Eph. 2:20f), who implies that our entire lives are built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ himself. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Baker** - An adjective meaning valuable, rare, precious. It carries the sense of being rare in some contexts (1 Sam. 3:1). It is used to describe precious and costly stones (2 Sam. 12:30; 1 Ki. 10:2, 10, 11); the valuable foundation stones of buildings (1 Ki. 5:17[31]); any expensive building stones or materials (1 Ki. 7:9-11). It is used of the Lord's lovingkindness (*ḥesed* <H2617>) to His people (Ps. 36:7[8]). Wisdom is asserted to be more valuable than jewels (Prov. 3:15). It is used as an abstract collective term for that which is valuable, noble, moral, ethical, or worthy compared to what is worthless (Jer. 15:19). In Job 31:26, it is used in a negative sense of the alluring attraction of the moon's splendor as an invitation to idolatry or astrology. The menacing figure in Daniel 11:38 casts his religious affection on the god of violence, honoring it. It may be used in Zechariah 14:6 meaning luminaries or lights, but the reading is uncertain, for it could mean cold. ([The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament](#))

**YAQAR** - 35V - **costly(6), glory(1), luminaries(1), noble(1), precious(23), rare(1), splendor(1), weightier(1)**. 1 Sam. 3:1; 2 Sam. 12:30; 1 Ki. 5:17; 1 Ki. 7:9; 1 Ki. 7:10; 1 Ki. 7:11; 1 Ki. 10:2; 1 Ki. 10:10; 1 Ki. 10:11; 1 Chr. 20:2; 1 Chr. 29:2; 2 Chr. 3:6; 2 Chr. 9:1; 2 Chr. 9:9; 2 Chr. 9:10; 2 Chr. 32:27; Job 28:16; Job 31:26; Ps. 36:7; Ps. 37:20; Ps. 45:9; Ps. 116:15; Prov. 1:13; Prov. 3:15; Prov. 6:26; Prov. 12:27; Prov. 24:4; Eccl. 10:1; Isa. 28:16; Jer. 15:19; Lam. 4:2; Ezek. 27:22; Ezek. 28:13; Dan. 11:38; Zech. 14:6

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**ILLUSTRATION** - It only takes one little mistake to ruin a life of great wisdom - In 2024 a sad example of this proverb came to light in evangelical Christianity when one of the more outstanding proclaimers of Biblical truth, Steve Lawson, was exposed as having a several year affair with a younger woman. Here is a quote from Grant Castleberry "In the case of Lawson, his entire Christian witness and public ministry have been virtually destroyed by this reproach of disqualifying sin. My favorite Lawson titles of his thirty books have been Foundations of Grace, Pillars of Grace, and The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. But now, these books have a moral asterisk next to their titles. I doubt I will ever use them again. A "little folly" has outweighed "wisdom and honor." A "fly in the ointment" has ruined the fragrant "perfume" of divine glory." ([A Legacy Lost: The Tragedy of a Fallen Leader](#)) Oh, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, how we need to assiduously guard our hearts, for out of our hearts come the springs of life, but if those springs become polluted, there is no life giving water! (Memorize and practice Pr 4:23+)

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## LITTLE THINGS

Dead flies cause the ointment of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor. Ecclesiastes 10:1

When William McKinley was President of the United States, he had to make a decision about the appointment of an ambassador to a foreign country. The two candidates were equally qualified, so McKinley searched his mind for some "yardstick" by which he might measure the true character of the men. Later he revealed that the unkindness of one of them was the determining factor in his decision. Many years earlier, when McKinley was still a Congressman, he had observed an inconsiderate act by one of the men. He recalled boarding a streetcar at the rush hour and getting the last vacant seat. Soon an elderly woman got on, carrying a heavy clothesbasket. No one offered her a seat, so she walked the length of the car and stood in the aisle, hardly able to keep her balance as the vehicle swayed from side to side. One of the men McKinley was later to consider for ambassador was sitting next to where she was standing. Instead of helping her, he deliberately shifted his newspaper so it would look like he hadn't seen her. When McKinley saw this, he walked down the aisle, took her basket, and offered her his seat. The man was unaware that anyone was watching, but his little act of selfishness later deprived him of what may have been the crowning honor of his lifetime.



### Just Too Smart

An experiment was conducted in which six bees and six flies were placed inside a bottle. The bottle was turned on its side with its base facing the light coming through the window. At the other end, the mouth of the bottle was open. In that situation it was discovered that bees will persist in trying to find their way to freedom through the base—until they die of hunger or exhaustion. It seems that the bees' attraction to light is their undoing in this experiment. The light shining through the base seems to convince them that there is no other way out. And so they press up against the bottom of the bottle closing themselves off from all other possibilities. Consequently, they cannot discover the opening at the other end of the bottle. The featherbrained flies, on the other hand, all get out of the bottle within two minutes. Seemingly unconcerned, they just keep buzzing all around inside until they sally forth to freedom through the neck and out the opening. Thus, the bees remain prisoners of their own logic while the flies meet the good fortune that often awaits the simple.

See: Proverbs 14:8; Ecclesiastes 10:1

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### The Biggest Business Goof of 1991

The January 13, 1992, issue of Fortune featured the "Biggest Business Goofs of 1991."

In an act of corporate cooperation, AT&T reached an agreement with the power company in New York City, ConEd. The contract stated that whenever power demands exceeded the utility's grid, AT&T would lessen their demands on the electric utility by throwing a switch, unplugging some of its facilities, and drawing power from internal generators at its 33 Thomas Street station in lower Manhattan.

On September 17, AT&T acted in accordance with its agreement. But when AT&T's own generators kicked in, the power surge kicked out some of their vital rectifiers, which handled 4.5 million domestic calls, 470,000 international calls, 1,174 flights across the nation carrying 85,000 passengers, and the total communications systems linking air traffic controllers at La Guardia, Kennedy, and Newark airports.

The alarm bells at the 33 Thomas Street station rang unheeded for six hours. The AT&T personnel in charge of the rectifiers were away attending a one-day seminar on how to handle emergencies.

—Phillip W. Gunter in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker), from the editors of Leadership.

See: Psalms 49:13; Proverbs 14:8; Proverbs 15:14; Ecclesiastes 10:1.

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### The Foolish Miners

Topics: FOOLISHNESS

Bible Verses: Proverbs 13:16; Ecclesiastes 10:1

In 1900, Americans Sam Gebo and Henry Frank developed a coal mine in the base of Turtle Mountain in Alberta, Canada. In May that year they erected the first buildings close to the mine in a new community they called Frank.

Situated near the Old Man River, with the Canadian Pacific Railroad running through town, Frank quickly grew to more than 1000 people, with two dozen businesses and services to support the nearby coal mine.

The Native Americans avoided Turtle Mountain. They called it the "mountain that walked" because of the tremors that came from it. Townspeople grew used to the tremors and soon did not notice them at all. The coal miners welcomed the tremors because the coal fell into the shaft and all the miners had to do was shovel out the coal after each tremor.

Then at 4:10 a.m. on April 29, 1903, a rock slide occurred at Turtle Mountain. Within 100 seconds, 76 died as the tons of rock buried them alive; three-quarters of the homes in Frank were crushed like balsa wood; over a mile of the Canadian Pacific Railroad was completely destroyed; and a river became a lake.

Be careful not to be foolish.

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**J R Miller** - "As dead flies give perfume a bad smell—so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor." Ecclesiastes 10:1

It is sad to see how some holy and noble characters are marred by little—yet grievous, faults and blemishes!

One man is generous—but he desires always to have his charity praised.

Another is disposed to be kind and helpful—but by his manner, he hurts or humiliates the one he befriends.

Another is unselfish and devout—but is careless of promises and engagements. He makes appointments, and never thinks of them again. He borrows money, and does not repay it. His friends say, "He is so forgetful!" Yes; but how his forgetfulness mars his character and hurts his influence! Forgetfulness is worse than an acceptable weakness; it is a sin!

Untruthfulness is a blot in all eyes.

Whenever SELF leaks out in conduct or disposition—it is a dead fly in the perfume!

It makes little difference, that a person is not intentionally at fault in the things which so mar his life. Carelessness and thoughtlessness are themselves such serious moral blemishes—that they make impossible, any excuse for delinquencies resulting from them. We need to look to "the littles" which either make or mar godly character. No fault is too small to be worth curing, and no fragment of beauty is too small to be worth setting in the mosaic of character.

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### Vance Havner - Dead Flies

"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour." Eccles. 10:1

A few flies can ruin a jar of precious perfume. And a little foolishness can spoil the influence of an honorable reputation. Someone said of a certain preacher: "When he is in the pulpit it seems that he ought never to come out; and when he is out it seems that he ought never to go in." A few unwise jokes, a remark off-guard, one move too far in a moment of hilarity—verily, such flies do make the best nard to stink. The devilry of these vain and idle words!

Of course we do not advocate that dry and dismal, holier-than-thou seriousness so often mistaken for saintliness. That sort of ointment is as bad as the spoiled kind for it has soured. But we must keep the heart with all diligence and walk circumspectly and let our conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ for

Alas, how easily things go wrong!  
A sigh too deep or a kiss too long;  
And then comes a mist and a weeping rain,  
And life is never the same again.

Watch those flies of "foolish talking and jesting which are not convenient" (Eph. 5:4). And the devil himself is called Beelzebub which means "Lord of flies!"

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[Keith Krell](#) applies Ecc 10:1 - Although there are probably many legitimate applications of this proverb, there are two I'd like to zero in on.

**First**, the fly may be a person. One person who is out of sorts with God can lead a whole group into sin. One person who is negative can put a wet blanket on everyone's hope. One person who is super-critical can create single-handedly an atmosphere of discouragement. Are you a fly in the ointment at your home, at work, or at church?

**Second**, the fly may be a flaw in character. One fault unchecked or one secret sin cherished can poison a person's entire character. May I suggest that you choose to swat one fly before it lands in your perfume. Perhaps it is a bad attitude; maybe a bad habit; perhaps a tendency toward being irresponsible or unreliable; maybe an omission of something we should be doing that if not corrected could lead to spiritual deterioration.<sup>[394](#)</sup> It's easy to think, "It's just a little thing:" a "little" relationship, a "little" flirtation at the office," a "little" edge in a tone of voice, a "little" padding on the expense account," a "little" experimentation in the wrong area—just a little thing.<sup>[395](#)</sup> But we must remember that a little thing can ruin everything. Wisdom helps make a life.

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**C H Spurgeon** in his sermon [Little Sins](#) gives an illustration from nature of the power of "little sins" - The best of men have always been afraid of little sins.... Men, with their eyes well opened by divine grace, have seen a whole hell slumbering in the [smallest] sin. Gifted with a microscopic power, their eyes have seen a world of iniquity hidden in a single act, or thought, or imagination of sin; and hence they have avoided it with horror—have passed by and would have nothing to do with it.... Little sins lead to great ones.... Nay, stand back! Little though the temptation be, I dread thee, for thy little temptation leads to something greater, and thy small sin makes way for something worse.

*If it had been a great evil, all men would have set to work to crush it....*

*Take heed of the thistle-seed, little sins are like it.*

*Take care they are not admitted into your heart.*

Years ago there was not a single thistle in the whole of Australia. Some Scotsman who very much admired thistles—rather more than I do—thought it was a pity that a great island like Australia should be without that marvelous and glorious symbol of his great nation. He, therefore, collected a packet of thistle-seeds, and sent it over to one of his friends in Australia. Well, when it was landed, the officers might have said, "Oh, let it in; is it not a little one? Here is but a handful of thistle-down, oh, let it come in; it will be but sown in a garden—the Scotch will grow it in their gardens; they think it a fine flower, no doubt—let them have it, it is but meant for



their amusement.” Ah, yes, it was but a little one; but now whole districts of country are covered with it and it has become the farmer’s pest and plague. It was a little one; but all the worse for that, it multiplied and grew. If it had been a great evil, all men would have set to work to crush it.... Take heed of the thistle-seed, little sins are like it. Take care they are not admitted into your heart.

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## David Jeremiah's Outline for Ecclesiastes 10

### I. [Foolishness in Little Things](#) (borrow)

### II. [Foolishness in Leadership](#)

- A. The Ego-Driven Leader
- B. The Easy-Going Leader
- C. The Engineered Leader
- D. The Evil Leader

### III. [Foolishness in the Labor Pool](#)

### IV. [Foolishness in Language](#)

- A. An Untamed Tongue
  - B. An Unkind Tongue
  - C. An Unwise Tongue
  - D. An Undisciplined Tongue
  - E. An Unreasonable Tongue
  - F. An Unfaithful Tongue
- 

## Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) DEAD FLIES IN THE OLD SPICE Ecclesiastes 10:1-3

It isn't often that our house is plunged into crisis, but it happened just the other day when our refrigerator stopped working. Or to be more precise, when our refrigerator stopped keeping things cold. It was still working in the sense that the motor was humming and the light came on when you opened the door. But soon our ice melted into a pool of water, and all our frozen food slowly turned to yucky mush.

Time to call the repairman. We found a coupon offering \$25 off any service call, made an appointment, and within several hours a friendly man arrived on our doorstep. He fiddled with this dial and that gizmo for a couple of minutes. Then he made a solemn announcement, "I think we may have a little friend caught in the fan." What little friend might that be? Sometimes a mouse will smell food and then get tangled in the condenser fan. End of mouse and end of cold air.

Sure enough, he was right. When he removed the bottom panel, there was our little friend, contorted upon the blades of death. Within ten minutes he had replaced the fan and was on his way. The bill came to just over \$200.

As Solomon has noted, it doesn't take many flies to make the perfume stink. And it takes only a little rodent to make a big refrigerator fail. Similarly, a little sin can cause enormous damage.

Have you heard of Peter Jenkins? He's the man who walked across America. When he had finished his trip, someone asked him if he ever felt like quitting. He said yes, he felt that way many times. What was it that made him feel like quitting? The high mountains? The searing sun? The lonely nights? The possibility of danger? No, none of that. It was the sand in his shoes. It's not the big things that hurt us spiritually. It's the little things—the sand in the shoes—that we neglect to take care of.

Little things become big, irritations become annoyances, and annoyances become sore spots. Over time sore spots become open wounds of bitterness. The infection spreads until it controls your whole life.

These things happen because we let the sand stay in our shoes. Little molehills of frustration not dealt with soon become big mountains of bitterness. Make it a priority to deal with the little things before those little things become big.

Loving Lord, protect me today from making some stupid mistake that will dishonor You, hurt others, and cause me to sin. May I live so that I will have nothing to regret when this day is done. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Can you think of a foolish mistake you made that ended up hurting you and others? Name several positive lessons you have learned from your mistakes.
- What is the greatest temptation you face right now?

**ILLUSTRATION OF SMALL THING** - Richard Conniff writes in National Geographic that on January 12, 1997, two Swiss men, Bertrand Piccard and Wim Verstraeten, set out to be the first to circle the earth in a balloon. Their aircraft was called the Breitling Orbiter, and it was a high-tech masterpiece, complete with solar power panels and an airtight capsule for pressurized flight at high altitudes that would enable them to fly the jet stream at two hundred miles an hour. Price tag: \$1.5 million.

Shortly after liftoff, however, calamity struck. With the cabin sealed tight and pressurized, the pilots suddenly noticed strong kerosene fumes.

Soon they e-mailed their control center: "Kerosene's coming through each pipe on both inside tanks and we cannot tighten them anymore. It is a nightmare.... Answer quick."

They were advised to lower their altitude, open the capsule, and hold on until they could reach the coast of Algeria. The fumes proved overwhelming, however, and they were forced to ditch in the Mediterranean. The cause of the kerosene leak? A clamp, like those used on an automobile radiator hose, had failed. **Price tag: \$1.16. (ED: THEIR "FLY IN THE OINTMENT!")** It doesn't take much to undermine a great enterprise.

God intends that the Christian life be a triumphant journey, but often we allow small things like doubt or fear to scuttle God's grand plan for us. (Borrow [Larson - 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers](#).)

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**David Jeremiah - SMALL DECISIONS AFFECT BIG OUTCOMES** - I'm certain you're familiar with this old saying:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;  
For want of the shoe, the horse was lost;  
For want of the horse, the rider was lost;  
For want of the rider, the battle was lost;  
For want of the battle, the kingdom was lost;  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

See David Jeremiah's explanation and application of this little ditty in [Searching for heaven on Earth page 254 \(recommended read\)](#).

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**Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.**

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KJV Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand, But a fool's heart at his left.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise person's good sense protects him, but a fool's lack of sense leaves him vulnerable.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:2 καρδ α σοφο ε ς δεξι ν α το κα καρδ α φρονο ς ε ς ριστερ ν α το

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart goes to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise person chooses the right road; a fool takes the wrong one.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise is at his right hand, And the heart of a fool at his left.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:2 The sage's heart leads him aright, the fool's leads him astray.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of a fool to the left.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:2 The wise man's understanding turns him to his right; the fool's understanding turns him to his left.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise person's heart leads the right way. The heart of a fool leads the wrong way.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise man goes in the right direction; but the heart of a foolish man in

the wrong.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart inclines him toward the right, but a fool's heart toward the left.

- **wise:** Ec 9:10 Pr 14:8 Lu 14:28-32
- **but:** Ec 10:10,14 Pr 17:16 Lu 12:18-20

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 4:23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Deuteronomy 5:32 "So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Psalms 16:8 I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Matthew 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Luke 6:45 "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Proverbs 4:23 (in depth discussion) **Watch** (command) over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Toward which path is your heart  
directing you, toward the right or the left?

### ONE'S HEART'S DIRECTION DETERMINES ONE'S DESTINY

A **wise** ([chakam](#); Lxx - [sophos](#)) **man's heart** ([leb](#); Lxx - [kardia](#)) *directs him toward the right, but* (term of contrast) **the foolish** ([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) **man's heart** ([leb](#); Lxx - [kardia](#)) *directs him toward the left* - **Young's Literal** = "The heart of the wise is at his right hand, And the heart of a fool at his left." If you are left-handed, don't take offense, for Solomon is not focusing on your hand. Likewise, Solomon is not making a political statement (right leaning vs left leaning politicians). He is focusing on our inner compass, the **heart** ([leb](#); Lxx - [kardia](#)), and how it controls our behavior and our life. Little wonder that he commanded us "Watch over your hearts with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life!" (Pr 4:23+) Solomon uses **heart** twice in the verse, and for the person going to the **right** his problem is not a heart problem, but to the contrary defines this man as wise. Our **heart** is our "control center" (like the air traffic controller), guiding us in one direction or the other, to the right or to the left. **But** for one going to the **left** their heart is the problem and defines this man as foolish. The wise person's inner character leads him in the right direction morally, spiritually, and practically.

**David Jeremiah** explains that "The right hand was thought to be the place of power and the left hand a place of weakness. It's another way for Solomon to say that a moment of weakness, or foolishness, characterizes a fool. A good example is the children's fable called "The Emperor's New Clothes." Remember what happened? The emperor walked around naked because he believed the lies of two men who came to town telling him they would dress him in the world's finest robes. His vanity overruled his sensibility and he made a fool of himself. Foolishness in little things can ruin even an emperor's life." ([Searching for Heaven on Earth - study guide](#))

**Tommy Nelson** - In Israel the right hand was the place of strength, skill, favor, and blessing. David said, "He is at my right hand; I will not be shaken" (Ps. 16:8). The left hand was considered the place of weakness. That's why you hear people say, "I can beat you left-handed." It means I can beat you with my unskilled hand. This is what Solomon is referring to in verse 2. Even though wickedness can cancel out and draw more popularity than wisdom, nevertheless the wise man's heart will direct him to the right. When it's all said and done, the wise man will end up strong, skilled, and successful. The fool, even though he cancels out much good and is respected in our pagan world, is directed to the left. He will end up weak, unskilled, and a failure. If you are not popular now, remember that the last chapter is not written. At some point, the fool is exposed for what he is. Do you remember who wrote Common Sense and The Age of Reason? Thomas Paine was the author, and he had a huge impact on revolutionary America. But he also hated Christianity. He felt that people should do to Christianity what a butterfly does to a cocoon. He wanted people to put religion away as an infantile thing and fly in the glories of humanism. Yale University experienced revival in the late 1700s under the preaching of Timothy Dwight, the grandson of Jonathan Edwards. At the same time, Thomas Paine died. Did he die as a revered statesman who was loved and appreciated? No, he died a drunk, desolate, broken, impoverished man. The news of his death and the circumstances surrounding it shook the student body. They saw firsthand that denying God and His truth doesn't work. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**NET NOTE** - Heb "a wise man's heart is at his right hand." The phrase "right hand" is a Hebrew idiom for the place of protection (e.g., Pss 16:8; 110:5; 121:5). In ancient warfare, the shield of the warrior on one's right-hand side protected one's right hand. Qoheleth's point is that wisdom provides protection (e.g., Eccl 7:12).

**William Barrick** explains this as "The wise person possesses a mind attuned to the eternity that God has placed within it (Eccl 3:11). The foolish person, however, yields to the evil within."

**Keith Krell** - Israel the right hand was the place of strength, skill, favor, and blessing.<sup>396</sup> The left hand was considered the place of weakness. That's why you hear people say, "I can beat you left-handed." It means I can beat you with my unskilled hand.<sup>397</sup> Solomon is saying that a wise man typically does the "right" thing while the fool does the "left" or wrong thing. My condolences to you if you are a lefty and you find this offensive.

**But** (term of contrast - wise vs foolish) **the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left** - The fool's heart leads him toward error, trouble, or ruin, not necessarily in outward appearance, but in disposition and decision-making.

**NET NOTE** - Heb "and the heart of a fool is at his left hand." The fool lacks the protection of wisdom which is at the right-hand side of the wise man (see note on "right hand" in the previous line). The wise man's heart (i.e., good sense) protects him, but the fool is always getting into trouble.

**Bob Utley** on "the left" This term in Arabic means "unlucky" (cf. JPSOA). It denotes the north. These two terms are often used as imagery for deviating from the standard of God. God's truth or Torah was seen as a well-worn, clearly marked path (e.g., Ps. 119:105). Deviation from the path (in any direction) meant sin and rebellion (e.g., Deut. 9:12,16; 31:29). It became a cultural idiom (cf. 2 Sam. 2:21).

*the wise person tends to or goes to the "right,"  
but the fool to the opposite.*

**William Barrick** - Yet another contrasting proverb opposes wisdom and foolishness (Eccl 10:2). Literally, the verse reads, "A wise man's heart is at his right hand and a fool's heart is at his left hand." Translators handle the text in a variety of ways in the English versions, but all of them furnish the same basic concept: the wise person tends to or goes to the "right," but the fool to the opposite. The "**right**" speaks of the correct route—a road to favor, while the **left** speaks of the path of error—a road to disfavor and rejection (Eccl 10:2; cp. Ge 48:13–14; Matt 25:32–34). Note that the text does not speak of the feet and walking, but of the **heart** and its inclination. The **heart** represents the inner person. The wise person possesses a mind attuned to the eternity that God has placed within it (Eccl 3:11). The foolish person, however, yields to the evil within (cp. Ec 8:11 and Ec 9:3). The axiom approximates that in Eccl 2:14a ("The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness").

**Which Way Is Your Heart Pointing?** Your life doesn't drift randomly. It flows from your heart. If your heart is humble before God, it will steer you wisely. If your heart resists truth, it will slowly veer off course, even when things "look fine" for a time. You might appear wise externally, but your heart knows the true direction. Ask God to renew your heart, that your compass would be aimed at what is right—even when it's hard. Your heart governs your direction—guard it carefully. Foolishness isn't just ignorance—it's a heart turned the wrong way. True discernment flows from a wise heart, not just a sharp mind. Daily choices reveal the trajectory of the heart (WHAT CHOICES DID YOU MAKE LAST WEEK?) Examine your heart daily—is it aligned with God's Word? Stay alert to small drifts—they show which direction your heart is leaning.

**Heart** (03820) **leb** closely related noun lebab - 03824 sometimes refers to a literal heart (Ex 28:29, 1Sa 25:37, 2Ki 9:24), but most often is used figurative to refer to what I term the "control center" of our being. Think of an Air Traffic Controller and how dysfunctional, even destructive it is when the controllers fail to function as they should. Just as a healthy human heart is at the center of the body and absolutely essential for physical life and health, so too a healthy spiritual heart (intellect, emotion, will) is at the center of one's inner being (soul) and is vital for a healthy soul, serving as the "fountain" of all moral attitudes and actions. Our spiritual heart thus controls our actions and our actions determine our habits, which in turn determine our character. When God measures the "worth" of a man's life He puts the measuring tape around his heart, not around his head. Be a man after God's Own heart (Acts 13:22) We must continually "post a guard" at the doorway of our heart, so that every avenue for sin's entry is blocked.

**John MacArthur** - The "heart" commonly refers to the mind as the center of thinking and reason (Pr 3:3; 6:21; 7:3), but also includes the emotions (Pr 15:15, 30), the will (Pr 11:20; 14:14), and thus, the whole inner being (Pr 3:5). The heart is the depository of all wisdom and the source of whatever affects speech (Pr 4:24), sight (Pr 4:25), and conduct (Pr 4:26, 27). (See [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

See also **HEART** - page 1262 in the [Dictionary of Biblical Imagery online](#)

**LEB IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 1:13; Eccl. 1:16; Eccl. 1:17; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:3; Eccl. 2:10; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl.

2:20; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 3:11; Eccl. 3:17; Eccl. 3:18; Eccl. 5:2; Eccl. 5:20; Eccl. 7:2; Eccl. 7:3; Eccl. 7:4; Eccl. 7:7; Eccl. 7:21; Eccl. 7:25; Eccl. 7:26; Eccl. 8:5; Eccl. 8:9; Eccl. 8:11; Eccl. 8:16; Eccl. 9:1; Eccl. 9:3; Eccl. 9:7; Eccl. 10:2; Eccl. 10:3; Eccl. 11:9; Eccl. 11:10;

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**ILLUSTRATION** - SEE DISCUSSION [Beware of Slowly Drifting From Your First Love of Jesus](#)

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#### WARNING FOOLS

Topics: Discernment; Foolishness; Human Condition; Ignorance; Warnings

References: 1 Samuel 25:25; Psalm 14:1; 53:1; Proverbs 6:27; 10:23; 18:2; Ecclesiastes 10:2; Matthew 7:24–27

The following warnings were found on consumer products:

- on a Duraflame fireplace log: "Caution: Risk of Fire."
- on a Batman costume: "Warning: Cape does not enable user to fly."
- on a bottle of hair coloring: "Do not use as an ice cream topping."
- on a cardboard sun shield for a car: "Do not drive with sun shield in place."
- on a portable stroller: "Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage."

—Amy Simpson, Winfield, Illinois

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#### Heart and Hand - J Ellis

HEART AND HAND (Ecclesiastes 10:2).—Solomon's writings are full of the praise of wisdom. He defines it, he illustrates it, he magnifies it.

- I. The wise man's heart at his right hand means that his affections are at their proper objects.

The heart is the moral power, or seat of principle.

The hand is the active power, the faculty by which principles are carried into action.

The heart is the very seat and citadel of life.

- II. His principles are at the back of practical power.

God's right hand led the children of Israel to the promised land.

Men are saved spiritually by God's right hand.

Christ after the resurrection was by the "right hand of God exalted."

In physical man, the heart is in closest connection with the strongest hand.

- III. His resolutions are at a degree of strength in which they promptly take the form of action.
- 

#### QUESTION - [How does the Bible describe a fool? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

**ANSWER** - The Bible has much to say about fools. The word *fool* today usually means "a senseless fellow, a dullard." The biblical definition has the added dimension of "someone who disregards God's Word." The Bible lists many characteristics of such a person, often contrasting him with one who is wise. Ecclesiastes 10:2 says, "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left." A fool is one whose wayward heart turns continually toward foolishness. "Fools speak foolishness and make evil plans" (Isaiah 32:6). Proverbs 26:11 says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly." Fools do not learn their lessons from the mistakes they make. They continue doing the same foolish things over and over again, to their own destruction (Proverbs 18:7).

The following is a partial list of some characteristics of a fool from the book of Proverbs: a fool hates knowledge (Proverbs 1:22), takes no pleasure in understanding (Proverbs 18:2), enjoys wicked schemes (Proverbs 10:23), proclaims folly (Proverbs 12:23), spurns a parent's discipline (Proverbs 15:5), speaks perversity (Proverbs 19:1), is quick-tempered (Proverbs 12:16), gets himself in trouble with his proud speech (Proverbs 14:3), mocks at sin (Proverbs 14:9), is deceitful (Proverbs 14:8), and despises his mother (Proverbs 15:20). A foolish child brings grief to his or her parents (Proverbs 17:25; 19:13). A foolish man commits sexual immorality (Proverbs 6:32; 7:7–12). A foolish woman tears down her own house (Proverbs 14:1).

The ultimate description of a fool is one who "says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). Although fools can choose to become wise by heeding wise counsel and applying it (Proverbs 8:5; 21:11), the Bible warns against associating with fools (Proverbs 14:7). Proverbs 13:20 says, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

There is an important distinction between the biblical definition of a fool and the word Jesus used (*raca*) in Matthew 5:22 when He forbade calling a Christian brother a "fool." The term *raca*, spoken from a heart of contempt, implied utter worthlessness. Jesus was not saying that we cannot call the choices of another foolish. But to call someone "*raca*" was saying that this person was beyond the

reach of God and therefore condemned forever. To say, "You fool!" to a brother or sister in that day was the equivalent of saying, "Damn you!" to someone today. We do not have the power or the right to condemn anyone to hell. That position of judgment belongs only to God. A born-again Christian cannot be "damned" because he or she has been purchased by the blood of Christ (Colossians 1:14). We can and should, however, do all we can to turn the hearts of those exhibiting foolishness toward wisdom and possibly save their lives and their eternal souls (James 5:20).

**Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone that he is a fool.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when a fool walks along the road he lacks sense, and shows everyone what a fool he is.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:3 καὶ γε νῦν ὁ τῶν φρῶν πορεύεται καρδία αὐτοῦ στερρεῖ καὶ λογίζεται πᾶντα φροσύνῃ στυγερῇ

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:3 Yea, and whenever a fool walks by the way, his heart will fail him, and all that he thinks of is folly.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when the fool walks along the road, his heart lacks sense, and he shows everyone he is a fool.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:3 You can identify fools just by the way they walk down the street!

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:3 And also, when he that is a fool is walking in the way, his heart is lacking, And he hath said to every one, 'He is a fool.'

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:3 A fool walks down the road, he has no wit -- and everyone remarks, 'How silly he is!'

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when fools walk on the road, they lack sense, and show to everyone that they are fools.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:3 When the fool walks through the street, in his lack of understanding he calls everything foolish.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when a fool goes walking, he has no sense and shows everyone else that he's a fool.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:3 And when the foolish man is walking in the way, he has no sense and lets everyone see that he is foolish.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to every one that he is a fool.

- and he: Ec 5:3 Pr 13:16 18:2,6 1Pe 4:4

#### Related Passages:

Luke 6:45 "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Matthew 7:20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Proverbs 13:16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly.



Proverbs 14:33 Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding, But in the hearts of fools it is made known.

Proverbs 12:23 A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly.

## FOLLY ON FULL DISPLAY

**Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking**([leb](#); Lxx - [kardia](#) - literally "his heart is lacking") **and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool** - In ancient times, walking along a road was a public activity. Metaphorically, it reveals a person's character, his speech, decisions, and interactions. Even in something as routine and neutral as walking, the **fool** reveals his inner disorder. His behavior betrays him. Solomon says watch their walk and you will discern the leaning of their heart which is toward foolishness. Their folly is so deeply embedded, it's noticeable even in their mundane behavior. The fool's behavior advertises his foolishness to everyone. He can't hide it even if he tries. His lack of wisdom is obvious to all who observe.

[Bob Utley](#) points out that "It is interesting that the phrase "**his sense is lacking**" is literally, "the fool has no heart" (i.e., he cannot think clearly, he lacks judgment, cf. Prov. 6:32; 7:7; 9:4,16; 10:13,21; 11:12; 24:30)."

[Keith Krell](#) - The "**road**" is not a literal highway but the fool's metaphorical way of life. The Scriptures are portrayed as a well-worn, clearly marked path.<sup>[399](#)</sup> Deviation from the path (in any direction) meant sin and rebellion.<sup>[400](#)</sup> The fool doesn't have to do a lot to demonstrate his foolishness. It is easily manifested in how he lives his life.

*A fool cannot consistently live wisely,  
because his heart is not trained in truth.*

[William Barrick](#) - People can discern what sort of person someone is just by watching him walk along a road (Eccl 10: 3). **His sense is lacking**—in other words, a **fool** exhibits an inner deficiency through his or her behavior (cp. Pr 12:23; 13:16). The **fool** speaks loudly, behaves arrogantly, ignores the rights and needs of others, and rebels against spiritual things. (13 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 134.) Solomon had learned to discern the nature of people by how they spoke and behaved.

**"What Are You Showing Without Knowing?"** You may be trying to look wise, responsible, or godly... But Ecclesiastes 10:3 reminds you: Your daily walk reveals your inner life. Fools reveal themselves without trying to. Likewise, the wise don't need to announce their wisdom—it's evident in how they walk, speak, and respond. Do my casual choices reveal a heart of wisdom or folly? What is my "road behavior" saying about who I am? Let God's Word shape your heart—because your heart will shape your walk. You don't have to say you're a fool—your actions will say it for you. Model wise walking—for your children, your peers, and your community.

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### A Fool

Fort Madison, Iowa (AP)—When Junior John Reynoso, thirty-four, escaped from the state penitentiary he did not figure on his mother making the capture. Prison officials said Mrs. Ethel Reynoso escorted her son back to the penitentiary twenty-four hours later. Reynoso had only twenty-three days left to serve when he fled from a work detail. He now faces an additional five years for escape.

What a fool a man is to risk one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six days for twenty-three days! And yet there are men who risk eternity for that which is infinitely shorter in proportion. What shall it profit a man if he gain twenty-three days and lose five years (Luke 12:20)?\*

See:Proverbs 24:9; 26:11; Ecclesiastes 10:3; Luke 9:23–25; Ephesians 5:15–16

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"Great Sermon, Pastor, I Didn't Understand a Word!"

J. Scott Armstrong, associate professor of marketing at the University of Pennsylvania, has demonstrated in a series of tests that both for written and spoken communication, "an unintelligible communication from a legitimate source in the recipient's area of expertise will increase the recipient's rating of the author's competence." Armstrong calls this the "Dr. Fox Hypothesis," based on an experiment in which an actor posed as Dr. Myron R. Fox and delivered a lecture of "double talk," patching raw material from a Scientific American article into not sequiturs and contradictory statements interspersed with jokes and meaningless references to unrelated topics. "The audience of professionals on anonymous questionnaires reported that they 'found the lecture clear and stimulating.' "

—The results of Armstrong's research originally appeared in "Interfaces," Vol. 10, No. 2 and were reported in Psychology Today.

**Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the anger of the ruler flares up against you, do not resign from your position, for a calm response can undo great offenses.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:4 ν πνεμα το ξουσι ζοντος ναβ π σ τ πον σου μ φ ς τι αμα καταπα σει μαρτ ας μεγ λας

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for soothing will put an end to great offences.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the ruler's anger rises against you, don't leave your place, for calmness puts great offenses to rest.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:4 If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:4 If your boss is angry at you, don't quit! A quiet spirit can overcome even great mistakes.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler go up against thee, Thy place leave not, For yielding quieteth great sinners.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; composure mitigates grave offences.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post, for calmness will undo great offenses.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:4 Should the anger of the ruler burst upon you, forsake not your place; for mildness abates great offenses.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:4 If a ruler becomes angry with you, don't resign your position. If you remain calm, you can make up for serious offenses.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the wrath of the ruler is against you, keep in your place; in him who keeps quiet even great sins may be overlooked.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for deference will make amends for great offenses.

- **do not abandon:** Ec 8:3
- **because:** 1Sa 25:24-44 Pr 25:15

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 16:14 The fury of a king is like messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it.

Proverbs 25:15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Proverbs 25:28 Like a city that is broken into and without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit.

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

James 1:19-20 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

When criticized unfairly,  
calmly resist the urge to react

## WHEN THE KING IS ANGRY STAY CALM, STAY WISE

In Ecclesiastes 10:4-7 Solomon discusses our response to various leaders.

**If the ruler's temper rises against you** ([See note](#)) If someone in authority becomes angry or hostile toward you, even unjustly, this verse offers wise counsel on how to respond. This is the leader who is so impressed with himself that he feels he has the right to oppress anyone within range of his shouting and screaming!

**Charles Swindoll** "Almost all of us can relate to the first example: living with patience under an impatient and hot-headed leader. Solomon advised that if the ruler's temper rises, a wise person maintains his or her own composure (10:4)....When we're faced with a hot-tempered person (especially a leader who's directing a foolish outburst toward us), it's easy to return insult for insult. However, what we really need to do is diffuse his or her offense with a patient spirit. Fools escalate conflict because they fail to be sensible." (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook](#))

*what I have learned is that  
difficult people are everywhere*

**Keith Krell** - This is an extremely practical verse. Solomon says, "When your boss gets angry at you, let it go. Never let another person's actions determine your reaction. Just hang in there and deal with the person. Keep your cool and maintain your composure. In doing so, you may one day gain a hearing with your superior."<sup>403</sup> It is important to note the phrase "do not abandon your position." I have worked for difficult people before, and my tendency has always been to want to quit. Yet, what I have learned is that difficult people are everywhere. This is why Solomon says, "Calm down. Breathe. Don't quit and run to a new place trying to run away from a broken world." We must all recognize that there will always be some people that we just can't stand. These individuals may be in your family, work, school, neighborhood, or church. It's easy to get angry and frustrated with these people. It's natural to wish they weren't a part of our life. Life without them would be so much easier but we would be spiritually flabby. Because of them, we are forced to grow in areas that would otherwise remain undeveloped for God.<sup>404</sup>

**David Jeremiah** - Woodrow Wilson once wrote that every man who takes office in Washington either grows or swells. He said, "When I give a man an office, I watch him carefully to see whether he is swelling or growing." The ego-driven leader swells, and he often bursts out in anger. Sound like your boss? ([Borrow](#))

**Do not abandon your position**, Don't panic or retreat from your role. Maintain your dignity, integrity, and station—don't flee or overreact. Instead "underreact!"

**Derek Kidner** applies the proverb and suggests avoiding self-inflicted damage, "for while it may feel magnificent to 'resign your post' (NEB), ostensibly on principle but actually in a fit of pride, it is in fact less impressive, more immature, than it feels." (Borrow [Kidner, A Time to Mourn, 89–90](#))

**Because** (term of explanation) **composure allays great offenses - NKJV**-"Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses." Calmness in the face of anger can defuse serious conflicts. Wisdom and poise have the power to quiet rage and prevent larger damage. Don't panic, do not turn in your resignation. Just "hang tight."

This verse teaches how to exercise godly wisdom in volatile relationships, particularly: When injustice or anger comes from those in power, when the temptation is to fight, flee, or panic. God often calls us to stay grounded and not to retreat or retaliate, but to stand firm in peace, letting wisdom bring resolution.

**Michael Eaton** - The anger of a ruler must be soothed with a calm forbearance that neither panics in fear nor deserts in bitterness. The same vocabulary ('anger ... soothed') occurs in Judges 8:3 which illustrates the point. ([Borrow](#))

**David Jeremiah** - In his book [At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends](#), President Dwight Eisenhower tells how he learned this lesson. When he was ten, he became so angry at someone that he beat his fists into an old apple tree until his knuckles were bleeding. That night his mother came into his bedroom. He was sobbing into the pillow, and she sat in the rocking chair by the bed and said nothing for a long time. Then she began to talk about anger, quoting Proverbs 16:32: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." There was little to be gained in hating another person, she told him as she put salve on his injured hands. We only hurt ourselves. Eisenhower considered that conversation one of the most valuable moments of his life, and it led to his developing a curious habit as an adult. Whenever someone angered him, he would write the person's name on a piece of scrap paper, drop it into the lowest drawer in his desk, and say to himself, "That finishes the incident."<sup>2</sup>

([Borrow](#))

**NET NOTE** - The noun מַרְפָּא (marpe', "calmness") is used in reference to keeping one's composure with a peaceful heart (Prov 14:30) and responding to criticism with a gentle tongue (Prov 15:4); cf. HALOT 637 s.v. מַרְפָּא. It is used in reference to keeping one's composure in an emotionally charged situation (BDB 951 s.v. 2 מַרְפָּא). The term "calmness" is used here as a metonymy of association, meaning "calm response." **ALLAYS** - The verbal root נוח means "to leave behind; to leave untouched" (HALOT 680 s.v. I נוח) in general, and in this passage, "to undo" or "to allay" offenses or "to avoid" offenses. The point is either that (1) a composed response can calm or appease the anger of the ruler, or (2) a calm heart will help one avoid great sins that would offend the king. The root נוח ("to rest") is repeated, creating a wordplay: "Do not leave" (אַל-תֵּנֵךְ, 'al-tannakh) and "to avoid; to allay" (יָנִיחַ, yanniakh). Rather than resigning (i.e., leaving), composure can appease a king (i.e., cause the anger of the king to leave).

**William Barrick** - "Ruler" (moshel) in verse 4 can include multiple levels of officials (cf. 2Ch 23:20; Ec 9:17; Jer 51:46). (Borrow [Murphy, Ecclesiastes](#)) Solomon advises remaining calm and collected even when a government leader expresses or displays anger (cp. Ec 9:17), because a calm response prevents unwise words or actions (cp. Pr 15:1; Pr 16:14; Pr 25:15). "**Do not abandon**" represents the first of only three direct instructions in Eccl 10 (cf. Eccl 10:20). The circumstances in verse 4 differ from those in Eccl 8:3, so the advice varies accordingly.

**"Composure Speaks Louder Than Panic"** The world tells you: When someone blows up at you—defend yourself immediately. When authority turns hostile—run or revolt. But Solomon says "Hold your place. Keep your head. Let your composure speak." God doesn't call you to be a doormat, but to be steadfast in peace. Your calmness can soothe wrath, restore order, and show the power of wisdom under fire. Remain calm when facing unjust anger or pressure. Wisdom includes knowing when to stand your ground quietly. When criticized unfairly, resist the urge to react impulsively.

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## **Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE Ecclesiastes 10:4-7

At the office, in the classroom, on the assembly line, living next door, and sometimes sharing the same bedroom are people who occasionally get on our nerves. Perhaps that's putting it too mildly. There are some people we just can't stand. Marshall Shelley wrote about the difficult people that pastors encounter, calling them "well-intentioned dragons." I like that because it nicely balances the reality most of us face every day.

We all have a few well-intentioned dragons around us. That's a given. It's how we deal with them that matters.

I used to think that those hard-to-live-with people were simply one more proof of universal depravity. In a fallen world some people are going to look a bit more "fallen" than the rest of us. That's certainly true, but as the years pass, I've come to realize that God actually sends the dragons our way for a positive purpose. They are grace-builders, sent on a mission from God to make us better people. Without them, life would be easier but we would be spiritually flabby. Because of them, we are forced to grow in areas that would otherwise remain undeveloped for God.

There are four ways we commonly deal with difficult people:

1. We ignore them. We do this by shutting the door, leaving the room, hanging up the phone, or telling our secretary not to let Mr. Jones know we're in the office today.
2. We intimidate them. Intimidation works when the troublesome person happens to be a wife, a brother, a sister, or a child. Intimidators use violence and the threat of violence, harsh language, half-truths, body language, and a myriad of ugly facial expressions to keep people in line and get their own way.
3. We argue with them. I personally find this a major temptation since I love a good argument.
4. We destroy them. We do that through subtle means, such as attacking a person behind his back, passing along bits of gossip, leaking confidential information, reporting on the moral failures of those we despise, and implying that others may have done wrong when we have no proof. A friend once told me about one of his colleagues who could "stick a knife in you and you wouldn't know it until you looked down and saw your blood

on the floor."

Against all this we have the example of Jesus, who always spoke the truth with love. He never intimidated, never threatened, and never ignored difficult people. Follow His example and you can't go wrong.

Father, I pray for a teachable spirit today so that I might learn something from the difficult people in my life.  
Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- Have you ever worked under someone you considered a fool? What happened?
- Why is it crucial to keep your temper when your boss is angry at you? How should Christians respond when we find ourselves in an unfair situation at work?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Daniel 6:1-28; Luke 12:1-12; and Ephesians 6:5-9.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Missionary-author Isobel Kuhn discovered this at a critical moment. She was serving in China with her husband, John, and their little son, Danny, who was six. John was in a distant location, so Isobel found herself virtually alone and in horrible danger. Dreaded bands of local thugs, the Lo-zi-lo-pa, had been bribed by the Communists to terrorize the area in advance of a full-fledged invasion.

Friends and national Christians encouraged Isobel to flee with her little son, because her status as a foreign Christian would put her at special risk. Isobel was paralyzed with uncertainty. She had no way of sending word to John, that she was fleeing, and he might well lose his life trying to get to her. In addition, escaping from China across the rugged Pienma Pass would involve grave danger and hardship.

In her fascinating book, *In the Arena*, she wrote:

I use a Scripture calendar and the verse that morning was, "Do not leave your post!" (Ecclesiastes 10:4). Very appropriate. Just like an answer.... On this occasion, with the threat of the ruthless Lo-zi-lo-pa descending on us, I felt the verse was from Him. And after deciding not to flee I had perfect peace—another sign it was His voice.... And so it proved. Day after day passed with quietness. (Borrow [In the Arena](#))

Conditions improved just long enough for Isobel's husband John to reach his family, and they were able to begin planning a safer evacuation from the area. (Borrow David Jeremiah's book [Searching for Heaven on Earth](#))

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#### Stay At Your Post—Ecclesiastes 10:4

Eric was stunned by the certified letter he had received. He had been fired! His record with the company was good, and the reasons given for his dismissal were without substance.

As he related his story to me, Eric explained, "I said to myself, 'Don't panic. Think this through. How would God have me respond?'"

After praying and consulting a Christian lawyer, Eric felt that God was leading him to apply the truth of today's text to his situation. So he stayed at his post and continued to see clients and place orders. To meet his financial needs, he drew on his personal reserves. Company officials were unprepared to deal with someone who kept at his job after being dropped from the payroll. Eight months later, the president offered Eric a new contract with the best terms ever.

Not everyone can or should do what Eric did. But we can learn from his example. We don't need to be "afraid of sudden terror" (Prov. 3:25). We don't need to panic.

When a trial turns our life upside down, we can "stay at our post" by seeking God's wisdom through prayer, Scripture, and mature Christian counsel. We can resist despair, remain confident that God is at work, and continue doing what is right and good. God will do the rest. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

When through life's darkened maze I go  
And troubles overwhelm my soul,  
Oh, grant me, Lord, Your grace to know  
That You are surely in control.

—DJD

A crisis cannot break the one who relies on God's strength.

## Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler--

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler:

NET Ecclesiastes 10:5 I have seen another misfortune on the earth: It is an error a ruler makes.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:5 σὴν πονηρὰ ν ἐδὼν π τ ν λιον ς κο σιον ἔ λθεν π προσ που το ξουσι ζοντος

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, wherein an error has proceeded from the ruler.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, an error proceeding from the presence of the ruler:

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler:

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler:

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is another evil I have seen under the sun. Kings and rulers make a grave mistake

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error that goeth out from the ruler,

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:5 One evil I observe under the sun: the sort of misjudgement to which rulers are prone-

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as great an error as if it proceeded from the ruler:

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:5 I have seen under the sun another evil, like a mistake that proceeds from the ruler:

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is a tragedy that I've seen under the sun, an error often made by rulers.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, like an error which comes by chance from a ruler:

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler:

- **an evil:** Ec 4:7 5:13 6:1 9:3
- **as an:** Ec 3:16 4:1

### Related Passages:

Proverbs 28:15-16 Like a roaring lion and a rushing bear Is a wicked ruler over a poor people. 16A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, But he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.

Proverbs 29:2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.

## ERROR FROM THE TOP

Keep in mind that in Ecclesiastes 10:5–7 Solomon presents the error of elevating the foolish to positions of leadership.

**There is an evil I have seen under the sun** Solomon is identifying a disturbing reality he has personally observed (**I have seen**), one that represents brokenness in the systems of the world. As is the case throughout this book, **under the sun** signifies life on earth without God. In other words, **under the sun** describes how one lives without giving God the time of day!

**Like an error which goes forth from the ruler** This **evil** is like a bad decision or unwise judgment made by a ruler that has real



societal consequences. This verse reminds us that those in authority have real power to shape societies for better or worse. When leaders elevate fools or make decisions without wisdom, it leads to injustice, disorder, and public harm. Such errors may be unintentional, but they're still profoundly damaging. One is reminded of Jesus' words "if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (Mt 15:14+)

**William Barrick - An Upside-Down World** (Eccl 10:5–7) The only remaining occurrence of **"I have seen"** in the book comes in this same section (Eccl 10:7). (See Ec 1:14; 2:13, 24; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:1, 4, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 17; 9:11, 13.) These two references bracket Eccl 10:5–7. The **"evil"** (cp. Ec 5:13; 6:1) that Solomon has seen **"under the sun"** refers to something that is not good—it is improper, disruptive, unjust, or even harmful. This particular impropriety occurs within the realm of government. A comparative sense (**"like an error"**) seems not to fit the context well. Therefore, some versions render the phrase **"as it were"** (RSV, ESV) or even omitting any form of **"as"** or **"like"** (HCSB, "There is an evil I have seen under the sun, even an error"). **Error** refers to a "thoughtless, culpable sort of mistake." (Fredericks, Ecclesiastes) An administrative oversight results in placing exceedingly inept people in positions of high responsibility and power. The **"ruler"** (shalit) does not specifically designate a king any more than the word moshel in Ec 10:4. Interestingly, Moses employs both words to describe Joseph's role in Egypt (Ge 42:6, shalit; Ge 45:8, moshel). The individual can be anyone in government leadership who is subordinate to the king (or pharaoh).

**"The Ripple Effect of Leadership"** When those in charge make foolish or hasty decisions, the effects ripple outward—hurting people, creating injustice, and disordering what God intended to be wise and just. If you're in a position of influence—at home, work, ministry, or governance—let this verse be a warning: A single act of foolishness can ripple into great harm. But it's also a call to pray for your leaders (1Ti 2:1-2+).

**Ecclesiastes 10:6 folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:6 Folly is set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly place.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:6 Fools are placed in many positions of authority, while wealthy men sit in lowly positions.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:6 ὁ θῆ φρων ν ψεσι μεγ λοις κα πλο σιοι ν ταπειν καθ σονται

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:6 The fool has been set in very high places, while rich men would sit in a low one.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:6 The fool is appointed to great heights, but the rich remain in lowly positions.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:6 Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:6 when they give great authority to foolish people and low positions to people of proven worth.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:6 He hath set the fool in many high places, And the rich in a low place do sit.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:6 folly promoted to the top and the rich taking the lowest place.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:6 a fool put in lofty position while the rich sit in lowly places.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:6 Foolish people are often given high positions, and rich people are left to fill lower positions.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:6 The foolish are placed in high positions, but men of wealth are kept low.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

- **Folly:** Judges 9:14-20 1Ki 12:13,14 Es 3:1 Ps 12:8 Pr 28:12,28
- **the rich:** Jas 2:3-5

Fools in high places!

**FOOLS IN HIGH PLACES:**

## UPSIDE DOWN LEADERSHIP

**Folly is set in many exalted places - NET** = "Fools are placed in many positions of authority, while wealthy men sit in lowly positions." In this passages, Solomon implies foolishness isn't just present but is in effect institutionalized. People with no discernment are given high positions, often through the error or corruption of leaders. Wisdom under the sun can be neutralized by the foolish decisions of rulers even to the point of social turmoil and reversal.

**While rich men sit in humble places** - This speaks to those who are competent, wise, or honorable but are relegated to obscurity while fools occupy the spotlight. Solomon is describing an inversion of moral and social order. Fools, who lack wisdom, are placed in charge. The honorable are pushed aside.

**Keith Krell** - In life, role reversal occurs.<sup>405</sup> Often those who work hard or are successful lose their positions to less competent and qualified people. This is especially true in our society. A hundred years ago, the famous people were doctors and scientists. I know it may be hard to believe but even lawyers and pastors were respected. And now, you can't turn on the TV without finding out what's new with Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton. With all due respect to these ladies, I have no idea how they keep getting on television. It baffles my mind. These ladies need to recognize that wisdom helps make a life.

**Michael Eaton** - 'Time and chance' (Ec 9:11) may produce curious reverses, and so limit the effectiveness of wisdom. Men with resources (the rich) may lack opportunity; men with opportunity (high positions) may lack at least the spiritual resources. ([Borrow](#))

**William Barrick** - Eccl 10:6 specifies the particular governmental situation or circumstance. Too many fools sit in places of leadership, while "rich men sit in humble places" (Eccl 10:6).

**"Don't Be Surprised by a Twisted World"** You may look around and see fools promoted, the wise ignored, evil celebrated, and/or the humble dismissed. Solomon saw it, but his words remind us that this is not how it should be, and it will not always be this way. God sees. God remembers. And in the end, He will exalt the humble and bring down the proud (cf. Luke 1:52). Don't lose heart when the world seems upside down—walk in wisdom anyway (Col 4:5-6).

**Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horseback and princes walking on foot like slaves.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:7 ε δον δο λους φ ππουσ κα ρχοντας πορευομ νους ς δο λους π τ ς γ ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants on the earth.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horses, but princes walking on the ground like slaves.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have even seen servants riding horseback like princes-- and princes walking like servants!

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants on horses, And princes walking as servants on the earth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:7 I see slaves riding on horses and princes on foot like slaves.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes walking on foot like slaves.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes walked on the ground like slaves.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves sitting on horses and influential people going on foot like slaves.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants on horses, and rulers walking on the earth as servants.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on foot like slaves.

ASV Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking like servants upon the earth.

DBY Ecclesiastes 10:7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

BHT Ecclesiastes 10:7 rä`îqî `ábädîm `al-sûsîm wüSärîm hölkîm Ka`ábädîm `al-hä`ärec

NIRV Ecclesiastes 10:7 I've seen slaves on horseback. I've also seen princes who were forced to walk as if they were slaves.

- Pr 19:10 30:22

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 19:10 Luxury is not fitting for a fool; Much less for a slave to rule over princes.

Proverbs 30:21-23 Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: 22 Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, 23 Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.

Psalms 12:8 The wicked strut about on every side When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

A world out of order:  
People unfit to rule exalted,  
Qualified are disregarded.

## AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

**I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land-** NLT - "I have even seen servants riding horseback like princes-- and princes walking like servants!" In the ancient world, to ride a horse was a symbol of honor, power, rulership, and military authority (cf. Esther 6:8–9) Here Solomon says he has seen people who lack the virtue, wisdom, or authority to rule but are nevertheless promoted to high positions, riding horses as if they were kings or generals.

**Nelson's Bible Commentary** - In the ancient Middle East, such a reversal of the normal roles of servant and master was felt to be an outrage against society. (See [Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary - Page 790](#))

**Michael Eaton** - In illustration, the Preacher presents an anomaly which would have been more vivid in the ancient world, where horses were associated with kingship and wealth (cf. Deut. 17:16). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**And princes walking like slaves on the land-** Those who are qualified to lead, the wise, noble, responsible, are instead disregarded, humiliated, or stripped of influence.

**Donald Glenn** comments that Solomon "also had seen **slaves riding on horseback**, a position of honor (cf. Jer. 17:25), while **princes** went on foot like slaves. Thus since position was not assigned on the basis of merit but on the basis of a ruler's caprice, the value of wisdom was often nullified." (Borrow [The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Solomon is painting the picture of a world where roles are reversed, authority is misassigned, virtue is ignored, and appearance or politics prevail. This is not just unfortunate but it is an **evil under the sun** (Ec 10:5). It reflects a fallen world where power is often given to the wrong people, and wisdom is suppressed.

**William Barrick** - Equally topsy-turvy are those governments in which slaves move around on horseback and princes walk like slaves (Eccl 10:7). In the cultural environment of ancient Israel, the common citizen did not own a horse. Royalty, nobility, and the military used equestrian transport (1 Kgs 5:6). (18 Seow, Ecclesiastes) Proverbs 19:10 addresses just such a topsy-turvy situation: "Luxury is not fitting for a fool; much less for a slave to rule over princes" (cp. Pr 30:21–23). Such conditions in government illustrate the reality of the uncertain aspect of life: "things do not turn out the way one expects"—even if wisdom is present. (19 Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 101) Political realities are often tangled. No one knows when one official will fall from favor and another, very different individual, will rise to power. Comparing Solomon's observations (Ec 10:5–7) with Hannah's song (1Sa 2:7–8) demonstrates that wisdom instruction in proverbs refer to general truths that might not apply in every situation. Solomon himself speaks of circumstances in which he prefers a wise young king to a foolish old king (Ec 4:13–16). The elevation of a slave or a poor man to a position of political power can also testify "to the power of God's 'revolutionary' ways." (20 Brown, Ecclesiastes) Citizens cannot know whether God has purposefully produced the reversal of political roles. The sinfulness of man might have brought about the situation, but it might also be the result of God's guiding hand. Note that Solomon does not advocate instigating a counter-revolution. Instead, he instructs the godly citizen to:

- 1) continue on as before without leaving any governmental position (Eccl 10:4),
- 2) be an observer like Solomon himself (Eccl 10:5, 7),

- 3) behave wisely, taking proper precautions even for daily labors (Eccl 10:8–10),
- 4) speak with grace and avoid loquaciousness (Eccl 10:12–14),
- 5) remember that the future cannot be known (Eccl 10:14),
- 6) be diligent, not lazy (Eccl 10:18),
- 7) pay attention to the normal enjoyments and necessities of life (Eccl 10:19), and
- 8) do not speak disrespectfully of those in authority (Eccl 10:20).

**“Don’t Be Discouraged by the Wrong People Rising”** Have you ever seen someone rise to power, not because of character or wisdom, but through flattery, corruption or self-promotion? Most of have seen this inequity! Solomon saw it too. This verse reminds us not to be surprised when the world promotes the unqualified and not to despair when wisdom walks humbly. These reversals are a sign of broken systems and poor leadership. God sees the inversion. And He promises to set all things right in His time. “He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has exalted those who were humble.” (Luke 1:52)

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**Spurgeon - Morning and Evening** - Upstarts frequently usurp the highest places, while the truly great pine in obscurity. This is a riddle in providence whose solution will one day gladden the hearts of the upright; but it is so common a fact, that none of us should murmur if it should fall to our own lot. When our Lord was upon earth, although he is the Prince of the kings of the earth, yet he walked the footpath of weariness and service as the Servant of servants: what wonder is it if his followers, who are princes of the blood, should also be looked down upon as inferior and contemptible persons? The world is upside down, and therefore, the first are last and the last first. See how the servile sons of Satan lord it in the earth! What a high horse they ride! How they lift up their horn on high! Haman is in the court, while Mordecai sits in the gate; David wanders on the mountains, while Saul reigns in state; Elijah is complaining in the cave while Jezebel is boasting in the palace; yet who would wish to take the places of the proud rebels? and who, on the other hand, might not envy the despised saints? When the wheel turns, those who are lowest rise, and the highest sink. Patience, then, believer, eternity will right the wrongs of time.

Let us not fall into the error of letting our passions and carnal appetites ride in triumph, while our nobler powers walk in the dust. Grace must reign as a prince, and make the members of the body instruments of righteousness. The Holy Spirit loves order, and he therefore sets our powers and faculties in due rank and place, giving the highest room to those spiritual faculties which link us with the great King; let us not disturb the divine arrangement, but ask for grace that we may keep under our body and bring it into subjection. We were not new created to allow our passions to rule over us, but that we, as kings, may reign in Christ Jesus over the triple kingdom of spirit, soul, and body, to the glory of God the Father.

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**Iain Paisley** - "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth." Ecclesiastes 10:7 (A Text a Day Keeps the Devil Away)

The present day is a day of upstarts, the usurping of the highest offices. The true and honourable are in the gutter while upstarts sit on the throne. Some day this riddle of providence will be unravelled and we will see the end from the beginning.

We should not murmur when our lot is that set forth in my text.

Did not this happen to our Saviour while He the Sovereign of Glory walked upon the earth mere servants rode horses. He became the Servant of servants and unwearingly did the slave's task and the servant's chores. He was continually despised and rejected of men. little wonder that we should be looked down upon as contemptible persons.

What high horses these upstarts ride. How they lift themselves up to lord over the Lord's people and do down the sons of the Most High.

Let us always remember that when the wheel of providence slowly rises again those lowest down will become those highest up and those highest up will then be lowest down.

Patience, child of God your day has yet to come and those all upstarts will be no more

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I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

A social scene in human life

I. This social scene is common.

1. In the political realm. We see small-minded men occupying influential offices in the State.
2. In the ecclesiastical department.
3. In the commercial department. How often do we see little men by trickery, fraud and lucky hits become the great men of the market.

4. In the literary department.

II. This social scene is incongruous.

1. It does not agree with what we might have expected under the government of a righteous God. That the race is not always to the morally swift and the battle to the morally strong is an undoubted anomaly in the government of God.

2. It does not agree with the moral feelings of humanity. Whilst there is a perversity in man which leads him to hurrah the successful and the prosperous, there is, nevertheless, down deep in the heart of all men a feeling that such a scene as that indicated in the text is something terribly incongruous, a great moral enormity.

III. This social scene is temporary.

1. Such a social scene does not exist in the other world. Death destroys all these adventitious distinctions and moral incongruities.

2. Such a social scene will not always exist here. (D. Thomas, D. D.)

#### **Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:8 One who digs a pit may fall into it, and one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:8 ρ σσων β θρον ν α τ μπεσε ται κα καθαιρο ντα φραγγμ ν δ ξετ αι α τ ν φ ις

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:8 He that digs a pit shall fall into it; and him that breaks down a hedge a serpent shall bite.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:8 The one who digs a pit may fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:8 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:8 When you dig a well, you might fall in. When you demolish an old wall, you could be bitten by a snake.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:8 Whoso is digging a pit falleth into it, And whoso is breaking a hedge, a serpent biteth him.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who digs a pit falls into it, he who undermines a wall gets bitten by a snake,

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:8 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and he who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a serpent.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:8 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it. Whoever breaks through a stone wall may be bitten by a snake.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who makes a hole for others will himself go into it, and for him who makes a hole through a wall the bite of a snake will be a punishment.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:8 He who digs a pit will fall into it; and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

- that: Judges 9:5,53-57 2Sa 17:23 18:15 Es 7:10 Ps 7:15,16 9:15,16 Pr 26:27
- a serpent: Am 5:19 9:3

#### **Related Passages:**

Psalm 7:15 He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made.

Psalm 9:15 The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made; In the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught.

Proverb 26:27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

Amos 5:19 As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, **heans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him.**

The risks of work

## THE COST OF CARELESS ACTIONS

Ecclesiastes 10:8–11 presents proverbs about work and risk, showing that foolishness can bring harm even in routine labor, and that wisdom is required not just for ruling or speaking, but for everyday tasks. There is always the possibility of an accident, even in the most pedestrian activity.

**He who digs a pit may fall into it** - Literally describes someone excavating a hole, possibly for construction, hunting, or malicious purposes. In ancient times, people would dig pits to trap animals or even enemies. Solomon points out that sometimes the trapper gets trapped either by accident or a result of "[poetic justice](#)." Human efforts, especially when done without wisdom or integrity, can become self-destructive. While this idea was applied figuratively (e.g., Ps 9:15), this passage appears to be literal, but not everyone agrees.

**David Jeremiah** tells that people really do fall into pits - This kind of thing actually happens, and in even worse settings. My friend the mortician once told me of the time people were walking to put a casket down and one of the pall bearers fell into the grave. It was a double hole where two people are buried, one on top of the other. The poor man fell all the way down and landed with a thump on the casket that was already there. It's important to watch where you're walking and to make sure the hole you're digging isn't your own grave ([Borrow](#))

*All life has  
its inherent dangers.*

**Warren Wiersbe** notes that "Students are not agreed on what Solomon's point is in this graphic section. Was he saying that every job has its occupational hazards? If so, what lesson was he teaching, and why did he take so much space to illustrate the obvious? His theme is folly, and he certainly was not teaching that hard work is foolish because you might get injured! Throughout the book, Solomon emphasized the importance of honest labor and the joys it can bring. Why would he contradict that message? I believe Solomon was describing people who attempted to do their work and suffered because they were foolish. One man dug a pit, perhaps a well or a place for storing grain, but fell into the pit himself. Why? Because he lacked wisdom and failed to take proper precautions. Frequently Scripture uses this as a picture of just retribution, but that doesn't seem to be the lesson here. (See Ps 7:15; 9:15–16; 10:2; 35:8; 57:6; Pr 26:27; 28:10.) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**David Hubbard** on Ecc 10:8-11 - The key to the passage may be, "But wisdom brings success" (lit. "profit," "advantage," Heb. yitrôn, see 1:3). Wisdom, with its cautious common sense, coaches its adherents to be careful and thereby cut down the possibility of accidents in otherwise hazardous work. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Walter Kaiser** - The warning of the five sentences (Ec 10:8-10a) preceding the concluding observation of 10:10b is that every course of action in life has its risk. If one is to succeed and emerge with "benefit," or "profit" (cf. the theme question of 1:3: "What's the benefit of all man's labor?"), he must act, but act wisely. That is the "margin" that counts....Wise men, unlike fools, take into their calculations the possible danger, and then they guard against it...Wisdom is the difference between success and failure. It allows for something "left over," a "surplusage" and an "advantage" that contributes to the success of the task and the, character of the worker. And wisdom must not be an afterthought added to one's work as perfume is added to complete the dressed-up person.(Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.** In ancient times, snakes nested in walls and rubble—disturbing them could be dangerous. Harm can come unexpectedly, even from what seems like manageable risk. Again this appears to be literal, not figurative. It would be foolish to be overconfident and to break down a hedge or wall without taking great caution about the possible inhabitants (snakes) of that wall!

**Temper Longman III** - This is a common and vivid metaphor for the idea that those who create a problem will reap the consequences. However, Qoheleth's proverb, whether he created it or is simply quoting it, reverses this idea. It is an innocent



person, who is simply doing a job, who falls prey to the dangers of the hole. (See [Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Page 317](#))

**William Barrick - Proverbs from Everyday Life Settings** (Eccl 10:8–11) Calamity awaits anyone even in common actions in everyday living. A farmer or a hunter may dig a pit and end up falling into it and being injured (Ec 10:8a; cp. Ps 7:15; 9:15; Pr 26:27). A serpent might bite the workman demolishing the wall of a dwelling or the wall of a city (Eccl 10:8b; Amos 5:19; cp. Acts 28:4).....Many of the biblical references to falling into a **pit** of one's own making speak of retribution and justice (sometimes called "boomerang justice"). However, this verse deals with accidents.

**Keith Krell** - In this final section, we will clearly see that wisdom is "skill for living." Solomon provides four concrete ways that we can make wisdom work for us. First, apply wisdom in getting a job done (10:8-10). These five illustrations make the point: Think before you act. You can have incredible energy, gusto, and perseverance. You can go out and dig a massive pit. But stay away from the edge or you might fall in and break your neck. Avoid the perils of your own work. Be wise as well as energetic. If you are clearing the stones from an old wall, be careful. All your strength could get you killed if there is a copperhead on the other side of that wall.<sup>406</sup> It's not enough to have energy; you better have wisdom to go with it. If you are an excavator, be careful when you cut out a piece of rock because it has to fall somewhere. Don't let it hit you on the head. Be smart with your energy, diligence, and talent. If you're cutting trees the same advice holds true. The tree has to fall somewhere, so be careful. And if you don't have enough wisdom to sharpen your axe you are going to make your work a lot harder. Stop and sharpen that edge. If it's dull you will have to strike harder and harder until you get out of control, miss the log, and hit yourself.<sup>407</sup> It's typically better to work smart instead of harder. If you exercise wisdom, you will have success.

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#### **Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - THESE THINGS HAPPEN Ecclesiastes 10:8-9**

James Herriot, a British veterinarian and best-selling author, describes in one of his books the stoic philosophy of the farmers who live in the rugged Yorkshire Dells. When disease decimates a herd of sheep or a sudden storm ruins an entire harvest, the farmers take it in stride, often saying nothing more than "These things happen."

Such a statement may seem like fatalism to outsiders, but to those hardy farmers it represents a realistic appraisal of life. No matter how much one plans or how hard he works, he could lose it all to an apparently random act of nature.

It happens all the time. Faulty wiring causes a fire that burns down a building, wiping out a business and putting seventy-four people out of work. One man's life savings go up in flames —the work of thirty years lost in thirty minutes. Upon investigation it is discovered that the wiring has been faulty for years, which means that the blaze could have started at any time. Why now? And why didn't someone discover the problem sooner?

"These things happen." If we deny it, we simply deny reality itself. A wise person understands that the best business plan in the world is just that—a plan, a projection, an idea about what the future may hold. The only thing you can know for certain is that the future won't work out exactly the way you planned.

Most of us know about Murphy's Law: If anything can go wrong, it will. Perhaps you've also heard of Johnson's Comment: Murphy was an optimist. If you're planning to succeed in this fallen world, make sure you leave plenty of room for the possibility of failure, trouble, catastrophe, and sudden setbacks.

You might fall into a well. Or you might be bitten by a serpent. Or you might be cut by flying rocks. Or injured while you are splitting logs. Those Yorkshire farmers are right. "These things happen." The only way to avoid potential calamity is never to dig, never to build, never to chop; in short, to stay in bed all day watching TV. But you could be electrocuted in your bathroom or trip and break your leg in the kitchen.

There aren't any guarantees in life. Bad things sometimes happen to people in the middle of their normal work. Other people are standing around doing nothing when suddenly a flowerpot hits them on the head. The only solution is to do your job, accept the risks that go with it, take appropriate precautions, and understand that things could still go haywire.

Does that sound like a contradiction? It isn't. It's just plain common sense. Let's call it Solomon's Observation: Expect the worst and sooner or later you won't be disappointed. You don't have to be a pessimist to survive in the world, but starry-eyed optimists generally don't last very long either.

Spirit of God, I pray for the grace not to be overly surprised by anything that happens to me today Amen.

#### **SHINING THE LIGHT**

- What practical steps have you taken to be prepared for the "accidents" of life?
- Do you agree that we live in a Murphy's Law universe? How can we remain hopeful in the face of the unexpected problems we

all face on a daily basis?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Jonah 1; Romans 5:3-5; and 1 Corinthians 16:5-9.

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**G Campbell Morgan** - the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. Ec 11.8

These are the final words in the revelation of what life is when it is lived "under the sun," that is, on the material plane, in a hemisphere with no vital relationships with the spiritual world beyond an intellectual assent to its existence. The mind travels on to that which lies beyond this life, and discovers only darkness. That outlook leads to the statement: "All that cometh is vanity." This carries his opening affirmation, "All is vanity," out beyond the present. The man who sees nothing but vanity in the things of to-day sees nothing but vanity in that which lies beyond his ken. There is only darkness, no light, no knowledge, vanity. Therefore let a man take hold of the present, and get out of it all that he can; let him rejoice in the years, because they are the only things of which he can be sure! This is exactly the attitude of thousands toward life. Indeed, it is the only attitude possible to those who have no direct dealing with the spiritual world. This is all they can do, and it is a pre-eminently sensible thing to do. Yet what a vicious circle is that which the mind, so circumscribed, makes in its thinking! Everything here is vanity—that is, void, not worth while; yet because there is nothing beyond, but once again vanity, let a man take hold of and enjoy the present vanity! Can anything be more fatuous? Thus the Debater proves what the book is intended to prove, the utter folly of life "under the sun," that is, life endeavouring to realize itself, while shutting out of its reckoning those larger facts, above the sun, beyond the material.

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### **Alexander Maclaren - Fences and serpents**

What is meant here is, probably, not such a hedge as we are accustomed to see, but a dry stone wall, or, perhaps, an earthen embankment, in the crevices of which might lurk a snake to sting the careless hand. The "wall" may stand for the limitations and boundary lines of our lives, and the inference that wisdom suggests in that application of the saying it, "Do not pull down judiciously but keep the fence up, and be sure you keep on the right side of it." For any attempt to pull it down—which, being interpreted, is to transgress the laws of life which God has enjoined—is sure to bring out the hissing snake with its poison.

I. ALL LIFE IS GIVEN US RIGIDLY WALLED UP. The first thing that the child learns is that it must not do what it likes. The last lesson that the old man has to learn is, you must do what you ought. And between these two extremities of life we are always making attempts to treat the world as an open common, on which we may wander at our will. And before we have gone many steps some sort of keeper or other meets us and says to us, "Trespassers I back again to the road!" Life is rigidly hedged in and limited. There are the obligations which we owe, and the relations in which we stand, to the outer world, the laws of physical life, and all that touches the external and the material. There are the relations in which we stand, and the obligations which we owe to ourselves. And God has so made us as that obviously large tracts of every man's nature are given to him on purpose to be restrained, curbed, coerced, and sometimes utterly crushed and extirpated. God gives us our impulses under lock and key. All our animal desires, all our natural tendencies, are held on condition that we exercise control over them, and keep them well within the rigidly marked limits which He has laid down, and which we can easily find out. We sometimes foolishly feel that a life thus hedged up, limited by these high boundaries on either side, must be uninteresting, monotonous, or unfree. It is not so. The walls are blessings, like the parapet on a mountain road that keeps the traveller from toppling over the face of the cliff. They are training-walls, as our hydrographical engineers talk about, which, built in the bed of a river, wholesomely confine its waters and make a good scour which gives life, instead of letting them vaguely wander and stagnate across great fields of mud. Freedom consists in keeping willingly within the limits which God has traced, and anything except that is not freedom, but is licence and rebellion, and at bottom servitude of the most abject type.

II. EVERY ATTEMPT TO BREAK DOWN THE LIMITATIONS BRINGS POISON INTO THE LIFE. We live in a great automatic system which, by its own operation, largely avenges every breach of law. I need not remind you, except in a word, of the way in which the transgression of the plain physical laws stamped upon our constitutions avenges itself; but the certainty with which disease dogs all breaches of the laws of health is but a type in the lower and material universe of the far higher and more solemn certainty with which "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The grossest form of transgression of the plain laws of temperance, abstinence, purity, brings with itself, in like manner, a visible and palpable punishment in the majority of cases. Some serpents' bites inflame, some paralyze; and one or other of these two things—either an inflamed conscience or a palsied conscience—is the result of all wrongdoing. I do not know which is the worst.

III. ALL THE POISON MAY BE GOT OUT OF YOUR VEINS IF YOU LIKE. Christ has received into His own inmost life and self the whole gathered consequences of a world's sin; and by the mystery of His sympathy, and the reality of His mysterious union with us men, He, the sinless Son of God, has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. For sin and death launched their last dart at Him, and, like some venomous insect that can sting once and then must die, they left their sting in His wounded heart, and have none for them that put their trust in Him. (A. Maclaren, D. D.)

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, And he who splits wood may be endangered by it.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:9 One who quarries stones may be injured by them; one who splits logs may be endangered by them.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:9 ξαρων λθους διαπονηθσεται ν α το ς σχ ζων ξ λα κινδυνε σει ν α το ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:9 He that removes stones shall be troubled thereby; he that cleaves wood shall be endangered thereby.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:9 The one who quarries stones may be hurt by them; the one who splits trees may be endangered by them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:9 He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:9 Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:9 When you work in a quarry, stones might fall and crush you. When you chop wood, there is danger with each stroke of your ax.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:9 Whoso is removing stones is grieved by them, Whoso is cleaving trees endangered by them.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:9 he who quarries stones gets hurt by them, he who chops wood takes a risk from it.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:9 Whoever quarries stones will be hurt by them; and whoever splits logs will be endangered by them.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:9 He who moves stones may be hurt by them, and he who chops wood is in danger from it.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:9 Whoever works in a stone quarry may get hurt. Whoever splits wood may be injured.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:9 He who gets out stones from the earth will be damaged by them, and in the cutting of wood there is danger.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:9 He who quarries stones is hurt by them; and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

#### **Related Passages:**

Proverbs 22:3 The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

Deuteronomy 19:5+ as when a man goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron head slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live;

Proverbs 14:16 A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless.

James 4:13-15+ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

## EVEN GOOD LABOR CAN PRODUCE HURT

Ec 10:8 warned about digging a pit and being the one who falls into it. These are not just literal warnings but are metaphors for consequences, carelessness, and the unpredictability of labor in a fallen world. Ec 10:9 focuses on the physical risks of hard work, implying that even legitimate, useful labor can lead to danger without foresight and caution.

**He who quarries stones may be hurt by them.** Someone who works with stones, cutting, quarrying, or carrying, risks injury. The idea is: hard labor, if done unwisely or carelessly, can backfire. Carelessness in familiar work can cause harm. Labor must be done thoughtfully and skillfully.

**and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.** Even splitting firewood, a normal daily task, involves risk. Logs can kick back, tools can break, accidents can happen. Work carefully—don't be presumptuous in your routines.

*Wisdom is needed in routine tasks,  
not just complex ones.*

Even honest labor is not immune to danger. Wisdom is not only needed for governing or teaching and it's needed for everyday work. Human life is frail, and no work is completely safe. In a fallen world ("under the sun"), nothing is guaranteed, even effort and usefulness don't protect you from harm. But Solomon doesn't encourage fear—he's urging practical, thoughtful living: Work wisely. Take precautions. Recognize that human effort has limits and must be tempered by wisdom.

**William Barrick** - The quarryman must watch that a loosened slab might not suddenly break away and fall on him (Eccl 10:9a). The woodman splitting logs might be harmed by a piece that flies up into his face, a log that suddenly rolls over his foot, or by the axe itself glancing off the log and striking his leg (Eccl 10:9b; cp. Deut 19:5).

**"Use Wisdom in the Mundane"** It's easy to think: "I only need wisdom in the big things." "I've done this task a thousand times—I'm fine." But Solomon reminds us: Even splitting wood or moving stones can hurt you—if you're careless or presumptuous. This is a call to bring wisdom into the small, ordinary parts of life: Your work. Your relationships. Your decisions. Live with a holy awareness: "Lord, teach me to number my days, that I may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

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### C H Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Oppressors may get their will of poor and needy men as easily as they can split logs of wood, but they had better mind, for it is a dangerous business, and a splinter from a tree has often killed the woodman. Jesus is persecuted in every injured saint, and he is mighty to avenge his beloved ones. Success in treading down the poor and needy is a thing to be trembled at: if there be no danger to persecutors here there will be great danger hereafter. To cleave wood is a common every-day business, and yet it has its dangers; so then, reader, there are dangers connected with your calling and daily life which it will be well for you to be aware of. We refer not to hazards by flood and field, or by disease and sudden death, but to perils of a spiritual sort. Your occupation may be as humble as log splitting, and yet the devil can tempt you in it. You may be a domestic servant, a farm labourer, or a mechanic, and you may be greatly screened from temptations to the grosser vices, and yet some secret sin may do you damage. Those who dwell at home, and mingle not with the rough world, may yet be endangered by their very seclusion. Nowhere is he safe who thinks himself so. Pride may enter a poor man's heart; avarice may reign in a cottager's bosom; uncleanness may venture into the quietest home; and anger, and envy, and malice may insinuate themselves into the most rural abode. Even in speaking a few words to a servant we may sin; a little purchase at a shop may be the first link in a chain of temptations; the mere looking out of a window may be the beginning of evil. O Lord, how exposed we are! How shall we be secured! To keep ourselves is work too hard for us: only thou thyself art able to preserve us in such a world of evils. Spread thy wings over us, and we, like little chickens, will cower down beneath thee, and feel ourselves safe!

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### J. H. Moulton, Eccl 10:9 - Raising stones and cleaving wood

The precise meaning of the maxim is not quite clear. Some think the stone is part of a cairn that marks a neighbour's property, which a man tries to move. The tree, likewise, belongs to a neighbour; and the teaching is, that one who commits acts of aggression upon the property of others will receive his punishment out of the acts themselves. Others find a political reference. The reformer tries to move stones, to remove ancient grievances, or to cut down trees, the upas-trees of hoary abuses, and finds that ancient and deep-seated evils have a deadly power of striking at those who dare to meddle with them. Or, again--and this, the simplest explanation, is to me at least as likely as any other--the cynical author who has found vanity of vanities in every successive sphere of human life observes in these homely words that ordinary honest labour must pay its due of misfortune in this sad world: a man cannot quarry stones to build his house, or cut logs to make up his fire, without risking the misfortune which a cruel fate seems to bring alike on the

evil and the good. This interpretation fits in well with the Preacher's view of life. Christ came to teach that in His right hand were pleasures for evermore. He came to join in every kind of innocent enjoyment, to teach men that the Father in heaven rejoiced in His children's joy. He lifted stones and cleft wood in the builder's workshop at Nazareth for more than twenty years out of His short life, to show that honest toil brought something else besides danger--that the stone could become a Bethel, and the wood an altar which raiseth the consecrated soul. (J. H. Moulton, D. D.)

**Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:10 If an iron axhead is blunt and a workman does not sharpen its edge, he must exert a great deal of effort; so wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:10 ν κπ σ τ σιδ ριον κα α τ ς πρ σωπον τ ρα ξεν κα δυν μεις δυναμ σει κα περισσε α το νδρε ου σοφ α

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the axe-head should fall off, then the man troubles his countenance, and he must put forth more strength: and in that case skill is of no advantage to a man.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen its edge, then one must exert more strength; however, the advantage of wisdom is that it brings success.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:10 Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron hath been blunt, And he the face hath not sharpened, Then doth he increase strength, And wisdom is advantageous to make right.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:10 If, for want of sharpening, the blade is blunt, you have to work twice as hard; but it is the outcome that makes wisdom rewarding.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge, then more strength must be exerted; but wisdom helps one to succeed.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron becomes dull, though at first he made easy progress, he must increase his efforts; but the craftsman has the advantage of his skill.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:10 If an ax is blunt and the edge isn't sharpened, then one has to use more strength. But wisdom prepares the way for success.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron has no edge, and he does not make it sharp, then he has to put out more strength; but wisdom makes things go well.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge, he must put forth more strength; but wisdom helps one to succeed.

- **wisdom:** Ec 10:15 9:15-17 Ge 41:33-39 Ex 18:19-23 1Ki 3:9 1Ch 12:32 2Ch 23:4-11 Mt 10:16 Ac 6:1-9 15:2-21 Ro 16:19 1Co 14:20 Eph 5:15-17 Col 4:5 Jas 1:5

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

Proverbs 24:27 Prepare your work outside And make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house.

Luke 14:28-30 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

## THE WISDOM TO SHARPEN THE AXE

**If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength- NET** - "If an iron axhead is blunt and a workman does not sharpen its edge, he must exert a great deal of effort." A blunt axe requires more effort to cut. The metaphor seems to point to inefficiency due to poor preparation or lack of wisdom. The person neglects to prepare the tool—a lack of foresight or wisdom. He is relying on effort instead of insight. Without proper preparation (sharpening), he must compensate with raw effort, which is harder, slower, and less effective. Hard work is good, but not enough without wise strategy. Solomon would say "Don't work harder—work smarter!"

*Preparation is vital—  
neglecting it leads to inefficiency.*

**Nelson's Bible Commentary** - A person of limited training will have to work harder, as though with a dull ax, than someone wiser whose tools are in order.(See [Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary - Page 790](#))

*Wisdom isn't just moral—  
it's practical.*

**Wisdom has the advantage of giving success**- Solomon is extolling the wisdom of preparation and training to increase the likelihood that an endeavor will be successful. Wisdom gives a clear advantage because it leads to success, efficiency, and effectiveness where mere strength would fall short.

**Tommy Nelson** - It doesn't matter how handsome you are, how talented you are, or how much your inheritance is. If you don't understand wisdom, you won't ultimately have the edge in life. In the end, you will make a mess of all your wall building, quarrying, and tree cutting. At some point, being a fool will come back to haunt you. That's Solomon's point here. Even though princes are sometimes put down and slaves raised up, even though life is unfair, stay wise because wisdom has the edge in the end. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**William Barrick** - This last illustration might also be compounded by a dull blade (Eccl 10:10a). The axe wielder must apply more strength in order to get the dull blade to bite deep into the wood. The extra exertion might create yet another accident. At the end of this string of common proverbs Solomon finishes with his main point: "**Wisdom has the advantage of giving success**" (Ec 10:10b). No matter what labor one pursues (digging a pit, demolishing a wall, quarrying stone, or splitting logs), the application of wisdom brings safety and success to the endeavor. It is as though Solomon said, "*Use your head. Think about what you are doing. Proceed with proper caution and attention to potentially harmful consequences.*" Danger can lurk in every area of daily life. Pragmatically speaking, these illustrations speak of proper preparation for any task. Wright adapts the truth to two modern axioms: "Sharpen your knife before carving the chicken. Or, Don't blame the class for not listening if you haven't sharpened your wits with proper preparation." (22 Wright, "Ecclesiastes) Speaking of the axiom's relevance, Tidball writes, "People want to lead churches or evangelize the world without training first. They want to go and live overseas without learning the language. They want to get married and have a family without saving up." (23 Tidball, That's Just the Way It Is)

**"Have You Stopped to Sharpen?"** You may be chopping through life: Parenting, leading, serving, working. Feeling exhausted, but still swinging. Solomon says: Stop and sharpen the axe. Are you praying for wisdom? Are you planning with thought? Are you learning, growing, asking God for insight? It's not lazy to pause. It's wise. Wisdom multiplies strength. Sharpen your spiritual tools: spend time in the Word and prayer. Don't equate busyness with fruitfulness—be strategic.

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Would Solomon have joined the Boy Scouts? I don't know, but I'm sure he would agree with their well-known motto: Be prepared. His two illustrations in verses 10-11 show the danger of approaching our work in a haphazard fashion.

First is the man whose job is splitting wood. Because he is too lazy to sharpen the ax, he has to work much harder than necessary. Sharpening an ax is a relatively simple job, taking at most only a few minutes at the beginning of the day. But perhaps this fellow is in a big hurry or maybe he didn't bother to check the blade or possibly he would rather spend those few minutes drinking coffee with his buddies. In any case, the blade remains dull; but the work has to be done, so he ends up straining his back from all the extra effort.

The case of the snake charmer is similar. Snake charming requires a certain degree of preparation and a large dose of good timing, or else the charmer's career will be a short one. When the snake bites too soon, the charmer loses the money he would have made. In today's world, he would probably have a lawsuit on his hands from a very unhappy customer.

There are many ways to apply these verses, but one of the most obvious has to do with taking the time to learn your craft thoroughly. To rise to the top in any profession requires a certain amount of skill plus a great deal of determination. The world is filled with talented men and women who never amount to much because they are unable (or unwilling) to pay the price to hone their God-given abilities.

The great temptation is to join the "good enough" club, as in "that's good enough for government work"—which is a slander on every dedicated public servant. The apostle Paul urges us to do our work "with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord" (Colossians 3:22), understanding that someday we will stand before Him and give an account for the quality of our daily work.

When God asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?" he replied, "A staff" (Exodus 4:2). That staff became the sign of God's miraculous power to deliver His people out of Egypt. What talent has God placed in your hand? Are you willing to offer it to Him?

Teacher of Truth, You have ordained that I should be a lifetime student in the classroom of life. May I not waste the lessons You are teaching me today. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- What areas of your life need "sharpening" right now? What is the major task facing you in the next twenty-four hours?
- Name three life lessons you have learned in recent months.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Ruth 3:1-14; Luke 1:37; and 2 Peter 3:18.

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**F B Meyer** - Ecclesiastes 10:10 If one do not whet the edge, then must be put to more strength.

If this is true, as we know it is, may we not often use it as an appeal to God? There are times with all who work for God, when they are blunt, through much usage. The brain is blunt, and cannot think. The heart is blunt, and cannot feel. The voice is blunt, and has lost its ringing note. How often the evangelist, towards the end of a series of services, feels blunt! Sometimes also there are private sorrows, of which we cannot speak, which take off the edge. At all such times let us turn to God and say, "Put in more strength. Let thy power be magnified in my weakness. Give more grace, so that thy work shall not suffer." I suppose Paul meant this when he said that he gloried in infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Surely more work is done by a blunt edge and Divine power, than by a sharp edge and little power.

This, however, does not justify us in seeking to be blunt. And when we are conscious that the edge is going off, it becomes us to seek a fresh whetting. The time is not lost in the harvest-field when the reapers whet their scythes with musical tinkle. A day in the country or a week by the seaside are very pleasant whetstones. Solomon says that friendship, the face of a friend, will sharpen a blunt edge; and full often we have been sharpened and quickened by seasons of holy fellowship. But after all, nothing gives us such a keen edge as the devotional perusal of the Divine Word. Let us appropriate the words of the prophet, and each one ask to be made a new sharp threshing-instrument having teeth, that we may thresh the mountains, and make them small, and give our God as little anxiety as possible.

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#### Os Hillman - HOW SHARP IS YOUR AX?

If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.  
ECCLESIASTES 10:10

Manufacturing companies live and die by the ability of their designers, engineers and staff to bring new products to market quickly.

Yet for many organizations, a team's capacity to turn promising ideas into new revenue is diminished because of fragmented business processes, a geographically dispersed workforce and a lack of technology innovation standards across the supply chain.

We live in an information age where the level of knowledge is increasing at warp speed. The way you did things two years ago may not be the same way you do things today. The knowledge you had two years ago may not be adequate to compete in the global marketplace today. Businesses have gone bankrupt because they were not willing to change with the times. Have you seen a Polaroid camera lately? Do you know someone over 60 years old who chose not to learn about computers? The world passes by such people because they are unwilling to "sharpen their ax."

God calls every workplace believer to model four key attributes: (1) excellence, (2) ethics and integrity, (3) extravagant love and service, and (4) signs and wonders.

Let's focus on the first quality of a Christian worker: excellence. Excellence does not just mean the way we do our jobs but it also means staying abreast of how we do our jobs. God desires to reveal His innovations in His creation. You will not compete in the marketplace today unless you make a commitment to stay abreast of innovation. This too is good stewardship.

How is your workplace ax? Does it need sharpening? What are the areas in your working life that need to be sharpened? What innovation is needed to ensure that you will be the head, not the tail, in your workplace calling? Begin today to evaluate action steps you may need to take to have a very sharp ax.

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### **J J Knap - Blunted Iron Ecclesiastes 10:10**

The wise Preacher had just spoken of someone who was cleaving wood. An axe was used for that. When this iron became blunt during the work, it was possible to continue with the work, but it would not progress even if more force was exerted. A wise man would rather stop for a moment, take up the whetting stone, and sharpen the blunted edge carefully. This was no waste of time but rather a gain, because soon the sharpened iron would go through the wood so much faster and more easily.

This counsel of the Preacher allows all kinds of application. Every one in his turn experiences the burdens of blunted iron. We all have to fulfil our task in the realms of life, and it makes no difference whether we occupy a high office or whether we belong to the hourly paid labourer. We have to be always and everywhere faithful in our calling: steadfast, immovable, always abounding, as the Apostle teaches somewhere; because, like the wood cutter would swing with his muscled arms the axe, so we have to put our whole heart into our work. However, at times the blunted iron starts to hinder us! The resilience does fade at times. Sometimes our courage fails us. We lose the freshness of spirit that we require and the sharpness of mind that must prevent us from mistakes. We may become tired and even exhausted. We like our work but we don't progress. It takes us pains to remain focused. Especially those who perform mental work know how difficult it can be to collect one's thoughts and to focus on one thing,—all our abilities have lost their sharpness, behold the blunted iron that needs to be whetted.

Those who educate the youth know it. Children cannot be involved day after day, but they must have their set times of rest to be refreshed. Half a day's break in the middle of the week, even during school hours a quarter of an hour outside in the playground. A few times a year the school is closed altogether for a few weeks,—behold, how the blunted iron is sharpened again.

As far as the adults are concerned, the Lord our God also knows that they cannot labour incessantly, because we would become completely dull. Therefore, He instituted a weekly day of rest. Every thing must stop. The coverall is exchanged for the garment of celebration. Peace enters the heart instead of the agitation of the week. When the day of rest is not spent in licentiousness which would increase the exhaustion, but in the house of prayer under the breathing of the Word, we return the following day with a whetted edge to our work to serve the Lord therein.

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### **Audie Lewis - Labor not in Vain**

If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.  
ECCLESIASTES 10:10

The source of our worst weakness is our home-born strength, and the source of our worst folly is our personal wisdom. Lord, help us to be still till we have abjured ourselves, till we have said, "Lord, our ways of working cannot be compared with your ways of working; teach us how to work. Lord, our judgments are weak compared with your perfect judgment; we are fools; be our teacher and guide in all things."

Jehovah works everywhere, and all things are his servants. He works in the light, and we see his glory; but he equally works in the darkness, where we cannot perceive him. His wisdom is too profound to be at all times understood of mortal men. Let us be patient and wait his time. With no more doubt of our Father's power than the child at its mother's breast has of its mother's love; with no more doubt than an angel before the throne can have of Jehovah's majesty, let us commit ourselves, each one after his own

fashion, to suffering and to labor for the grand cause of God, feeling well assured that neither labor nor suffering can be in vain in the Lord.

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### **Charles Swindoll - NO SUCCESS WITHOUT WISDOM**

That's the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed. ECCLESIASTES 10:10

I don't know of a hotter subject today than success. Magazine articles, books, seminars, and sermons promote it. But success is seldom linked with wisdom. Chances are good that if we would pick up last Sunday's paper and read it through, we'd come across twenty or more references to success, yet find nothing added regarding wisdom. In today's hype about success, wisdom is conspicuous by its absence. Outside of biblical literature and biblically based books, we hardly even come across the word. . . .

[Wisdom] may not give us great popularity and wealth, and it may not mean that we will be the most respected in our field or that we will have the most significant voice in the company, but ultimately, as God gauges it, we will be successful. Living on the Ragged Edge

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### **Vance Havner - SHARPENING THE AXE**

If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength.... Ecclesiastes 10:10.

A dull axe means harder work and we lose no time when we sharpen the edge. The Christian in particular and the Church in general both need to stop chopping wood long enough to whet the blade. Hours out for the Word and prayer and a week out from regular church work to revive the saints is a wise investment. We save time that might be spent in a hospital later if we had a checkup now. It is poor business to add more wheels to the machinery and increase the work load when the power is low. When we are too busy to sharpen the axe, we are too busy!

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### **J J Knap - Blunted Iron      Ecclesiastes 10:10**

The wise Preacher had just spoken of someone who was cleaving wood. An axe was used for that. When this iron became blunt during the work, it was possible to continue with the work, but it would not progress even if more force was exerted. A wise man would rather stop for a moment, take up the whetting stone, and sharpen the blunted edge carefully. This was no waste of time but rather a gain, because soon the sharpened iron would go through the wood so much faster and more easily.

This counsel of the Preacher allows all kinds of application. Every one in his turn experiences the burdens of blunted iron. We all have to fulfil our task in the realms of life, and it makes no difference whether we occupy a high office or whether we belong to the hourly paid labourer. We have to be always and everywhere faithful in our calling: steadfast, immovable, always abounding, as the Apostle teaches somewhere; because, like the wood cutter would swing with his muscled arms the axe, so we have to put our whole heart into our work. However, at times the blunted iron starts to hinder us! The resilience does fade at times. Sometimes our courage fails us. We lose the freshness of spirit that we require and the sharpness of mind that must prevent us from mistakes. We may become tired and even exhausted. We like our work but we don't progress. It takes us pains to remain focused. Especially those who perform mental work know how difficult it can be to collect one's thoughts and to focus on one thing,—all our abilities have lost their sharpness, behold the blunted iron that needs to be whetted.

Those who educate the youth know it. Children cannot be involved day after day, but they must have their set times of rest to be refreshed. Half a day's break in the middle of the week, even during school hours a quarter of an hour outside in the playground. A few times a year the school is closed altogether for a few weeks,—behold, how the blunted iron is sharpened again.

As far as the adults are concerned, the Lord our God also knows that they cannot labour incessantly, because we would become completely dull. Therefore, He instituted a weekly day of rest. Every thing must stop. The coverall is exchanged for the garment of celebration. Peace enters the heart instead of the agitation of the week. When the day of rest is not spent in licentiousness which would increase the exhaustion, but in the house of prayer under the breathing of the Word, we return the following day with a whetted edge to our work to serve the Lord therein.

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**Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.**

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KJV Ecclesiastes 10:11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:11 A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; The babbler is no different.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the snake should bite before it is charmed, the snake charmer is in trouble.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:11 ν ὁ κ φιδ ν ο ψιθυρισμ κα ο κ στω περισσε α τ π δοντι

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:11 If a serpent bite when there is no charmer's whisper, then there is no advantage to the charmer.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the snake bites before it is charmed, then there is no advantage for the charmer.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:11 If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:11 If a snake bites before you charm it, what's the use of being a snake charmer?

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the serpent biteth without enchantment, Then there is no advantage to a master of the tongue.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:11 If, for want of charming, the snake bites, the snake-charmer gets nothing out of it.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the snake bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage in a charmer.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the serpent bites because it has not been charmed, then there is no advantage for the charmer.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:11 If a snake bites before it has been charmed, then there is no advantage in being a snake charmer.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:11 If a snake gives a bite before the word of power is said, then there is no longer any use in the word of power.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:11 If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage in a charmer.

- the serpent: Ps 58:4,5 Jer 8:17
- a babbler: Heb. the master of the tongue, Ps 52:2 64:3 Pr 18:21 Jas 3:6

#### Related Passages:

Psalms 58:4-5 They have venom like the venom of a serpent; Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear, 5 So that it does not hear the voice of charmers, Or a skillful caster of spells.

Jeremiah 8:17 "For behold, I am sending serpents against you, Adders, for which there is no charm, And they will bite you," declares the LORD.

#### Snake Charmer

### TOO LATE TO CHARM WISDOM WASTED BY DELAY

**If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer** - A snake charmer, whose control is through words/whispers gets no money from spectators if he is bitten! Wisdom delayed or applied too late is as useless as a charmer who begins his craft after the snake has already bitten. If the snake bites first, the charmer's skill is wasted. If you speak or act too late, your wisdom is ineffective. Solomon's point is that you need to use the wisdom you have and not wait until you are bit to use it. While it is not exactly apropos, the saying is close "Use it or lose it!" (That could literally be true of a snake charmer who gets bit and loses his life!)

**Warren Wiersbe** - Snakes have no external ears; they pick up sound waves primarily through the bone structure of the head. More than the music played by the charmer, it is the man's disciplined actions (swaying and "staring") that hold the snake's attention and keep the serpent under control. It is indeed an art....Some charmers had a mongoose available that "caught" the snake just at the right time and "saved" the man from being bitten. If for some reason the mongoose missed his cue, the serpent might attack the charmer, and that would be the end of the show. Either way, the man was foolish. The common denominator among these "foolish workers" seems to be presumption. They were overconfident and ended up either hurting themselves or making their job harder. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Tommy Nelson** - This verse looks like a random thought but actually is the key to this entire section. You've probably seen a snake charmer on television. And it's quite a talent to be able to charm a snake, but if the charmer gets bitten, his talent didn't do him any

good. The charmer had the skill but he didn't use it. Solomon's point is that you need to use the wisdom you have. Otherwise, you may as well not have it since it's of no service to you. It's not enough to know how to charm the serpent—you have to actually apply your knowledge before you're bitten. Let's apply this idea to life. You probably have many areas in life where you know the right things to do. You could give a list of wonderful principles for marriage, parenting, money management, sexuality, friendships, and work. You know all the right answers in your head. But that's not the most important part, is it? If the serpent bites, the person who knows how to charm a snake is no better off than one who doesn't. So the important thing is not just that you have the knowledge, but that you actually use it in marriage, parenting, and so on. You have to use your wisdom. Our churches are filled with Bible-believing people who have mangled their lives because they were bitten by the snake. They didn't put their wisdom to use. What about you? Are there areas of your life where you know the right thing to do but just aren't doing it? Are you praying with your spouse? Are you reading the Bible with your kids? Are you out of debt and using your money wisely to fulfill the Lord's calling on your life? If the answer to any of these is no, you need to put your wisdom into practice. ...I don't care how much Bible you know, it's meaningless if you don't know how to charm the serpent before it gets to you. Life is loaded.(Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

*the important thing is not just that you have the knowledge  
but that you actually use it*

**Keith Krell** - This verse first looks like a random thought, but actually is the key to this entire section. You've probably seen a snake charmer on television. It's quite a talent to be able to charm a snake, isn't it? But if the charmer gets bitten, his talent didn't do him any good. The charmer had the skill but he didn't use it. Solomon's point is that you need to use the wisdom you have. Otherwise, you may as well not have that sense, for it is of no service to you. It's not enough to know how to charm the serpent; you have to actually apply your knowledge before you're bitten. Let's apply this idea to life. You probably have many areas in life where you know the right things to do. You could give a list of wonderful principles for marriage, parenting, money management, sexuality, friendships, and work. You know all the right answers in your head. But that's not the most important part, is it? If the serpent bites, the person who knows how to charm a snake is no better off than one who doesn't. So the important thing is not just that you have the knowledge but that you actually use it in marriage, parenting, and so on. You have to use your wisdom. Our churches are filled with Bible-believing people who have mangled their lives because they were "bitten by the snake." They didn't put their wisdom to use. What about you? **Are there areas of your life where you know the right thing to do but just aren't doing it?** Are you praying with your spouse? Are you reading the Bible with your kids? Are you out of debt and using your money wisely to fulfill the Lord's calling on your life? If the answer to any of these questions is no, you need to put your wisdom into practice. Wisdom helps make a life.

*Like the charmer, you must act  
before the bite, not after.*

**William Barrick** - The final proverb moves from the realm of common chores to the snake charmer (Eccl 10:11). His imminent danger seems a bit more expected—snake charmers work with poisonous serpents like cobras and adders. If the charm does not work immediately, the snake might strike the charmer (or a customer) and cause his death. **Eaton** notes from this proverb that "Slackness may nullify inherent skill." (Borrow [Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 136.](#))

*Wisdom must be applied  
in the right moment to be effective.*

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#### "The Forked Tongue of the Babblers"—Donald Cantrell

Ecc 10:11—Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better

The babbler is compared to a deadly snake; we all know that a snake will strike at any time without warning or reason. The bible is trying to warn the reader about the danger of a babbler. I would dare say that most of us have a healthy fear of snakes, we have no desire to encounter one any time soon. I know that snakes have their place in the flow of things; they eat certain critters and so forth, but in my opinion give me the critters. In past days I have had horrific nightmares concerning the slithering, legless creature with the forked tongue. I remember waking up in a cold sweat on a camping trip, as I tried to gather my senses I realized that my leg was completely numb, immediately I supposed that I had been snake bit. I started screaming like a man should scream that had just been bitten by a venomous snake. We could not get the tent unzipped, so my cousin tore the tent completely down, and then I realized that my leg had only been numb because of how I had been laying upon it. I begin laughing uncontrollably, but my cousin never did think that it was neither funny nor humorous. We all know how deadly the bite of a snake can be, we all try to avoid snakes, and we try to keep them out of our paths. Would it not be bright of us to treat the babbler with the same reservation and hesitation? The word for babbler here is the person that slanders, the one that runs swiftly from person to person spreading venomous gossip. We must mark the babbler, they must be treated just as if they were capable of killing, and their tongue is fatal and venomous. A snake will slither around until it comes upon an unknowing victim and then without warning it leaps upon its victim, rendering the victim

useless against its poisonous bite. Why do we not treat the babbler the same way?

The bible clearly tells us to mark those that cause division, it warns us to avoid them, and it tells us this in plain English. If this is the case why do we not obey the word, why do we not publicly mark the babbler, why do we not clearly expose them? No we fail to do this and we let them slither on from church to church, and in doing so they spread their venom into others. If we know someone is a babbler and do not stop them, we most definitely will have to answer to God for our hesitation. I think that every church should have special rocks for the babbler, when one pops its head up, we should hit them in the head with the rock. If we hit them enough they will either quit babbling or they will shed their skin and get out of dodge. Do not tolerate slander, do not accept slander, and do not give an ear to the slanderer. The best action to take with any slanderer is to ask them to wait, call in the object of their slandering then make it a three-way conversation. I promise you this person will never blabber to you again; they will avoid you as if you had a hand full of rocks. The slandering person never wants to slander face to face, never has, they never will.

1. The Tongue of a Babblers
2. The Target of a Babblers
3. The Tragedy of a Babblers
4. The Trumping of a Babblers

In the space below ask God to help you avoid the babbler, asks God to help you expose any babbler that has crept into your life.

#### **Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;

NET Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise person win him favor, but the words of a fool are self-destructive.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:12 λ γοι στ ματος σοφο χ ρις κα χε λη φρονος καταποντιο σιν α τ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise mouth are gracious: but the lips of a fool will swallow him up.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, but the lips of a fool consume him.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:12 Wise words bring approval, but fools are destroyed by their own words.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words of the mouth of the wise are gracious, And the lips of a fool swallow him up.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:12 The sayings of a sage give pleasure, what a fool says procures his own ruin:

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words spoken by the wise bring them favor, but the lips of fools consume them.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words from the wise man's mouth win favor, but the fool's lips consume him.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:12 A wise person's words win favors, but a fool's lips are self-destructive.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth are sweet to all, but the lips of a foolish man are his destruction.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

- **words:** Job 4:3,4 16:5 Ps 37:30 40:9,10 71:15-18 Pr 10:13,20,21,31,32 Pr 12:13,14,18 15:2,23 16:21-24 22:17,18 25:11,12 31:26 Mt 12:35 Lu 4:22 Eph 4:29 Col 4:6
- **while:** 2Sa 1:16 1Ki 20:40-42 Ps 64:8 140:9 Pr 10:8,10,14 18:6-8 19:5 Pr 26:9 Lu 19:22

#### **Related Passages:**

Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:1-2 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. 2The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly.

Proverbs 10:32 The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.

Proverbs 25:11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

James 3:5-6 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Luke 6:45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Proverbs 21:23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

## GRACE OR RUIN FROM OUR TONGUE

Ecclesiastes 10:12 begins a new subsection (vv. 12–14) focusing on the speech of the wise vs. the foolish.

This passage is very similar to Proverb 10:32 which says "The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverted."

**Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious**([chen](#); Lxx - [charis](#)) The wise speak words that attract, encourage, and bring benefit. Their words build up, not tear down.

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** - Advice is like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon and the deeper it sinks into the mind.

**While the lips of a fool consume him - NET** - "but the words of a fool are self-destructive." A fool's own words lead to his destruction. His speech boomerangs back to ruin him—whether through pride, deception, or rashness.

Solomon said almost the same thing in Proverbs 13:3 "The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

*the fool blurts out whatever is on his mind and  
doesn't stop to consider who might be hurt by it.*

-- Warren Wiersbe

This verse teaches a foundational biblical truth: What comes from the mouth reveals the heart (Luke 6:45). The wise have speech that is gracious—truthful, kind, thoughtful, healing (cf. Prov. 16:24). The fool speaks in ways that are destructive—to himself and others.

*Speech is not neutral—  
it either brings grace or leads to ruin.*

This truth of gracious words from the lips of wise men is echoed in the NT...

Ephesians 4:29+ **Let** no unwholesome word **proceed** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace ([charis](#)) to those who hear.

Colossians 4:6+ **Conduct** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace ([charis](#)), as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

*Grace-filled words  
are a hallmark of wisdom*

**William Barrick** - The Words and Work of a Fool (Eccl 10:12–15) All biblical wisdom literature eventually gets around to the topic of speech (often using the figures of mouth, tongue, and/or lips).<sup>25</sup> Literally, verse 12 begins, "Words of a wise man's mouth are



grace.” Gracious words accompany the wise (Eccl 10:12a; cp. 8:1; Prov 22:11; Ps 45:2; Luke 4:22) and such grace wins favor with the people whom a wise person encounters. Indeed, the wise individual’s words are “gracious in content, winsome in spirit, affectionate in appeal, and compliant and affable in tone.”<sup>26</sup> The foolish on the contrary, will suffer the consequences of unwise words (Eccl 10:12b) and only succeed in alienating others.

**Keith Krell** - In Eccl 10:12-15, it becomes clearer that Solomon’s focus is on controlling our words. He writes, “Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?”<sup>409</sup> The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.<sup>410</sup> It is sad to say but both the foolish and wise alike can multiply their words. Yet, consider the following benefits to silence or at least to talking less: (1) you can listen carefully to what others say; (2) you have time to frame your thoughts; (3) your companions will value your words because you have listened to them; and (4) you run a much lower risk of saying something foolish.<sup>411</sup> A wise person once remarked that it’s better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

**NET NOTE on consume** - Heb “consume him”; or “engulf him.” The verb בלע (“to swallow”) creates a striking wordplay on the homonymic root בלע (“to speak eloquently”; HALOT 134–35 s.v. בלע). Rather than speaking eloquently (בלע, “to speak eloquently”), the fool utters words that are self-destructive (בלע, “to swallow, engulf”).

**Bob Utley** - **Ec 10:12-14** There is a play on the term “mouth,” “lips,” and “swallow” (i.e., “consume”). What we say does make a difference (e.g., Eccl. 10:13,14; Prov. 10:32; 11:11,13; 13:3; 14:3; 18:6,7,21; Matt. 12:37).

“**What Do Your Words Say About You?**” Every day, your mouth is preaching a message about your heart. Are your words: Full of grace? Thoughtful, truthful, tender? Or are they: Rash? Bitter? Self-serving or harmful? The fool’s speech devours himself. But the wise? Their words bring blessing to others and honor to God. Wise speech is marked by grace, not just truth. Pause before speaking—consider if your words edify or destroy. Avoid gossip, boasting, or rash promises. Ask daily: “Lord, let the words of my mouth be gracious and glorifying to You.”

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**Consume (01104)** bala means to to swallow down, swallow up, engulf as a person swallows a fig (Isa. 28:4) or as the great fish swallowed Jonah (Jon. 1:17). “The earth swallowed” Pharaoh’s army. (Ex 15:12) “The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up” speaking of Korah and his rebellion (Nu 16:32).

**Gilbrant** - This primary Hebrew verb means “to swallow,” “to swallow up” or “to engulf.” It is used literally and figuratively. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the rebellious Korahites opposing Moses. The wicked “swallows down” riches only to lose them again according to Zophar (Job 20:15). The wicked also attempt to swallow the righteous, but the Lord prevents it (Ps. 124:3). Jonah 1:17 says, “Now the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah.” Usages of the simple stem include the rod of Aaron swallowing the rods of Pharaoh’s sorcerers and magicians (Exo. 7:12) and the earth swallowing the imperial Egyptian army, as they drowned under the surface of the water. In the passive sense, the corrupt priests and prophets of Israel were swallowed up by wine (Isa. 28:7). Hosea 8:8 says of God’s apostate people, “Israel is swallowed up.” Through their involvement with pagan nations, the Israelites had lost their unique identity as the Lord’s people. The Piel (intensive) form carries the same meaning of “to swallow” (Ps. 35:25; Isa. 3:12), also speaking of corruption in the political system. Swallowing is also understood in the sense of “to destroy” militarily, as when Joab considered attacking Abel, or when Zion was besieged (Isa. 49:19). The speech of the senseless person eventually brings ruin upon himself, without anyone needing to oppose him (Ecc. 10:12). Balac is used once in the Hithpael future tense. Psalm 107:27 speaks of mariners imperiled on a tempestuous sea. Literally, this verse states, “their wisdom is swallowed up.” ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Walter Kaiser** - Used of men (Isaiah 28:4), fish (Jonah 2:1), serpents (Exodus 7:12), and animals (Genesis 41:7, 24). On two different occasions, the Lord caused the earth to open and swallow alive groups of men as a judgment: at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:12) and at the Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebellion (Numbers 16:30, 32, 34; Numbers 26:10; Deut. 11:6; and Psalm 106:17). Frequently the word is used as a symbol of destruction and ruin: Lament. 2:2, 5, 8; Isaiah 3:12; Isaiah 49:19, etc. (See [Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament](#), online)

**BALA** - 48V - **brought to confusion(1), confound(1), confuse(2), confused(1), consume(1), destroy(1), destroyed(1), destroying(1), end(1), moment(1), removed(1), ruin(1), spreads(1), swallow(13), swallowed(18), swallows(4).** **Gen. 41:7** - “**thin ears swallowed up the seven plump**”; Gen. 41:24; Exod. 7:12 = “Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.”; Exod. 15:12; Num. 4:20; Num. 16:30; Num. 16:32; Num. 16:34; Num. 26:10; Deut. 11:6; 2 Sam. 17:16; 2 Sam. 20:19; 2 Sam. 20:20; Job 2:3; Job 7:19; Job 8:18; Job

10:8; Job 20:15; Job 20:18; Job 37:20; Ps. 21:9; Ps. 35:25; Ps. 55:9; Ps. 69:15; Ps. 106:17; Ps. 107:27; Ps. 124:3; Prov. 1:12; Prov. 19:28; Prov. 21:20; Eccl. 10:12; Isa. 3:12; Isa. 9:16; Isa. 19:3; Isa. 25:7; Isa. 25:8; Isa. 28:4; Isa. 28:7; Isa. 49:19; Jer. 51:34; Lam. 2:2; Lam. 2:5; Lam. 2:8; Lam. 2:16; Hos. 8:7; Hos. 8:8; Jon. 1:17; Hab. 1:13

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#### Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - FOOLS AND THEIR FOOLISH WORDS Ecclesiastes 10:12-15

Once again we are reminded that fools talk too much. When first we meet such a person, his unending chatter may seem pleasing to us. He laughs and jokes his way through life, pointing out the lighter side of even the saddest moments. He's a riot, the life of the party, a fun guy to have around. He's a cutup, and if you only see him now and then, he seems like a great person to know. But those who know him better don't share that high opinion. Humor is like rich spice: A little goes a long way, but too much spoils the meal.

What starts out as harmless folly ends up as wicked madness. Either he won't stop or perhaps he can't. Foolish words flow like a torrent out of his mouth. It's all there—flippant humor, coarse jesting, irreverent teasing, unkind insults, silly stories, inane comments—some of it funny but nearly all of it inappropriate.

A wise person once remarked that it's better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. Consider the benefits of silence: (1) You can listen carefully to what others say; (2) you have time to frame your thoughts; (3) your companions will value your words because you have listened to them; and (4) you run a much lower risk of saying something foolish.

If that last reason sounds too negative, consider Proverbs 10:19, "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise."

Spirit of God, I pray for the gift of sanctified brevity. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- When are you most tempted to talk too much? What steps can you take to say less today?
- Pause and commit your lips to the Lord for His glory.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 19:14; Proverbs 17:27-28; and James 3:2-12.

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#### Spontaneous Combustion - Peter Kennedy [From Generation to Generation: Devotional Thoughts](#)

"Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips."—Ecclesiastes 10:12

The following is a definition of spontaneous combustion as given by John Machnick, an engineer for the Travelers Insurance Company:

"Under a variety of conditions, the temperature of certain materials can increase without drawing heat from surroundings. If the temperature of the material reaches its ignition temperature, spontaneous ignition is said to occur. In most cases, spontaneous heating occurs when a material reacts with oxygen from the air...

"Cotton rags soaked in linseed oil are very susceptible to spontaneous ignition. This is because the reaction of oxygen and linseed oil (oxidation) is fairly rapid and evolves considerable heat. Spontaneous ignition of the cotton rags can be prevented by restricting the amount of oxygen reaching the rags (placed in sealed metal container) or by providing sufficient ventilation (hanging on a clothesline) to quickly dissipate the heat."

Spontaneous combustion can occur if you let sin soak into your life. Only the foolish fail to deal with sin. Are you allowing sin to soak into your life? Today confess any sin to Christ and ask Him for His gracious forgiveness.

"Sensible talk meets with approval in a stable society, but there is a destructive talk that degrades."—J. Stafford Wright

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#### Silver Boxes of Encouragement

On the spur of the moment, I was asked to give a children's sermon in a church I was visiting. My mind raced to Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good ..." (KJV).

I asked the children, "How can we make our words good for others?" They answered, "Say nice things. give out compliments. Be cheerful. Tell the truth."

Then a little girl piped up, "Our words should be like little silver boxes with bows on top."

What more could I say? The children had taught the verse to each other and to me in a way none of us could easily forget.

—Florence Littauer, Silver Boxes. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart."  
See: Proverbs 15:23; Ecclesiastes 10:12; James 3:2.

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## THE REFRESHMENT OF GRACE [David Jeremiah Morning and Evening Devotions: Holy Moments](#)

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up.ECCLESIASTES  
10:12

The most unsettling TV commercial in 1999 showed close-ups of three individuals bearing noticeable physical injuries and scars. There was no explanation—only a familiar logo at the end and the words, "Just do it." What made the commercial moving was the Joe Cocker song playing throughout in the background: "You are so beautiful . . . to me."

Granted, the commercial was for shoes. But there was another message as well: true beauty and grace is not a matter of physical perfection. Some of the most refreshing people to be around are those who have overcome serious limitations in their lives. Their gracious attitude seems to say, "I may not have everything that's possible, but I'm doing everything possible with what I have been given."

There should be no bounds to the graciousness of those who know Christ since God has made all grace abound to us to make us sufficient in all things (2 Corinthians 9:8). Wherever we go as Christians, we should take with us the refreshment of the gospel of grace.

Instead of "Just do it," Christians should "Just dispense it"—the grace of God, that is.

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## FREDERICK WM. FABER.

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious.—Ecclesiastes 10:12.

Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad.—Proverbs 12:25.

It would seem as if very few of us give this power of kind words the consideration, which is due to it. So great a power, such a facility in the exercise of it, such a frequency of opportunities for the application of it, and yet the world still what it is, and we still what we are! It seems incredible, Take life all through, its adversity as well as its prosperity, its sickness as well as its health, its loss of its rights as well as its enjoyment of them, and we shall find that no natural sweetness of temper, much less any acquired philosophical equanimity, is equal to the support of a uniform habit of kindness. Nevertheless, with the help of grace, the habit of saying kind words is very quickly formed, and when once formed, it is not speedily lost. Sharpness, bitterness, sarcasm, acute observation, divination of motives,—all these things disappear when a man is earnestly conforming himself to the image of Christ Jesus. The very attempt to be like our dearest Lord is already a wellspring of sweetness within us, flowing with an easy grace over all who come within our reach.

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## A Word Fitly Spoken

I spoke  
Words fell  
Aimlessly on ears.  
Later  
One said,  
"Your word—  
It helped  
That Day."  
I turned  
Wondering—  
Forgot I said  
That word.  
Let me speak  
Those words  
Often.  
Helpful words  
That I forget.

—Jim Elliot in The Journals of Jim Elliot. Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 10.

See: Proverbs 16:24; Proverbs 25:11; Ecclesiastes 10:12.

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### Beyond Idle Chatter

Talking and eloquence are not the same: to speak, and to speak well, are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks. — Ben Jonson in Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 13.

See: Job 6:25; Proverbs 25:11; Ecclesiastes 10:12.

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### Chilling Advice

Advice is like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon and the deeper it sinks into the mind. —Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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### Ecclesiastes 10:12 Things Said In Secret

Read: Ephesians 4:25-32

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious. —Ecclesiastes 10:12

Some say that anonymity is the last refuge for cowards. Judging from mail and comments I've read that have been submitted anonymously, I would agree. People hiding behind the screen of anonymity or a false identity feel the freedom to launch angry, hurtful tirades. Anonymity allows them to be unkind without having to take responsibility for their words.

Whenever I am tempted to write something anonymously because I don't want to be identified with my own words, I stop and reconsider. If I don't want my name attached to it, I probably shouldn't be saying it. Then I do one of two things: I either toss it out or I rewrite it in a way that makes it helpful rather than hurtful.

According to Ephesians, our words should edify and impart grace (4:29). If I'm unwilling to use my name, there's reason to believe that my motive is to hurt, not to help.

Whenever you're tempted to say something in secret—perhaps to a family member, co-worker, or your pastor—consider why you don't want your name to be identified with your words. After all, if you don't want to be identified with your words, God probably doesn't either. He is gracious and slow to anger (Ex. 34:6), and we should be the same. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

O Lord, help us to turn aside  
From words that spring from selfish pride,  
For You would have Your children one  
In praise and love for Your dear Son.  
—D. De Haan

Anonymity can be a coward's way of hiding behind hurtful words.

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### Ecclesiastes 10:13 the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness.

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KJV Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:13 The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, And the end of his talk is raving madness.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:13 At the beginning his words are foolish and at the end his talk is wicked madness,

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:13 ρχ λ γων στ ματος α το φροσ νη κα σχ τη στ ματος α το περιφ ρεια πονηρ

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly: and the end of his talk mischievous madness.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly, but the end of his speaking is evil madness.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:13 At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness--

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:13 Fools base their thoughts on foolish assumptions, so their conclusions will be wicked madness;

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly, And the latter end of his mouth is mischievous madness.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:13 his words have their origin in stupidity and their ending in treacherous folly.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:13 The words of their mouths begin in foolishness, and their talk ends in wicked madness;

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of his words is folly, and the end of his talk is utter madness;

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:13 A fool starts out by talking foolishness and ends up saying crazy things that are dangerous.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:13 The first words of his mouth are foolish, and the end of his talk is evil crime.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is wicked madness.

- beginning: Judges 14:15 1Sa 20:26-33 22:7,8,16-18 25:10,11 2Sa 19:41-43 2Sa 20:1 2Ki 6:27,31 Pr 29:9 Mt 2:7,8,16 Lu 6:2,11 Lu 11:38,53,54 Joh 12:10 Ac 5:28-33 6:9-11 7:54-59 19:24-28

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 10:14 Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.

Proverbs 18:7 A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Psalms 141:3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Matthew 15:11 "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

Folly unchecked ends in madness!

### THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF FOOLISH SPEECH

This verse follows Ecclesiastes 10:12, which contrasted the gracious words of the wise with the self-consuming speech of the fool. Now in verse 13, Solomon traces the trajectory of a fool's speech from its origin (folly) to its culmination (madness)—showing that foolish words don't just remain harmless; they escalate into greater evil. This serves as a sobering warning about letting foolish, careless, or arrogant words go unchecked.

**The beginning of his talking is folly** (sikluth; Lxx - [aphrosune](#)) From the very first words, the fool's speech reveals immaturity, arrogance, or recklessness. There is no discretion or thoughtfulness in how he begins.

**and the end of it is wicked madness** (holen - delirium, irrational behavior) - The final result of foolish, unchecked speech is not harmless confusion—it turns into destructive, irrational, and wicked behavior. Foolishness does not remain static, but is "dynamic" and can escalate. It may begin with foolish ignorant words but it may progress (as they continue blabbing) to full blown madness. This reminds me of the effect of sin which always (at least often) starts small but if not checked escalates to greater sin.

**Bob Utley** - "the end of it is wicked madness" The NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 1040, asserts that this refers to an attitude of life that recognizes no moral law operating in the world. Therefore, this would be taking the imagery of "under the sun" as a life's motto. In my culture it is the idiom, "you only go around once in life, so get all the gusto you can." Ecclesiastes addresses this very attitude (cf. Eccl. 3:17; 9:11; 12:14).

**Tommy Nelson** - the words of a fool wreak havoc. Discriminating people can't stand to be around him. The things he says range from the silly to the truly evil. The fool opens his mouth and error comes out. And yet he keeps talking. No matter how he gets beat

up in life, it never convinces him to repent. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**David Jeremiah** - This is the person who talks just for the sake of talking. Either they love to hear themselves talk, or they are insecure with silence. Their words are a stream-of-consciousness tape that plays non-stop as long as they're awake. This person sees no difference between words—they're all the same: Important! The trouble is, no one that he's around thinks so. He is foolish because of not knowing how to speak only when there is something meaningful to say. ([Study Guide](#))

**William Barrick** - From start to finish, the speech of a fool displays a lack of wisdom and too often results in "wicked madness" (Eccl 10:13).

**"Watch the Beginning of Your Words"** Sometimes we dismiss flippant speech with: "I was just joking." "It's not that serious." "It's just a little foolishness." But Solomon says: Foolish words grow. They don't stay small. What begins as thoughtless chatter can lead to: Lying, Boasting, Gossip, Slander, Blasphemy. And eventually, it leads to destruction. Let your prayer be: "Lord, may the beginning of my speech be wise, so its end will glorify You."

### **Ecclesiastes 10:14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; Who can tell him what will be after him?

NET Ecclesiastes 10:14 yet a fool keeps on babbling. No one knows what will happen; who can tell him what will happen in the future?

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:14 καὶ φωνῶν πληθύνει λόγους οὐκ γινώσκει ἄνθρωπος τί τὸ γένετον καὶ τί τὸ στέλεχος αὐτοῦ τίς ναγγελεῖται

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool moreover multiplies words: man knows not what has been, nor what will be: who shall tell him what will come after him?

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No one knows what will happen, and who can tell anyone what will happen after him?

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:14 and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming-- who can tell him what will happen after him?

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:14 they chatter on and on. No one really knows what is going to happen; no one can predict the future.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:14 And the fool multiplieth words: 'Man knoweth not that which is, And that which is after him, who doth declare to him?'

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool talks a great deal, but none of us in fact can tell the future; what will happen after us, who can tell?

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:14 yet fools talk on and on. No one knows what is to happen, and who can tell anyone what the future holds?

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:14 yet the fool multiplies words. Man knows not what is to come, for who can tell him what is to come after him?

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:14 He never stops talking. No one knows what the future will bring, or what will happen after death. Who can say!

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:14 The foolish are full of words; man has no knowledge of what will be; and who is able to say what will be after him?

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?

- **fool:** Ec 5:3 Pr 10:19 15:2
- is full of words: Heb. multiplieth words, Job 34:37 35:16
- a man: Ec 3:22 6:12 8:7 Jas 4:13,14

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Matthew 12:36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

Ecclesiastes 8:7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But **the mouth of fools spouts folly.**

Fools multiply words while the  
unknowable future swirls behind him

### THE TALK OF FOOLS WORDS MULTIPLY, WISDOM FADES

Eccl 10:12–15 contrast the speech and conduct of the wise and the fool. Verse 14 specifically highlights the talkative nature and arrogant presumption of fools, especially in predicting the future.

**Yet the fool multiplies words** The phrase denotes excessive, mindless talking with an inflated sense of self-importance. Fools are known for excessive, presumptuous speech. Fools think talking more makes (or shows) them wiser, but their very actions expose their folly to all. And Solomon adds that "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable" (Pr 10:19) This verse recalls Eccl 5:2 "Do not be hasty in word " (aka "let your words be few")! Fools are full of empty words and in this context especially about the future.

**Tommy Nelson** - The fool pontificates and pretends that he has exhaustive knowledge about life. He fakes certainty to keep up the pretense of having his life together. It's called humanism. The fool says, "I'm in charge and there is no God." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**No man knows what will happen,** A universal truth: no human being can predict the future. Only God knows what will happen next (cf Eccl 3:11).

**and who can tell him what will come after him** Solomon emphasizes that fools talk endlessly—especially about things they do not and cannot know—namely the future. Their verbosity stands in contrast to the wise who speak with restraint and reverence (see Ec 10:12). This underscores the futility and arrogance of trying to declare what lies beyond one's life or control.

**Warren Wiersbe** - Foolish people talk about the future as though they either know all about it or are in control of what will happen. "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1, NKJV). Several times before, Solomon has emphasized man's ignorance of the future (Ec 3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 9:12), a truth that wise people receive but fools reject. (See James 4:13–17.) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Bob Utley** - "No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him" This is a recurrent theme (cf. Eccl. 3:22; 6:12; 7:14; 8:7; 10:14). The future is hidden, even from the wise and godly person! Wisdom is far better than foolishness (cf. Eccl. 10:15), but it is limited in this fallen period of human history!

Ecclesiastes 10:14 teaches that fools are marked by their verbose presumption—they speak endlessly as if they know the future, yet not even the wisest can say what will come. The Preacher calls this vanity and warns of the folly of speculative speech. While wisdom is restrained and grounded in humility, folly is loud, arrogant, and blind to its own ignorance.

**William Barrick** - In spite of the dangers he faces, however, the fool just keeps on talking ("multiplies words," Eccl 10:14a). The implied lesson is that everyone must take heed to the words they speak, for God hears and will judge each one accordingly (Matt 12:36–37). Just as the proverbs of Eccl 10:8–10a conclude with a practical application, so Eccl 10:12–14a unexpectedly apply their instruction to the ignorance of mankind concerning what will happen in the future (Eccl 10:14b; cp. Eccl 3:22; 6:12; 7:14; 8:7).



According to Kaiser, the fool's "unbelief and failure to consider that there is a future judgment, wherein the totality of life will be reviewed, puts him at such a huge disadvantage compared to the devout, wise man that he is to be pitied." (27 Kaiser, Jr., Ecclesiastes)

**THOUGHT** - Sometimes we are tempted to fill silence with words, to speak confidently about what we think is coming next. But God calls us to walk by faith, not by forecasts. The wise recognize their finitude and let their words be few. The fool, however, lives loudly—assuming control over what God alone governs. Let your speech be seasoned with grace, not stuffed with speculation. "Lord, teach me to listen more than I speak, and to trust You with the tomorrows I cannot see."

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**QUESTION** - [What does the Bible say about talking too much / being talkative? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](http://GOTQUESTIONS.ORG)

**ANSWER** - The Bible warns us against talking too much or being overly talkative. In fact, the Bible says that a fool can be recognized by his many words (Ecclesiastes 5:3). Ecclesiastes 10:14 adds that a fool "multiplies words."

The Bible discourages using an abundance of words where a few would suffice. "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues" (Proverbs 17:28). Those who feel compelled to give utterance to every thought in their heads usually end up in trouble.

Proverbs 10:8 describes the overly talkative person as a "babbling fool" (ESV, NASB), a "prating fool" (NKJV), or a "chattering fool" (ISV) who will come to ruin. Such a person is contrasted with one who is "wise of heart" and who "will receive commandments." The [antithetical parallelism](#) of Proverbs 10:19 warns that talking too much naturally leads to sin: "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent" (ESV).

The wise person refuses to talk too much. Rather, he fears the Lord, listens to the Lord, and obeys the Lord. He follows the example of Mary, "who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said" (Luke 10:39). When our mouths are full of our own words, we have little time or interest in God's words. Talking too much usually means listening too little.

Modern culture offers numerous avenues through which we can express ourselves verbally. Social media, blogs, cell phones, and call-in radio all enable us to keep up a constant stream of chatter. But how much of our talking is truly edifying or important (see Ephesians 4:29)? Saying what needs to be said is important, but talking too much easily leads to saying what should not be said.

Restraining our lips is an indication of wisdom and humility. Talkative people often do not take the time between their many words to choose their words carefully. Christians should be aware that talking too much is detrimental to our witness in the world, as James reminds us, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26). James later says that [controlling the tongue](#) is one of the hardest things to do, humanly speaking (James 3:2). In fact, "no human being can tame the tongue" (James 3:7). Fortunately, we have the Holy Spirit to help us with the task, and here is a helpful prayer: "Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

The apostle Peter is often quoted in the gospels, and it seems that he was a talkative person by nature. In one instance at least, Peter's verbosity was ill-advised. On the mount of [transfiguration](#), Peter says to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say . . .)" (Mark 9:5–6). Notice that Peter "did not know what to say," so, of course, he *said* something! It's just what talkative people do. God quickly silenced Peter by redirecting his focus: "A cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" (Mark 9:7). Peter's talking had to be replaced with listening.

Just as the overly talkative person displays foolishness, the one who holds his tongue demonstrates knowledge and understanding. "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit" (Proverbs 17:27). We can't gain knowledge if we are constantly talking, but understanding comes from listening and using our words sparingly. "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak . . ." (James 1:19).

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**Ecclesiastes 10:15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:15 The labor of fools wearies them, For they do not even know how to go to the city!

NET Ecclesiastes 10:15 The toil of a stupid fool wears him out, because he does not even know the way to

the city.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:15 μ χθος τ ν φρ νων κοπ σει α το ς ς ο κ γνω το πορευθ ναι ε ς π λιν

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:15 The labour of fools will afflict them, as that of one who knows not to go to the city.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:15 The struggles of fools weary them, for they don't know how to go to the city.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:15 The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:15 A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:15 Fools are so exhausted by a little work that they can't even find their way home.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:15 The labour of the foolish wearieth him, In that he hath not known to go unto the city.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:15 A fool finds hard work very tiring, he cannot even find his own way into town.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:15 The toil of fools wears them out, for they do not even know the way to town.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:15 When will the fool be weary of his labor, he who knows not the way to the city?

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:15 Fools wear themselves out with hard work, because they don't even know the way to town.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:15 The work of the foolish will be a weariness to him, because he has no knowledge of the way to the town.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:15 The toil of a fool wearies him, so that he does not know the way to the city.

- labour: Ec 10:3,10 Isa 44:12-17 47:12,13 55:2 57:1 Hab 2:6 Mt 11:28-30
- because: Ps 107:4,7 Isa 35:8-10 Jer 50:4,5

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 2:14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.

Proverbs 12:23 A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly.

Proverbs 19:3 The foolishness of man ruins his way, And his heart rages against the LORD.

Fool unable to find way to the city!

## FOOLISH LABOR FRUITLESS LIFE

**The toil of a fool so wearies him** The fool works—but his labor wears him out rather than accomplishes anything. He lacks the insight to work efficiently or meaningfully, so his effort is wasted energy. “Vanity of vanities... all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2)—when life is pursued without God and wisdom

*Hard work without wisdom  
leads to exhaustion, not success.*

**that he does not even know how to go to a city** This verse may sound humorous, but it is deeply tragic—a fool's busyness does not lead to success, because he lacks basic direction. The fool is so mentally dull or directionless that he cannot even accomplish a basic task—like going to the city. This may be literal or metaphorical: he can't even navigate life's most obvious paths. Wisdom helps us navigate life's simplest paths—fools are lost even there.

**Warren Wiersbe** - There is a bit of humor here. The fool boasts about his future plans and wearies people with his talk, but he can't even find the way to the city. In Bible times, the roads to the cities were well-marked so that any traveler could find his way, but the fool is so busy talking about the future that he loses his way in the present. “He can't find his way to the city” was probably an ancient proverb about stupidity, not unlike our “He's so dumb, he couldn't learn the route to run an elevator.” ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Tommy Nelson** - Solomon is making fun of the fool. He's saying that this person who claims to know everything about life's most important questions can't even find the next city. Paul Johnson wrote a book called [The Intellectuals](#). Johnson examined the

teachings of many of the most important thinkers of Western civilization—men like Rousseau, Karl Marx, Leo Tolstoy, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Bertrand Russell. But he didn't just study their teachings, he also examined the way they lived their lives. He looked at how they treated people, their habits, their marriages, their kids, and their friends. Do you know what he found? Every one of those people scoffed at God. They pontificated on eternity. They denied everything holy and presented themselves as the fount of all wisdom. But most of them didn't have the sense to raise a child well. They didn't keep their marriages together. They destroyed first themselves and then everything around them. Don't be misled by a fool. Foolishness harms not only individuals and families but entire civilizations. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

*the fool often cannot accomplish the most intuitive of tasks or make the simplest decisions.*

**William Barrick** - The closing instruction indicates the futility of a fool's labor—he becomes so exhausted that he cannot figure out how to go into a nearby city (Eccl 10:15). Incompetence arises out of the failure to apply due diligence in the realm of labor and work. **Eaton** describes the circumstances as “a moral and intellectual laziness which leads to a stumbling (Ec 2:14), fumbling (Ec 10:2), crumbling (Ec 10:18) life.” (28 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 136.) **Kidner** explains that the fool “would get lost, we might say today, even if you put him on an escalator.” (29 Kidner, A Time to Mourn, 92–93.) Whatever the original meaning of this proverb, one thing is clear: the fool often cannot accomplish the most intuitive of tasks or make the simplest decisions. He (or she) just “makes things needlessly difficult for himself by his stupidity.” (30 29 Kidner, 93) An English saying fits the fool well here: “*He does not know enough to come in out of the rain.*”

**“Don’t Mistake Motion for Meaning”** You can be busy and barren. You can exhaust yourself with: Work. Ministry. Productivity. But if your labor is disconnected from wisdom, and from God’s purposes, you’ll burn out without fruit. Solomon says: The fool is worn out—but he’s not getting anywhere. True success is not about effort alone—it’s about walking in God’s wisdom, with direction, faith, and discernment.

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**H A Ironside** - The labor of fools wearies them, for they do not even know how to go to the city! Ecclesiastes 10:15

All through the Word of God one glorious city is before the eyes of His saints. It is the city for which Abraham looked, which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. We see it pictured in all its magnificence in the closing chapters of the book of Revelation. The way to that city is Christ Himself. He says so plainly, “I am the way.... No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Yet men labor on in their folly, seeking another way because they will not heed the plain message of the gospel. We are warned that, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Not a way, but the Way will bring us safely home.

O God, through Christ the living Way,  
My Father and my God,—  
So near, and I so far astray,  
Brought nigh Thee by His blood.

And now by love’s own power led on,  
I reach the inmost rest—  
The nameless rapture of a son  
Upon the Father’s breast.  
—C. T. S.

**Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, And your princes feast in the morning!

NET Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is childish, and your princes feast in the morning!

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:16 ο α σοι π λις ς βασιλε ς σου νε τερος κα ο ρχοντ ς σου ν πρω σθ ουσιν

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to thee, O city, whose king is young, and thy princes eat in the morning!

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, land, when your king is a youth and your princes feast in the morning.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:16 What sorrow for the land ruled by a servant, the land whose leaders feast in the morning.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a youth, And thy princes do eat in the morning.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, country with a lad for king, and where princes start feasting in the morning!

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:16 Alas for you, O land, when your king is a servant, and your princes feast in the morning!

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land, whose king was a servant, and whose princes dine in the morning!

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:16 How horrible it will be for any country where the king used to be a servant and where the high officials throw parties in the morning.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:16 Unhappy is the land whose king is a boy, and whose rulers are feasting in the morning.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!

- when: 2Ch 13:7 33:1-20 36:2,5,9,11 Isa 3:4,5,12
- and: Pr 20:1,2 Isa 5:11,12 28:7,8 Ho 7:5-7
- in the: Jer 21:12

#### Related Passages:

Isaiah 5:11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!

Proverbs 31:4-5 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, 5 For they will drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Hosea 7:5 On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine; He stretched out his hand with scoffers,

### WOE TO THE NATION WITH IMMATURE LEADERS

Ec 10:16–17 presents a contrast between foolish and wise leadership, starting with a **woe** and ending with a **blessed**. Solomon is speaking from personal experience as a king—warning that immaturity and indulgence in rulers bring a curse to the nation they lead.

While I am not a great fan of the paraphrase called The Message, it does have an interesting paraphrase of Eccl 10:16-17 - "Unlucky the land whose king is a young pup, and whose princes party all night. Lucky the land whose king is mature, where the princes behave themselves and don't drink themselves silly"

**Woe to you, O land** - **Woe** is 'iy (only Ec 4:10, 10:16; [ouai](#) in the Septuagint) the short for of the usual word for **woe**, [hoy](#), an interjection of distress Woe oracles typically contain an invective ("woe to"), a threat (to the **land**), and the reason for the denunciation and threatened judgment (immature leaders). The people are warned when they are under poor leadership. The whole nation suffers when rulers are immature or foolish.

**Whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning** - Nations need leaders who are mature and do not lead like children who are inexperienced, immature and unwise, lacking discernment and restraint that are necessary to govern well. **Whose princes feast in the morning** speaks of foolish indulgence. Instead of being public servants, they were pleasure seekers! Self-indulgence in leadership is a sign of poor character In ancient cultures, morning feasting was often a sign of luxury, laziness, and moral decline (cf. Isa. 5:11–12). The upshot is that immaturity and indulgence in rulers bring a curse to the nation they lead.

This truth is alluded to in Proverb 29:2 "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan."

This passages echoes of Isaiah's rebuke to rebellious Israel in Isaiah 3:4, 12 where God says...

**I will make mere lads their princes, And capricious children will rule over them....**12 O My people! Their oppressors are children, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray And confuse the direction of your paths.

Poor leadership is a judgment on a nation, and Solomon, as a ruler, understood the devastating impact of foolish governance.

**Tommy Nelson** - It's true for Russia. It's true for Germany. It's true for France and it's true for America. Woe to the country that has a king who acts like a child. A country is in trouble when it's leaders party before they have done their work. When leaders don't have the wisdom to focus on priorities and guide decisions with morality, a country is in trouble. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**William Barrick** - Due Diligence (Eccl 10:16–20) Turning to the status of a nation, Solomon introduces a woe-oracle (Eccl 10:16) and a declaration of blessing (Eccl 10:17). Thus the text describes two different national destinies: disaster or security.<sup>31</sup> In a context dealing with wisdom, Solomon reveals that wise people truly care about how leaders govern their home country. It is the fool who does not care and who isolates himself or herself from how a government conducts its business and from those who lead it "in a world which is at once demanding (18), delightful (19) and dangerous (20)." (32 Kidner, A Time to Mourn, 94) A nation with a young and inexperienced king and profligate leaders is doomed (cf. Isa 5:11, 22–23; Prov 31:4–5). Security will be lax and the business of the nation will suffer from lack of mature and serious judgment (Eccl 10:16).

**"Leading with Maturity and Restraint"** Leadership isn't about titles—it's about character. Whether you lead a country, a company, a family, or a church, Solomon says maturity and self-control matter. Leaders who serve themselves bring harm to those they lead and instability to the nation. Leaders who serve others, who rise early to work, not feast, bless their people. Leadership is a stewardship, not a platform for personal gain. Ask yourself: Do I use my authority to serve, or to indulge? Am I growing in maturity, humility, and restraint? Pray for our leaders to govern with wisdom and maturity (1Ti 2:1-3)

**Keith Krell** - Third, apply wisdom in leading others (Ecc 10:16-19). In Eccl 10:16-17 Solomon writes, "Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility<sup>412</sup> and whose princes eat at the appropriate time<sup>413</sup>—for strength and not for drunkenness." In these verses, Solomon informs us that some leaders try to solve problems with pleasure—food and drink. Food is for activity, not for inactivity. We eat to live; we do not live to eat!! One who controls the base appetite to eat probably can control other areas where self takes control. Self discipline is crucial in a leader! We are affected by the tone set by those at the top of any organization. This is true of both good and bad leaders. Laziness, incompetence, or moral failure in any organization will cause it to collapse. This is true from the White House all the way to your house. So Solomon gives us some guidance. An image of bad rulers is compared to good ones. The first priority for bad rulers is to fulfill their own appetites and desires. Good rulers, on the other hand, are disciplined. They enjoy good things in moderation, so they can concentrate on governing well.

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **LEADERS GOOD AND BAD** Ecclesiastes 10:16-17

Warren Bennis is an educator, a philosopher, an author, a scholar, and a keen observer of the American scene. These are his words: "Leadership is a word that is on everyone's lips. The young fight against it. Police seek it. Experts claim it. The artists spurn it. Scholars want it. Bureaucrats pretend to have it and politicians wish they could find it. Everyone agrees on this one fact. There is less of it today than there used to be."

If I could add a footnote, it would be that we face a crisis of leadership inside the Christian church. Turn on the radio. Open the newspaper. Watch the 10 P.M. news for yet another story about a Catholic priest, a Protestant pastor, a vicar, a prelate, a spiritual leader caught in yet another moral failure, financial scandal, ecclesiastical upheaval—some shocking new revelation almost every week.

We are at that point in history where a generation of church leaders is passing from the scene. The leaders who rose to prominence after World War II are now retiring. Who will replace Billy Graham? Where will we find another theologian like Carl Henry? Who will be the next Francis Schaeffer to take the gospel and apply it to the problems of the modern world?

Solomon makes clear that we need leaders who will take their jobs seriously. They must be men and women who display the virtue of self-control. Leaders who party all day ("feast in the morning") bring nothing but sorrow to those who follow them. Leaders who eat at the proper time possess the forgotten virtue of self-control. Paul lists self-control in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 as a non-optional qualification for spiritual leaders. The word he uses literally means to have a "safe mind"—that is, one not clouded by

emotional mood swings or by artificial stimulants. The self-controlled person is experienced enough to keep his balance when life throws him a curve-ball. The word self-control also implies a sober and serious attitude. The person is not a goof or a lightweight flake. He or she is serious about spiritual things. This individual is great to have around when a tough decision needs to be made because he doesn't jump to conclusions or act solely on the basis of his emotions. He knows the right thing to do and isn't afraid to do it.

Blessed are the leaders who have discovered the power to do what they ought to do. Blessed are they, and blessed are those who follow them.

O Lord, pour out Your grace upon our leaders. Fill them with wisdom and courage to follow in the paths of righteousness so that we might live in peace and our land be blessed by You. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- Do you agree that leadership is a noble calling from the Lord?
- In your opinion what are the three most important qualities of a good leader? Why is character an all-important issue in leadership?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Proverbs 28:12; Daniel 4; and 1 Timothy 3:1-8.

**Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time--for strength and not for drunkenness.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, And your princes feast at the proper time-- For strength and not for drunkenness!

NET Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time-- with self-control and not in drunkenness.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:17 μακάρι α σ γ ς βασιλε ς σου υ ς λευθ ρων κα ο ρχοντ ς σου πρ ς καιρ ν φ γονται ν δυν μει κα ο κ α σχυνθ σονται

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, whose king is a son of nobles, and whose princes shall eat seasonably, for strength, and shall not be ashamed.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed are you, land, when your king is a son of nobles and your princes feast at the proper time-- for strength and not for drunkenness.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time-- for strength and not for drunkenness.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy is the land whose king is a noble leader and whose leaders feast at the proper time to gain strength for their work, not to get drunk.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy art thou, O land, When thy king is a son of freemen, And thy princes do eat in due season, For might, and not for drunkenness.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy the land whose king is nobly born, where princes eat at a respectable hour to keep themselves strong and not merely to revel!

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is a nobleman, and your princes feast at the proper time-- for strength, and not for drunkenness!

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of noble birth, and whose princes dine at the right time (for vigor and not in drinking bouts).

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:17 A country is blessed when the king is from a noble family and when the high officials eat at the right time in order to get strength and not to get drunk.



BBE Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy is the land whose ruler is of noble birth, and whose chiefs take food at the right time, for strength and not for feasting.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of free men, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

- when: Ec 10:6,7 Pr 28:2,3 Jer 30:21
- and thy: Pr 31:4,5

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 31:4-5 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, 5For they will drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Proverbs 29:2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.

## BLESSED IS THE LAND WITH WISE LEADERS

**Blessed are you, O land,** The well being of a nation is tied to the quality of its leadership.

**whose king is of nobility** This could mean born of noble character, or more importantly, acting with nobility and dignity (not simply inherited status). Could mean born of noble character, or more importantly, acting with nobility and dignity (not simply inherited status).

**and whose princes eat at the appropriate time--** Suggests self-control, discipline, and timely action—they do not indulge at inappropriate times (unlike in Ec 10:16).

**Bob Utley** - "**At the appropriate time**" This concept of a divinely **appropriate time** was first introduced in Eccl. 3:1-11,17; 7:17; 8:5,6,9; 9:8,11,12(twice); 10:17 (esp. Eccl. 3:11).

**For strength and not for drunkenness** - This contrasts purposeful leadership vs. self-indulgent revelry.

**Bob Utley** - **for strength**" Food is for activity, not for inactivity (drunkenness, see [SPECIAL TOPIC: WINE AND STRONG DRINK](#)). We eat to live; we do not live to eat!! One who controls the base appetite to eat probably can control other areas where self takes control. Self discipline is crucial in a leader!

A nation is blessed when its leaders are noble in character and disciplined in conduct. Their decisions are made not out of gluttony or selfish impulse, but with purpose, strength, and timing. Rulers who eat (i.e., celebrate or take pleasure) not to indulge themselves but to be fit for service create a healthy society.

**William Barrick** - Blessing, however, awaits the land with an experienced king who comes from a noble heritage and who works together with officials not given to gluttony and drunkenness (Eccl 10:17). Good national leaders exhibit a personal independence, maturity, wisdom, and self-control. (33 Cp. Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 137) Selfish, arrogant, and pleasure-seeking leaders bring trouble to any nation. In Isaiah 3:1–5 the Lord announces that He will judge His people in Jerusalem and Judah by removing the mature, the experienced, the noble, and the influential and replace them in leadership with “mere lads” and “capricious children” who will bring in an oppressive government. Such a situation brings to mind the astoundingly pettiness and ignorance of Rehoboam as he rejected the counsel of his wiser elders and listened instead to the unwise council of rash young men in 1 Kings 12:10–12. Ecclesiastes 10 is on the verge of becoming a rude reality in Solomon’s kingdom. Perhaps with his powers of keen observation he sees the trouble brewing already and with his God-given wisdom discerns what will happen when his son inherits the throne. 2Ch 13:7 refers to Rehoboam being “young and timid and could not hold his own against” his worthless companions. “Young” here is relative, since he was 41 years of age when he became king (1 Kgs 14:21).

**THOUGHT** - Not all leadership is created equal. Some rulers lead to be served; others serve to lead. Solomon reminds us that what happens in the banquet hall of the palace affects the people in the fields. Leadership begins in the heart—with humility, discipline, and purpose. “Lord, may I lead (or serve those who lead) not with pride or indulgence, but with noble character and strength for the task You’ve given.” Whether you’re a parent, teacher, or leader in any capacity, this verse reminds us: Live nobly. Feast with purpose. Lead with strength.

**Ecclesiastes 10:18** Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.



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KJV Ecclesiastes 10:18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:18 Because of laziness the building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:18 Because of laziness the roof caves in, and because of idle hands the house leaks.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:18 ν κνηρ αἰς ταπεινωθ σεταῖ ὁ κωσις κα ν ργ χειρ ν στ ξει ο κ α

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:18 By slothful neglect a building will be brought low: and by idleness of the hands the house will fall to pieces.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:18 Because of laziness the roof caves in, and because of negligent hands the house leaks.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:18 Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:18 If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:18 Laziness leads to a sagging roof; idleness leads to a leaky house.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:18 By slothfulness is the wall brought low, And by idleness of the hands doth the house drop.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:18 Thanks to idleness, the roof-tree gives way, thanks to carelessness, the house lets in the rain.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:18 Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:18 When hands are lazy, the rafters sag; when hands are slack, the house leaks.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:18 A roof sags because of laziness. A house leaks because of idle hands.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:18 When no work is done the roof goes in, and when the hands do nothing water comes into the house.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:18 Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

- Pr 12:24 14:1 20:4 21:25 23:21 24:30,31 Heb 6:11 2Pe 1:5-10

### Related Passages:

Proverbs 24:30-34 I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, 31 And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down. 32 When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction. 33 "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest," 34 Then your poverty will come as a robber And your want like an armed man.

Proverbs 10:4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Proverbs 18:9 He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.

House decaying from laziness

## THE SILENT DANGER OF LAZINESS

While those verses focused on the conduct of rulers, this verse applies the same principle of neglect and irresponsibility more generally—to the maintenance of homes, societies, or institutions.

**Through indolence the rafters sag,** Neglect caused by laziness leads to structural decay. It may happen slowly, but the result is inevitable: the house begins to sag and fall apart. Martin Luther said "If I rest, I rust!"

*You cannot kill time  
without injuring eternity.*

**Bob Utley** - This seems to be an unrelated saying (cf. TEV. NJB), which chastises inactivity (cf. Prov. 24:30-34). It may be related to characteristics of leaders (cf. NKJV, NRSV). Several of the words are rare (i.e., "rafters," BDB 900) and point toward a cultural proverb.

**Michael Andrus - If a man is lazy, the rafters sag.** (Ecc 10:18) This proverb is not difficult to grasp on the surface, but it deserves more careful attention. There are actually three proverbs here within the course of ten verses, all of which speak of laziness or idleness. The first is this: *"If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks."* The reason idleness or laziness is a concern to the Preacher is that one of the common reactions to the unfairness of life (which is one of the key themes in his book), is to adopt a kind of fatalism. Whatever will be, will be. If I'm meant to be successful or happy or productive, I will be; if not, all the effort in the world won't make me so. No, says Solomon, that is not an appropriate response. While effort alone will not guarantee success, lack of effort will almost certainly guarantee failure. The same concept is expanded in Ecc 11:4: "Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap." In other words, don't sit around waiting for the most opportune moment to work but be diligent constantly. Think about how this applies to ministry. If we wait until we're less busy, until we feel right, until just the right moment we will never witness, never serve, and never see results. ([SHARP GOADS AND HARD NAILS summary of Ecclesiastes 7-11](#))

**and through slackness the house leaks** When effort is withheld, even solid structures deteriorate. A house left to itself will begin to leak, symbolizing ruin from neglect.

**Michael Eaton** - "If attention is not paid to the everyday details of life, the results become a crippling liability." (Borrow [Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 137](#))

*The proverb should be interpreted literally and applied liberally—  
it speaks in itself of a man's need to maintain his home, but within this context  
that same axiomatic truth applies to the government of a nation just as accurately.*

**William Barrick** - What takes place within a nation might also take place within each citizen's home. The lazy homeowner will soon find himself living in a home on the verge of collapse—literally (Eccl 10:18). The roof sags precariously and the rain sprouts innumerable leaks. Ancient roofs were flat and sealed with lime, "which eventually cracked and allowed rain to seep in (cf. Prov 19:13; 27:15)." (34 Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 105.) The proverb should be interpreted literally and applied liberally—it speaks in itself of a man's need to maintain his home, but within this context that same axiomatic truth applies to the government of a nation just as accurately. (36 Daniel J. Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books) In government, Fredericks observes, "self-indulgent sluggards will only procrastinate the routine decisions necessary for the daily administration . . . . This indolence is the opposite of the urgency of the biblical work ethic." (37 Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," 225 - See Eccl 9:10; Pr 10:4; Pr 18:9; Pr 20:4; Pr 28:2.)

**Keith Krell** - In Ecc 10:18, Solomon shares another memorable proverb: "Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks." Picture a guy sitting at home with a bottle of beer in his hand, watching television. He's supposed to be doing work, taking care of things, providing for those for whom he is responsible. He's supposed to be a steward of the tasks entrusted to him. But the house is falling down. The roof is leaking. The bills are stacking up. The beer belly is growing larger.<sup>414</sup> Solomon says that this is not an appropriate response. While effort alone will not guarantee success, lack of effort will almost certainly guarantee failure. What is it that you know you need to do this week that is not done in your life? It will take you less than three seconds to answer that question. I already know what it is in my life. Now that you know what it is, name it. Plan it. Schedule it. Do it. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; because in the grave where you are going there is no planning, no foresight, and no work. You want to rest? You will have plenty of time to rest in the grave. Until then, stay busy doing what needs to be done.<sup>415</sup>

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **NO ROOM FOR SLUGGARDS** Ecclesiastes 10:18

Hard work is a Christian virtue. The call to hard work is a call to truly purposeful living. It means not wasting your life but rather doing something with the opportunities that God has placed before you. It means that instead of wasting your days as a couch potato, you decide to get up and get busy. So many Christians just while away the hours, looking at the flowers, consulting with the rain. The game of life is being played all around us, and we are sitting on the bench, sound asleep.

Though your work will differ from my work and from everybody else's work, the elements of success are always the same: planning, forethought, diligence, enthusiasm, and a full commitment to whatever God has called you to do.

Are your rafters sagging? Get up and do something about it. Does your roof leak? Get up and plug those holes.

There is a world out there. Get in it. Don't sit on the sidelines. God gave you two hands; use them. God gave you a voice; speak up. Get up and in the name of God do something. Use your power, your intelligence, your vision, your gifts, and all that God gave you to make the world a better place.

Here is the application. What is it that you know you need to do this week that is undone in your life? It will take you less than three seconds to answer that question. I already know what it is in my life. Now that you know what it is, name it. Plan it. Schedule it. Do it. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might because in the grave where you are going there is no planning, no foresight, no work. You want to rest? You will have plenty of time to rest after the grave. Until then, stay busy doing what needs to be done.

O God, help me to do my work as if Your reputation depended upon it. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- Do you have a reputation as a hard worker? What would your friends say?
- How many unfinished projects are there in your life right now?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Proverbs 24:30-34; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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[What are some Bible verses about idleness?](#)

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Tempted at Your Leisure - Temptation rarely comes in working hours. It is in their leisure time that men are made or marred.

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There is not a thing on the face of the earth that I abhor so much as idleness or idle people. —George Whitefield

**Ecclesiastes 10:19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:19 Feasts are made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:19 ε ς γ λωτα ποιο σιν ρτον κα ο νο ς ε φρα νει ζ ντας κα το ργυρ ου πακο σεται σ ν τ π ντα

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:19 Men prepare bread for laughter, and wine and oil that the living should rejoice: but to money all things will humbly yield obedience.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is prepared for laughter, and wine makes life happy, and money is the answer for everything.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:19 Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:19 A party gives laughter, wine gives happiness, and money gives everything!

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:19 For mirth they are making a feast, And wine maketh life joyful, And the silver answereth with all.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:19 We give parties to enjoy ourselves, wine makes us cheerful and money has an answer for everything.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:19 Feasts are made for laughter; wine gladdens life, and money meets every need.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:19 Bread and oil call forth merriment and wine makes the living glad, but money answers for everything.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:19 A meal is made for laughter, and wine makes life pleasant, but money is the answer for everything.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is for laughing, and wine makes glad the heart; but by the one and the other money is wasted.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:19 Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

- feast: Ec 2:1,2 7:2-6 Ge 43:34 Da 5:1-12 1Pe 4:3
- and wine: Ec 9:7 Ps 104:15 Isa 24:11 1Sa 25:36 2Sa 13:28 Lu 12:19 Eph 5:18,19
- maketh merry: Heb. maketh glad the life
- but: Ec 7:11,12 1Ch 21:24 29:2-9 2Ch 24:11-14 Ezr 1:6 7:15-18 Ne 5:8 Ps 112:9 Isa 23:18 Mt 17:27 19:21 Lu 8:3 16:9 Ac 2:45 11:29 Php 4:15-19 1Ti 6:17-19

#### Related Passages:

Isaiah 22:13 Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine: **"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die."**

Proverbs 21:17 He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

Luke 12:19-21+ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

1 Timothy 6:9-10+ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Ecclesiastes 5:10+ He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.

## THE FOOL'S PHILOSOPHY PLEASURE WITHOUT PURPOSE

**Men prepare a meal ([lechem](#) - literally bread) for enjoyment and wine makes life merry** - There is disagreement on how to interpret this verse. Some take it that people plan meals not for strength or necessity, but for pleasure and entertainment—reflecting hedonistic or indulgent motives. Others take these as positive comments. While my title and comments favor a negative approach to this verse (especially in light of the immediate context mentioning indolence and slackness Ec 10:18), one should probably avoid being too dogmatic.

**NET NOTE** - Heb "bread." The term לֶחֶם (lekhem) is used literally of "bread" and figuratively (i.e., by metonymy) for a "feast" (BDB 536–37 s.v. לֶחֶם). BDB suggests that עָשִׂה לֶחֶם ('osih lekhem) in Eccl 10:19 means "make a feast" (BDB 537 s.v. 1 עָשִׂה לֶחֶם.a). This obscure line has occasioned numerous proposals: "a feast is made for laughter" (KJV, ASV, NIV); "feasts are made for laughter" (NRSV); "men feast for merrymaking" (Moffatt); "men prepare a meal for enjoyment" (NASB); "the table has its pleasures" (NEB); "they [i.e., rulers of v. 16] make a banquet for revelry" (NJPS); "people prepare a banquet for enjoyment" (MLB); "for laughter they make bread and wine, that the living may feast" (Douay); "bread is made for laughter" (RSV); "bread [and oil] call forth merriment" (NAB).

**And money is the answer to everything** - Is this to be taken as a positive or negative comment? See [interpretations below](#). If viewed in a negative light, this is what fools think, that money is the answer for everything and can meet all one's needs.

**Charles Swindoll** sees Ecclesiastes 10:12-20 as "**A Fool's Portrait**" and on Ecc 10:19 writes that "The final trait Solomon mentioned is that fools neglect their daily obligations because they are too distracted with merrymaking and fun. This is certainly a timely observation for our high-paced and entertainment-oriented culture. Because fools party, waste time, and seek fulfillment from things money can buy, they lead careless, undisciplined lives that fail to fulfill their essential responsibilities. These responsibilities may include maintenance of home, car, or other belongings. But more often than not, the fool neglects the more important but less obvious parts of his or her life: marriage, children, work, health, and spiritual development. In the previous chapter, we saw that fools refuse to listen to rebuke and that their uncontrolled folly always makes its way into the open. While on the subject of the manifestation of folly, Solomon began adding colorful brush strokes to the pencil sketch set forth in Ecclesiastes 10:1–11. But the portrait that emerges by the end of chapter 10 is anything but delightful, especially for people who resemble its disturbing image. What begins as an almost comical sketch of the fool turns into a tragic and dangerous depiction. One thing is certain: being a fool is no laughing matter." (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World](#))

**David Hubbard** takes a negative interpretation of Ec 10:19 - "Rich" seems to connect this verse with verse 19 and suggest that the reviling thoughts and words were triggered by the whole program of carousing (v. 16), laziness (v. 18), and **profligacy** (v. 19) that tarred the reputation of the court. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**David Hubbard** goes on to add "It is only fair to say that the unified interpretation of this list of sayings (Eccl 10:16–20) is not shared by all commentators. Some would see the last three verses as detached pieces of advice added to close the whole section that began at Eccl 9:13. Moreover, many would give verse 19 a neutral or positive interpretation about the joys of festal living when one has money to afford them. In that reading, the verse would be an expansion of the thought conveyed in the alternative conclusion of Eccl 9:7. In verse 19, "answers" is related to the participle that is read "keeps him busy" (Heb. root 'ānāh) in 5:20. "Provides" or "supports" is probably the gist in verse 19, where "everything" (lit. "all") means "both": "but money provides both (bread [feast] and wine)."" (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Walter Kaiser** favors a negative approach writing "The land's misfortune through such foolishness is further compounded in 10:19 by the people's idleness and indulgence in laughter, feasts, and drinking, and money is their solution to everything: "Money answers every demand and every wish." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** favors a negative interpretation - This verse declares the personal philosophy of the foolish officers: Eat all you can, enjoy all you can, and get all you can. They are totally indifferent to the responsibilities of their office or the needs of the people. In recent years, various developing nations have seen how easy it is for unscrupulous leaders to steal government funds in order to build their own kingdoms. Unfortunately, it has also happened recently to some religious organizations. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10NKJV). The prophet Amos cried out against the wicked rulers of his day who trampled on the heads of the poor and treated them like the dust of the earth (Amos 2:7, and see Eccl 4:1; 5:11–12). The courts might not catch up with all the unscrupulous politicians, but God will eventually judge them, and His judgment will be just. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Pulpit Commentary** takes the negative approach in light of the context (Eccl 10:18), writing that here Solomon gives "a cause of the decay spoken of above. The rulers spend in revelry and debauchery the time and energy which they ought to give to affairs of state."

**New Bible Commentary** takes somewhat of a "middle of the road" interpretation - While laughter, wine and money were not despised by the Teacher, the point of v 19 is that the pleasures of life should not be its total outlook. The emphases of the Hebrew word-order here point to the failure of the slothful life: 'bread'... wine... money is the limit of its horizon. (Borrow [New Bible Commentary](#): 21st century edition)

**Jay Adams** on Eccl 10:19 - Verse 19 shows again how sinners may pervert the purpose of a good thing. A meal, instead of being used to sustain life, is turned into an occasion for riotous activity and reveling: wine is used to get drunk on,<sup>1</sup> and money is counted the solution to all problems. This philosophy of life is destructive and vain—as some of your counselees have already discovered. They must be shown how to use things for their intended, rather than perverted, purposes. (Life Under the Sun)

**James Smith** - Now Koheleth explains how the old house of state got to be in such bad shape: **For merriment they make bread, and wine [that] cheers life.** The rulers spent too much time in revelry and debauchery. They have too little time and energy to devote to the affairs of state. They have used God's good gifts intemperately and for thoughtless pleasure. For these worthless rulers "money is the answer to everything." It takes money to finance their lavish lifestyle. This they possess, and they are thus able to indulge their appetites to the utmost. No doubt much of their money was acquired by extortion and bribery as well as through exorbitant taxation. They use their high office to enhance their personal wealth (10:19). (The Wisdom Literature and Psalms)

[Jamieson](#) takes a negative approach writing "Referring to Eccl 10:18. Instead of repairing the breaches in the commonwealth (equivalent to "building"), the princes "make a feast for laughter (Eccl 10:16), and wine maketh their life glad (Ps 104:15), and (but) money supplieth (answereth their wishes by supplying) all things," that is, they take bribes to support their extravagance; and hence arise the wrongs that are perpetrated (Eccl 10:5, 6; Eccl 3:16; Isa 1:23; Isa 5:23). ([A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments](#))

In my approach of taking this verse in a negative light, this passage is not a theological endorsement of [hedonism](#) ("eat to laugh"), drunkenness ("wine makes life merry") or materialism ("money solves everything"). Instead, it reflects the thinking of a corrupt or foolish society who is living life **under the sun** (without God). People **under the sun** chase pleasures and trust wealth, ignoring godly wisdom.

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon repeatedly says: Pleasure is fleeting (Eccl. 2:1–11), Wealth cannot save you (Eccl. 5:10–15), Joy apart from God is vanity (Eccl. 2:24–26; 3:13)

**William Barrick** - The opposite of laziness is diligence. The lazy will suffer loss, but the diligent will enjoy the fruits of their labors. They enjoy food enough, drink enough, and money enough to take care of every need (Eccl 10:19). This positive interpretation of the verse depends upon associating it with the appropriate behavior of wise rulers in Eccl 10:17, rather than connecting it with the irresponsible feasting of foolish officials in Eccl 10:16. (38 Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books, 368) According to Garrett, "The

point is that at least some money is essential for enjoying life, and steps must therefore be taken to insure that the economy (be it national or personal) is sound.” (39 Garrett, Ecclesiastes, 336–37) Solomon already addressed the positive value of money or wealth in Eccl 2:26; 5:19; and Eccl 7:11–12.

**“Don’t Build Your Life on a Lie”** This verse warns us perhaps more than any other in this chapter not to be lulled by the world’s slogans: “Just enjoy life.” “Drink and forget your troubles.” “Money solves everything.” “You just go around once. Grab for all the gusto you can get!” “If it feels good, do it!” These lies may seem comforting, but they are godless and lead to emptiness. Only God offers something better: True joy is found in Christ (Ps 16:11+) and His Spirit (Gal 5:22+). Purpose in our work (Eph 2:10+). Provision that money can’t buy (2Pe 1:3-4+). Pleasure and wealth are often pursued as ends, but in the end they fail to satisfy because YOU CAN’T TAKE IT WITH YOU! Evaluate your use of money—does it rule you or serve God’s purpose? Guard against numbing your soul with food, entertainment, or drink. Use resources to bless, build, and invest in eternal things, for where your treasure is, that is where your heart is (Mt 6:19-21+). Pray for wisdom (Col 1:9+, Jas 1:5+) to avoid being ensnared in the seductive trap of indulgence disguised as success.

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**QUESTION - [What does it mean that “money is the answer for everything” in Ecclesiastes 10:19? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)**

*The Bible is not teaching here that we should focus on partying and making money; rather, it is making a broader point about wisdom vs. foolishness.*

**ANSWER** - The statement “Money is the answer for everything” comes in the middle of a section of Ecclesiastes that relates a list of seemingly unrelated proverbs. Here is the whole proverb: “A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer for everything” (Ecclesiastes 10:19). The Bible is not teaching here that we should focus on partying and making money; rather, it is making a broader point about wisdom vs. foolishness.

*In this book, the human author is answering the question  
“How does one live his or her life apart from God?”*

Before we tackle the intent of that specific proverb, let’s look at the theme of the [book of Ecclesiastes](#) as a whole. In this book, the human author is answering the question “How does one live his or her life apart from God?” The book is full of worldly wisdom, some of which is good common sense, and some of which is not good or godly at all. One might label the book “**How the World Thinks.**”

A key phrase in Ecclesiastes is **under the sun**, which is repeated throughout. It indicates that the author is sharing an earth-bound perspective. He is only considering life “**under the sun**”; that is, a human life lived to the exclusion of any consideration of God or eternity. From that godless perspective, everything is “**meaningless**” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14).

Ecclesiastes 10:19 and the statement that “**money is the answer for everything**” is part of a group of observations about wisdom and folly. The behaviors and outcomes of the wise and foolish are being contrasted. For example, Ecclesiastes 10:5–7 presents the error of elevating the foolish to positions of leadership. Ec 10:10 relates the wisdom of preparation and training.

In regard to interpreting Ecclesiastes 10:19, different commentators take different views:

Some see Ecc 10:16–20 as the application of the “wisdom-folly” contrast to a nation’s leaders. Thus Ec 10:19 says that, even for foolish kings and princes (Ec 10:16), and even for the lazy (Ec 10:18), money makes everyone hear and respond. If you have money, you have influence and resources: “*Money answers to every demand, hears every wish, grants whatever one longs for, helps to all*” ([Keil and Delitzsch, Old Testament Commentary, 6:779](#)). In this view, the statement that “money is the answer for everything” is an ancient version of our modern saying “Money talks.”

Others see Ecclesiastes 10:18–20 as a separate section and view Ec 10:19 as taking a practical view of money: “*At least some money is essential for enjoying life, and steps must therefore be taken to insure that the economy is sound*” (Borrow Garrett, [The New American Commentary, 14:337](#)).

Most likely, “**money is the answer for everything**” is simply an expression of folly. The proverb mentions feasting, wine, and merry-making as well as money. To the foolish, “*it is money that is the answer to everything*” (Borrow [Eaton, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 16:138](#)). In modern terms, the life of the foolish is circumscribed by partying, alcohol, and money. We see this foolishness play itself out in the world daily. There’s [nothing new](#) under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

It is unfortunately true that “money talks” and seems to be the answer to everything in our world. But wisdom decrees, to the king on down, that the pursuit of riches leads to trouble (see 1 Timothy 6:9–10+). Not all problems can be fixed with money. In the end, [Mammon](#) is a hard taskmaster (Mt 6:24KJV+) and only a fool would say, “*Money is the answer for everything.*”

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The final phrase of verse 19 might have caught your attention: **"Money is the answer for everything."** Indeed, commentators differ on its meaning. Is this an ironic jab at those who think money can solve every problem, or is this Solomon's sober evaluation of life as it stands? I suggest the latter as more appropriate because in one sense money is indeed the answer for everything.

The Bible never condemns money per se. A quarter is a morally neutral object—capable of being spent in a million different ways—some good, some not so good, and some positively evil. That quarter can be combined with others to provide food for a homeless man; it can also purchase pornography; or it can make a phone call to a lonely grandmother. The coin could end up traveling to Thailand to buy a hymnbook, or it could help to pay the first installment on a semester's college tuition. A teenager could use it to help buy a blouse—or bullets for a street gang. Who knows? In each case the moral value of money is determined by the ends to which it is put.

Jesus made the same point in Luke 16:9: "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." Notice the reason He gives—"so that when it is gone." What is the "it" He is talking about? Money and everything money can buy. Money fails in the end. Five minutes after you are dead someone else will have your money. Five minutes after death your checkbook will be useless to you. Think of it. All you live for, the accumulated wealth of a lifetime, everything you dreamed about, every cent you ever saved, every investment—all of it is gone forever.

After a rich man dies, people often say, "How much did he leave?" The answer is always the same: He left it all. The question is not, How much did you make? The question is, How did you spend what you had while you had it? Did you buy houses, land, stocks, furniture, new cars, new clothes? Is that all you did with your money? Was that the goal of your life? Or did you use your money to invest in things that will last forever? Those are your only two choices.

Father, thank You for so many good gifts. I pray for the wisdom to enjoy all that is mine and to use it for Your glory. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- In what sense is money the answer for everything?
- Name three things money can't buy. Name three worthwhile things you could do if you had enough money.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Proverbs 8:10-19; Luke 12:27-34; and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

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#### The Harsh Facts of Life Seldom Publicized

- 75 percent of retirees depend on friends, relatives, or Social Security as their only source of support. (Source: Social Security Administration)
- 25 percent of persons over age 65 must continue to work out of financial necessity. (Source: Social Security Administration)
- Fewer men are worth \$100 at age 68 than at age 18, after 50 years of hard work. (Source: Dewey's Economic Table)
- Total liquid assets of persons age 65 and over are approximately \$4,000 per capita. (Source: National Council on Aging)
- 93 percent of the men age 65 who have failed financially said it was because of a lack of a definite plan. (Source: LIAMA Cooperative Research)

With these kinds of statistics, retirement for a large number of people will take on a whole new meaning.

See: Ecclesiastes 10:19

**Ecclesiastes 10:20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 10:20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

NET Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not curse a king even in your thoughts, and do not curse the rich while in your bedroom; for a bird might report what you are thinking, or some winged creature might repeat your words.

BGT Ecclesiastes 10:20 κα γε ν συνεῖδ σει σου βασιλ α μ καταρ σ κα ν ταμιε ο ις κοιτ νων σου μ καταρ σ



πλοσιον τι πετειν ν το ο ρανο ποσει σ ν τ ν φων ν κα χων τ ς πτ ρυγας παγγελε λ γον

LXE Ecclesiastes 10:20 Even in thy conscience, curse not the king; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry thy voice, and that which has wings shall report thy speech.

CSB Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not curse the king even in your thoughts, and do not curse a rich person even in your bedroom, for a bird of the sky may carry the message, and a winged creature may report the matter.

ESV Ecclesiastes 10:20 Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

NIV Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

NLT Ecclesiastes 10:20 Never make light of the king, even in your thoughts. And don't make fun of the powerful, even in your own bedroom. For a little bird might deliver your message and tell them what you said.

YLT Ecclesiastes 10:20 Even in thy mind a king revile not, And in the inner parts of thy bed-chamber Revile not the rich: For a fowl of the heavens causeth the voice to go, And a possessor of wings declareth the word.

NJB Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not abuse the king, even in thought, do not abuse a rich man, even in your bedroom, for a bird of the air might carry the news, a winged messenger might repeat what you have said.

NRS Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts, or curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

NAB Ecclesiastes 10:20 Even in your thoughts do not make light of the king, nor in the privacy of your bedroom revile the rich. Because the birds of the air may carry your voice, a winged creature may tell what you say.

GWN Ecclesiastes 10:20 Don't curse the king even in your thoughts, and don't curse rich people even in your bedroom. A bird may carry your words, or some winged creature may repeat what you say.

BBE Ecclesiastes 10:20 Say not a curse against the king, even in your thoughts; and even secretly say not a curse against the man of wealth; because a bird of the air will take the voice, and that which has wings will give news of it.

RSV Ecclesiastes 10:20 Even in your thought, do not curse the king, nor in your bedchamber curse the rich; for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

- **Curse:** Ex 22:28 Isa 8:21 Ac 23:5 Ec 7:21,22 Lu 19:40
- **in your sleeping rooms** Lu 10:40 12:2,3

Words can escape our control and travel far.

## WHEN WORDS FLY FURTHER THAN WE THINK

Solomon warns against not only foolish speech in public but even private criticism of rulers. The warning is that words travel, and careless or bitter talk—especially against those in power—can have consequences. It's a powerful reminder of the unseen dangers of speech, even when we believe we are in a "safe" space.

**Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king,**Not merely about profanity, but disrespect, ridicule, or undermining authority—even in secret.

**Bob Utley** - The VERB "**curse**" (BDB 886, KB 1103, used twice) is a *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (LIKE A COMMAND). It is hard to keep reckless words a secret (cf. Luke 12:3)! Those who hear these outbursts often use them for self interest (i.e., tell the king in order to gain favor).

**And in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man,**This phrase indicates private, inner expression, or muttered speech in intimate settings like a bedroom.

**For a bird of the heavens will carry the sound** A poetic way of saying: "Words have wings." Similar to modern idioms: "A little bird told me..." Symbolizes how speech—especially slander or disrespect—travels beyond our control. This verse is the source of the idiom "**a little bird told me**" a phrase used when one does not want to reveal the source of the information that one is about to

share or has shared.

**and the winged creature will make the matter known.** **Winged creature** (ba'al kenafayim) is possibly a metaphor for a messenger, servant, or gossip. Even private contempt can be exposed. There are no truly safe places for careless words.

**David Jeremiah** - Solomon is reminding us with this illustration that a wise person doesn't say something in private that he wouldn't want someone to hear in public.

**Michael Eaton** concludes that "The verse challenges us to remain calm in days of national sloth, immaturity and indulgence, and calls for a submissive approach to authority, giving an expedient reason for obedience." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes, 138.](#))

**Walter Kaiser** "But as if to quickly caution the wise person not to be tempted to unwisely make a frontal attack on government just because some or most of the leaders lack credibility, Solomon adds verse 20. Be careful of disloyal speech that comes from disloyal thoughts. Influential members of the body politic may learn of your thoughts when some unseen event exposes you. The proverbial reference to the bird in verse 20 is like our proverb, "The walls have ears," or "Some little bird told me." Thus Solomon advises discretion, caution, and control. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**William Barrick** - Lastly, Solomon returns to private speech and rumors to warn against speaking unwisely about the king (Eccl 10:20; cp. Eccl 7:21–22). Cursing a ruler comprises a violation of the Mosaic law (Exod 22:28). Paul instructed Timothy to pray for "kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim 2:1–2). "Cursing political leaders is wrong in itself," Within the royal household few words can be spoken without someone overhearing them (see 2 Kgs 6:12)—even the walls of one's bedroom have ears. Using a bird as the illustration implies the speed with which idle words can make their way to the ears of the slandered person. Eccl 10:20 closes the chapter by twice giving an instruction to not speak a curse even within the quiet seclusion of one's bedroom. When compared with the proverb of Eccl 9:17, there is a measure of irony that, having given positive significance to a failure to listen to quiet words publicly spoken at the end of Eccl 9, Solomon ends Eccl 10 with a warning about the certainty of hearing quiet words privately spoken....It really is a matter of patriotic respect for governmental leaders. In his book, *Politics According to the Bible*, **Wayne Grudem** reminds his readers that "The Bible teaches Christians to obey and honor the leaders of the nation in which they live." (Borrow [Grudem, Politics According to the Bible](#)) He identifies this instruction in both the New Testament (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17) and the Old (Prov 24:21; Eccl 10:20; Jer 29:4–7). ([Grudem, 110–11](#))

*If nothing else, this chapter teaches us to pay proper attention to the so-called "little things" in life both personally and nationally.*

**Three kinds of animals mentioned in Eccl 10:1–20 will help us remember the message of the passage.**

The diminutive size and seeming insignificance of flies, snakes, and birds conceal the great potential for harm that they possess. (Sidney Greidanus, [Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes](#)) The flies, after all, were "flies of death" (or, "deadly flies"; Eccl 10:1). The serpent's bite can also be deadly (Eccl 10:8, 11) and the little bird carrying one's words to the king can bring dire consequences (Eccl 10:20). Bird flu epidemics have cost the lives of thousands of people even in the modern era of scientific medicine—evidence that small animals bring enormous consequences. If nothing else, this chapter teaches us to pay proper attention to the so-called "little things" in life both personally and nationally. Everything a person does matters. **The character of a government leader matters. Even a little word can have far-reaching effects.**

Questions for study:

- What little things in life possess the potential to bring substantial harm upon an individual?
- What seemingly insignificant factors have the potential to bring about serious consequences for a nation?
- How can we identify a biblical fool?

Identify some of the preparations necessary for a wise and secure life on a daily basis.

- What are the qualities of a good national leader?

Sometimes we feel safe in venting our frustrations in private—about bosses, politicians, pastors, or even family members. But Ecclesiastes warns: Speech leaks. Even your secret bitterness may one day rise to the surface. But more importantly, God hears what man cannot. "Lord, teach me to be clean not only in public but in private—pure in speech, thought, and heart."

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**Keith Krell** - Lastly, apply wisdom in withholding criticism (Ec 10:20). Solomon states that the wise person should not even criticize someone in the privacy of their bedroom. Listen to these words: "Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known." Many will ask the question, "What shall I do when those in authority over me are fools?" Solomon says, "Be careful what you say about those in authority over you. Loose lips sink ships. They also sink careers and friendships." Of course, it is hard to keep

reckless words a secret, but we must realize that words can travel like the speed of light.<sup>416</sup> Those who hear juicy gossip and slander often use them for self interest (i.e., tell the king in order to gain favor). This is the origin of the little expression: "A little bird told me." Birds don't talk, of course, but Solomon is reminding us with this illustration that a wise person doesn't say something in private that he wouldn't want someone to hear in public.<sup>417</sup> We should watch what we say because we never know who is listening. Remember, "The walls have ears!" We should always utilize discretion, caution, and control. Sam Rayburn (1882-1961), democratic politician from Texas, said, "Among my most prized possessions are words that I have never spoken."<sup>418</sup> Today, will you recommit yourself to holding your tongue? Will you strive to believe the best about people? Will you refuse to participate in gossip? If someone wants to talk to you about another person, will you shut him or her down? The truth is: gossip and slander can destroy churches. May you and I see gossip and slander in the same repulsive light as we do child molestation. We would never want to be party to this because it is sinful and we know the damage that it does. The same is true with gossip. It is utter foolishness.<sup>419</sup>

A man walked into a convenience store, put a \$20 bill on the counter, and asked for change. When the clerk opened the drawer, the man pulled a gun and asked for all the cash in the register. The man took the cash from the clerk and fled, leaving his \$20 bill on the counter. So how much did he get from the drawer? Fifteen bucks. Go figure.<sup>420</sup> We read this story and we think, "What a fool!" Yet, we often exchange God's wisdom for man's foolishness and don't think anything of it.

How should you respond to God's Word today? I would suggest memorizing James 1:5: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." If you and I humbly come to the Lord and ask to exchange our foolishness for His wisdom, He will grant this prayer every time. He will also change your life in the process. Wisdom helps make a life.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Zig Ziglar was playing golf with a young associate. At the beginning of the game, he looked at the youth with amusement. The young man was about six foot three and weighed about 220 pounds. He was uncomfortable as he approached the tee in an unorthodox way. He picked up his club, wiggled it a few times, laid it down, then repeated the whole process. Zig whispered to someone nearby, "That young man is obviously not a golfer." A moment later, the young man drove the ball about 240 yards right down the middle of the fairway. So much for Ziglar's opinion!

After the fellow hit the ball, he walked over to Zig, looked him in the eye, and said, "Mr. Ziglar, I heard what you said."

Zig wanted to disappear. He wished he could evaporate into thin air. But the young man continued, "I heard what you said when you spoke in my hometown three years ago, and it completely changed my life. I want you to know, Mr. Ziglar, that it is an honor for me to even be on the same golf course with you."

Writing in his book [Top Performance \(page 100\)](#), Ziglar said that he breathed a sigh of relief and made a new resolution that day to be far more careful in uttering his comments—especially negative ones—about another person.

So we must guard our own tongues, not allowing them to be untamed, unkind, unwise, unreasonable, or unfaithful. Our language, like our labor, is part of the "little things" that guide the well-being of our lives. (See David Jeremiah's [31 Days to Happiness: How to Find What Really Matters in Life](#))

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**Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - LITTLE BIRDS ARE LISTENING** Ecclesiastes 10:20

The above verse wraps up a section that deals with what we might call good citizenship. The Pulpit Commentary groups verses 16-20 under the title "Duties of rulers and subjects," with verses 16-19 dealing with good and bad rulers and verse 20 covering the duty of loyalty on the part of subjects.

Fundamentally verse 20 contains a warning against too much loose talk. We could paraphrase it: "Be careful what you say because your casual comments may get back to those in authority and you could end up in big trouble." Even a "harmless" joke around the office water-cooler may sound much different when it is repeated in your supervisor's office. We needn't assume that the person doing the speaking has mischief or malice in his heart. He may, but that's not the point. Sometimes in a moment of frustration we may blow off steam, saying things we don't really mean, or at least saying things in small pieces that we wouldn't say if given the chance to state them in a thoughtful manner. Or we may make a comment—humorous or not—that is truly innocent but somehow can be misinterpreted by others and used against us later. How many people have lost their jobs or any chance at career advancement precisely because they were judged to be loose cannons who could not be trusted?

Underlying this warning lies the truth that even bad leaders deserve our respect. If we believe in God at all, we must believe that promotion comes from the Lord (Psalm 75:5 -6) and that the "powers that be" are ordained by God (Romans 13:1). He raises up one ruler and brings down another. This applies just as much to office politics as to national politics. Your boss is where he is because God wants him there—which means that sometimes unworthy people are promoted to places of authority for reasons known only to God.

The lesson is clear. Be careful what you say about those in authority over you. Loose lips sink ships. They can also sink your career. So watch what you say.

Lord God, set a seal upon my lips lest I should say anything in private that I would be embarrassed to hear repeated in public. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- How would you feel if everything you said in the last forty-eight hours was broadcast over the radio? Would you have any reason to be embarrassed or ashamed?
- How do you spot a person whose lips are truly under God's control?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Exodus 22:28; 2 Kings 2:23-25; and Acts 23:1-5.

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#### Warren Wiersbe - Ecc. 10:20 LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE

In recent years, various developing nations have seen how easy it is for unscrupulous leaders to steal government funds in order to build their own kingdoms. Unfortunately, it has also happened recently to some religious organizations. The courts might not catch up with all the unscrupulous politicians, but God will eventually judge them, and His judgment will be just.

The familiar saying "A little bird told me" probably originated from verse 20. You can imagine the group of these officers having a party in one of their private rooms and, instead of toasting the king, they are cursing [making light of] him. Of course, they wouldn't do this if any of the king's friends were present, but they were sure that the company would faithfully keep the secret. Alas, somebody told the king what was said, and this gave him reason to punish them or dismiss them from their offices.

Even if we can't respect the person in the office, we must respect the office (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people" (Ex. 22:28). These hirelings were certainly indiscreet when they cursed the king, for they should have known that one of their number would use this event either to intimidate his friends or to ingratiate himself with the ruler. A statesman asks, "What is best for my country?" A politician asks, "What is best for my party?" But a mere officeholder, a hireling, asks, "What is safest and most profitable for me?"

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#### Avoid Spreading Rumors

Topics: GOSSIP, RUMORS, WORDS

Bible Verses: Proverbs 16:28; Ecclesiastes 10:20

In the summer of 1978, someone in the working-class district of Philadelphia started a rumor about 72 year old Mabel Sheehan. The word going around was that she had paid for several trips to Puerto Rico for some friends. Others said Mabel, who lived alone with her sheep dog, had bought a car for a friend.

But as the rumors spread, so did the outlandish claims. Someone said she had stashed away \$35,000 in her modest row house. Someone else guessed the amount was closer to \$45 million. None of it was true. Mabel got along on a monthly Social Security Check of \$247 and her only savings was a prepaid burial plan.

But in September 1978, a crowd of 300 curiosity seekers gathered in front of her house. The police were called in and 100 police, on horses and in riot gear, were assigned to protect the house from vandalism.

One skeptical teenager said: "If there is no money in there, why are all these police guarding the house?"

Mabel, overcome by the events, fled to a nearby convent for safety. It took police a full day of persuasion, plus 19 arrests, to convince the crowd that the whole situation was much ado about nothing.

Ignore gossip and rumors, they are trouble. Instead look to the Lord and seek Him in all that you do.