

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10 — The Folly of Man and the Value of Wisdom

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10 focuses on the contrast between:

Wisdom.

And:

Folly.

The chapter shows that foolishness does not always need to be great in order to be destructive.

Sometimes:

One careless decision.

One foolish statement.

One moment of anger.

One neglected responsibility.

One sinful action.

Can damage years of good work and reputation.

The Preacher opens with the picture of dead flies ruining expensive perfume.

The amount of corruption may be small.

But the effect is noticeable.

The lesson is clear:

A little folly can outweigh much wisdom and honor.

The chapter also examines:

Leadership.

Work.

Speech.

Anger.

Carelessness.

Laziness.

Self-control.

Human authority.

The proper use of resources.

One of the repeated lessons is that wisdom helps a person act with:

Calmness.

Preparation.

Restraint.

Diligence.

Discernment.

The fool, by contrast, repeatedly exposes himself.

His:

Actions reveal him.

Speech reveals him.

Laziness reveals him.

Lack of judgment reveals him.

Ecclesiastes 10 also gives significant attention to leadership.

A nation suffers when leaders are:

Immature.

Self-indulgent.

Undisciplined.

Lazy.

But a nation benefits when leaders exercise:

Wisdom.

Self-control.

Responsibility.

Proper timing.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 10 is:

Wisdom produces stability, restraint, diligence, and sound judgment, while even a small amount of folly can corrupt reputation, leadership, work, speech, and the good that has been built over many years.

I. A LITTLE FOLLY CAN RUIN MUCH GOOD

Ecclesiastes 10:1 — Dead Flies in the Perfume

“Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a foul stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”

The Preacher begins with a vivid picture.

A perfumer carefully prepares something:

Expensive.

Pleasant.

Fragrant.

Valuable.

Then a few dead flies fall into it.

The perfume becomes contaminated.

The fragrance becomes offensive.

The point is not about flies.

It is about reputation.

A person may spend years developing:

Wisdom.

Character.

Trust.

Honor.

Then one foolish action can damage much of what was built.

Cross References

James 3:5

The tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast about great things. Consider how a very small flame can set an enormous forest on fire.

1 Corinthians 5:6

Your boasting is not good. Do you not realize that a small amount of yeast spreads throughout the entire batch of dough?

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinful person can destroy a great amount of good.

Spiritual Principle

A small act of foolishness can create consequences much larger than the act itself.

Key Truth

Guard carefully what took years to build.

II. THE WISE AND FOOLISH HEART MOVE IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

Ecclesiastes 10:2 — Right Hand and Left Hand

“A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left.”

In biblical imagery, the right hand often represented:

Strength.

Honor.

Skill.

The Preacher is describing direction.

The wise person is oriented toward:

Discernment.

Good judgment.

Proper action.

The fool repeatedly moves toward poor decisions.

Cross References

Matthew 25:33

The Son of Man will place the sheep at His right hand and the goats at His left, separating them according to their true condition.

Ecclesiastes 2:14

The wise person has eyes to see where he is going, while the fool walks in darkness, even though both eventually face death.

Proverbs 4:27

Do not turn away toward the right or left into evil. Keep your feet away from wrongdoing.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom provides moral direction.

III. FOOLISHNESS EVENTUALLY REVEALS ITSELF

Ecclesiastes 10:3 — The Fool Announces Himself

“Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he tells everyone that he is a fool.”

Foolishness cannot remain hidden forever.

The fool reveals himself by:

Speech.

Conduct.

Decisions.

Attitudes.

He may never say:

“I am foolish.”

But his behavior says it for him.

Cross References

Proverbs 13:16

A prudent person acts with knowledge, but a fool openly displays his foolishness.

Proverbs 12:23

A wise person does not feel the need to display everything he knows, but foolish people openly reveal their lack of understanding.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool has little interest in understanding. He is mainly interested in expressing his own opinions.

Spiritual Principle

Character eventually becomes visible through conduct.

IV. CALMNESS CAN QUIET ANGRY AUTHORITY

Ecclesiastes 10:4 — Do Not Abandon Your Place

“If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.”

The Preacher gives practical advice for dealing with anger.

When someone in authority becomes angry, the natural response may be:

Anger.

Defensiveness.

Walking away.

Retaliation.

But wisdom often responds with calmness.

Cross References

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer can turn away anger, but harsh words stir up greater conflict.

Proverbs 25:15

Through patience a ruler may be persuaded, and gentle speech can break through even strong resistance.

Romans 12:18

As far as it depends upon you, do everything you reasonably can to live peacefully with everyone.

Spiritual Principle

Calmness can accomplish what confrontation sometimes cannot.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not allow someone else's anger to choose your response for you.

V. RULERS CAN MAKE SERIOUS MISTAKES

Ecclesiastes 10:5 — Error from Those in Authority

“There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from a ruler.”

Leadership does not guarantee wisdom.

A ruler can make mistakes.

Position does not make someone:

Infallible.

Wise.

Moral.

Competent.

The decisions of leaders can affect entire communities.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 5:8

If you see poor people oppressed and justice denied, do not be shocked. One official may answer to another, and there are still higher authorities above them.

Isaiah 3:12

When immature and irresponsible people rule, the nation suffers, and those who should guide the people may instead lead them in the wrong direction.

Micah 3:1

Micah called to the leaders and rulers of Israel and said, “You should understand justice and know what is right.”

Spiritual Principle

Authority increases responsibility.

It does not eliminate the possibility of foolishness.

VI. FOOLISHNESS CAN BE ELEVATED

Ecclesiastes 10:6 — The Wrong People in High Places

“Folly is set in many high places, while the rich sit in a low place.”

The Preacher observes situations where:

Foolish people receive authority.

Qualified people are overlooked.

Social positions do not always reflect wisdom or ability.

Cross References

Proverbs 19:10

Luxury does not fit a fool, and it is even less appropriate for a servant to rule arrogantly over princes.

Proverbs 30:22

The earth is disturbed when a servant suddenly rules as king without the wisdom or character needed for that position.

James 2:2

Suppose a wealthy man wearing expensive clothing enters your meeting, and a poor man wearing worn clothing enters as well.

Spiritual Principle

Position should never be confused with character.

VII. STATUS CAN BE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Ecclesiastes 10:7 — Servants on Horses

“I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking on the ground like servants.”

The image is one of social reversal.

Those expected to lead are walking.

Those expected to serve are riding.

The Preacher is not attacking servants.

He is illustrating disorder and reversal.

Cross References

Proverbs 19:10

Luxury is not fitting for a fool, and neither is it fitting for an unprepared servant to rule arrogantly over princes.

Proverbs 30:22

Certain conditions disturb the natural order, including when an unprepared servant suddenly becomes king.

1 Samuel 2:7

The Lord can make a person poor or rich. He can bring one person low and raise another person up.

Spiritual Principle

Human position can change quickly.

Wisdom matters more than title.

VIII. CARELESS ACTIONS CAN RETURN UPON THE PERSON

Ecclesiastes 10:8 — The Pit and the Serpent

“He who digs a pit may fall into it, and he who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a serpent.”

Actions have consequences.

A person digging a dangerous pit may fall into it.

A person breaking through a wall may disturb a hidden snake.

The broader lesson is:

Think before acting.

Cross References

Proverbs 26:27

The person who digs a pit to harm someone else may fall into that same pit, and the person who rolls a stone against another may have it roll back upon himself.

Psalms 7:15

The wicked person digs a pit and makes it deep, but he falls into the very hole he prepared for someone else.

Galatians 6:7

Do not deceive yourself: God cannot be mocked. A person will eventually harvest the same kind of seed he has planted.

Spiritual Principle

Foolish actions often create the very danger they intended for others.

IX. EVEN LEGITIMATE WORK REQUIRES CAUTION

Ecclesiastes 10:9 — Stones and Logs

“He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.”

Work involves risk.

The Preacher is not teaching people to avoid work.

He is teaching:

Be careful.

Prepare.

Think ahead.

Respect danger.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 19:5

Suppose a man goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and while swinging his axe the iron head accidentally flies off the handle and kills his neighbor. Such an event was to be treated as accidental rather than intentional murder.

Proverbs 27:12

A prudent person sees danger coming and takes shelter, but the inexperienced keep going and suffer the consequences.

Ecclesiastes 10:8

The person who digs a pit may fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall may encounter hidden danger.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom does not eliminate risk.

Wisdom prepares for it.

X. SHARPEN THE AXE

Ecclesiastes 10:10 — Wisdom Makes Work Effective

“If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.”

This is one of the most practical pictures in Ecclesiastes.

A dull axe still works.

But it requires much more effort.

The wise worker stops long enough to sharpen the blade.

This teaches preparation.

Sometimes the answer is not:

Work harder.

Sometimes the answer is:

Work wiser.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:17

Just as iron sharpens iron, one person can sharpen and strengthen another person.

Proverbs 24:5

A wise person possesses great strength, and a person with knowledge continually increases his ability.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

The Preacher concluded that wisdom is better than strength, even though the wisdom of a poor person is sometimes despised.

Spiritual Principle

Preparation often saves unnecessary effort.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Before demanding more strength, ask whether greater wisdom would accomplish the task better.

XI. SKILL USED TOO LATE HAS LITTLE VALUE

Ecclesiastes 10:11 — The Serpent Bites First

“If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.”

Timing matters.

A person may have great skill.

But if the skill is used too late, its usefulness is greatly reduced.

Wisdom acts before preventable damage occurs.

Cross References

James 3:8

No human being can completely tame the tongue by his own strength. It is restless and dangerous, capable of spreading deadly harm.

Psalms 58:4

The wicked carry destructive poison in their speech and behavior like the venom of a serpent, acting as though they refuse every warning.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who use it continually will experience the fruit produced by their words.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom used too late cannot always undo damage already done.

XII. WISE WORDS BRING FAVOR

Ecclesiastes 10:12 — Speech Reveals Wisdom

“The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.”

Words reveal character.

The wise person uses words with:

Grace.

Restraint.

Purpose.

The fool's own words become destructive.

Cross References

Proverbs 10:32

Righteous people know how to speak what is fitting and helpful, but wicked speech twists and damages what should be good.

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always be gracious and wise, as though seasoned properly, so you will know how to answer each person.

Proverbs 18:7

A fool's mouth becomes his own destruction, and his lips become a trap that catches him.

Spiritual Principle

Words can either build reputation or destroy it.

XIII. FOOLISH TALK GETS WORSE

Ecclesiastes 10:13 — From Foolishness to Madness

“The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.”

Foolish speech often grows.

It begins badly.

Then worsens.

One careless statement leads to another.

One lie requires another lie.

One angry sentence produces another.

Cross References

Proverbs 29:11

A fool pours out every thought and emotion without restraint, but a wise person knows how to control himself.

Proverbs 15:2

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge correctly, but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.

James 3:6

The tongue can act like a fire, spreading wrongdoing through the whole course of life and causing enormous destruction.

Spiritual Principle

Uncontrolled speech tends to become more destructive the longer it continues.

XIV. THE FOOL SPEAKS CONFIDENTLY ABOUT WHAT HE CANNOT KNOW

Ecclesiastes 10:14 — Multiplying Words About the Future

“A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?”

The fool speaks as though he knows:

Everything.

Tomorrow.

The future.

The final outcome.

The wise person recognizes uncertainty.

Cross References

Matthew 6:34

Do not become consumed with worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will bring its own concerns. Today already has enough trouble of its own.

James 4:13

Some of you say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to a certain city, stay there for a year, conduct business, and make money,” speaking as though the future were completely under your control.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not brag about tomorrow, because you do not know what even one day may bring.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom speaks about the future with humility.

XV. FOOLISH LABOR BECOMES EXHAUSTING

Ecclesiastes 10:15 — Unable to Find the Way

“The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not even know the way to the city.”

The fool works.

But without direction.

His labor becomes exhausting because he lacks basic wisdom.

This is another reminder that effort alone is not enough.

Cross References

Isaiah 55:2

Why spend your money on what cannot truly satisfy you, and why work for what does not nourish your soul? Listen carefully to God and receive what is truly good.

Proverbs 21:16

The person who wanders away from the path of wisdom will eventually find himself among those who have chosen the way of death.

Jeremiah 10:23

Lord, I know that a person's way is not completely under his own control. Human beings cannot successfully direct every step of their lives by themselves.

Spiritual Principle

Activity without direction produces exhaustion.

XVI. A LAND SUFFERS UNDER IMMATURE LEADERSHIP

Ecclesiastes 10:16 — Childish Kings and Morning Feasts

“Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!”

The issue is not merely chronological age.

The picture is of immature, self-indulgent leadership.

Leaders are feasting when they should be working.

Their priority is pleasure rather than responsibility.

The result is:

Woe to the land.

Cross References

Isaiah 3:4

God warned that immature rulers would govern the people, and leadership without maturity would bring disorder.

Isaiah 3:12

The people suffer when immature leadership dominates them and those responsible for guidance lead them down confused paths.

Proverbs 31:4

Kings and rulers should not give themselves to uncontrolled drinking, because leadership requires clear judgment.

Spiritual Principle

When leaders live for personal pleasure, the people they lead eventually suffer.

XVII. DISCIPLINED LEADERSHIP BLESSES A LAND

Ecclesiastes 10:17 — Feasting at the Proper Time

“Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of the noble, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!”

The contrast is clear.

Wise rulers know:

When to work.

When to eat.

Why to eat.

They use resources for strength rather than indulgence.

Self-control is essential to leadership.

Cross References

Proverbs 31:4

It is not fitting for kings to become controlled by wine or for rulers to become consumed with strong drink.

Isaiah 32:1

A king will reign with righteousness, and rulers will govern with justice.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine can mock a person, and strong drink can make him loud and foolish. Anyone controlled by it is not wise.

Spiritual Principle

Good leadership requires self-discipline.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The person who cannot govern himself will eventually struggle to govern others wisely.

XVIII. LAZINESS CAUSES DECAY

Ecclesiastes 10:18 — The House Begins to Leak

“Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through idleness the house leaks.”

Neglect causes deterioration.

A house does not usually collapse in one moment.

It often deteriorates gradually because maintenance is ignored.

The same is true of:

Relationships.

Finances.

Health.

Character.

Churches.

Organizations.

Nations.

Cross References

Proverbs 24:30

I passed by the field of a lazy person and by the vineyard of someone who lacked good judgment.

Proverbs 18:9

The person who is careless and lazy in his work is closely related to someone who intentionally destroys.

Proverbs 6:10

“A little sleep, a little more rest, a little folding of the hands to relax” can eventually lead to serious need.

Spiritual Principle

Neglect creates damage slowly but surely.

Key Truth

What you repeatedly refuse to maintain will eventually deteriorate.

XIX. RESOURCES HAVE PRACTICAL USE

Ecclesiastes 10:19 — Bread, Wine, and Money

“Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.”

The Preacher is speaking practically about life under the sun.

Food supports celebration.

Wine was associated with festivity.

Money provides answers to many practical material needs.

But the wider book has already made clear:

Money cannot answer everything spiritually.

It cannot provide:

Salvation.

Eternal life.

True contentment.

Perfect wisdom.

Cross References

Proverbs 15:15

All the days of a deeply troubled person may feel miserable, but a cheerful heart experiences something like a continual feast.

1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money is a root from which many kinds of evil grow, and some people have wandered away from faith because of their determination to become rich.

Proverbs 31:6

Strong drink was sometimes given in ancient society to those suffering severe distress or facing great pain.

Spiritual Principle

Money can solve many material problems.

It cannot solve the deepest problems of the soul.

XX. GUARD EVEN YOUR PRIVATE SPEECH

Ecclesiastes 10:20 — Words Travel

“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, and some winged creature will tell the matter.”

The Preacher warns about secret speech.

People often assume:

“Nobody will know.”

But private words have a way of becoming public.

The expression about a bird carrying the message is a vivid picture of how quickly information can travel.

Cross References

Exodus 22:28

Do not speak contemptuously against God, and do not curse or dishonor the ruler of your people.

Luke 12:3

What you have spoken in darkness may eventually be heard in the light, and what you whispered privately may be publicly announced.

Habakkuk 2:11

Even the stones in the wall seem ready to cry out against hidden wrongdoing, and the beams of the house seem prepared to answer them.

Spiritual Principle

Speak privately in a way that you would not be ashamed to hear repeated publicly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If the truth becoming public would destroy you, reconsider what you are saying in private.

XXI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 10

1. A Little Folly Can Ruin Much Good

One foolish decision can damage:

Years of reputation.

Years of trust.

Years of faithful work.

Principle:

Never underestimate the cost of one careless choice.

2. Wisdom Produces Stability

The wise person responds with:

Calmness.

Discernment.

Restraint.

Principle:

A calm spirit can sometimes solve what anger would make worse.

3. Wisdom Makes Work More Effective

The dull axe requires unnecessary force.

Principle:

Preparation can accomplish what raw effort cannot.

4. Words Reveal Character

The wise speak graciously.

The fool destroys himself with his own mouth.

Principle:

Your words eventually tell people what kind of heart you have.

5. Leadership Matters

Immature leadership harms a nation.

Disciplined leadership strengthens it.

Principle:

Leadership is stewardship, not an excuse for self-indulgence.

6. Laziness Causes Decay

Neglected things deteriorate.

Principle:

Small responsibilities ignored repeatedly become large problems later.

7. Private Words Have Consequences

Secret speech may eventually become public.

Principle:

Integrity means being the same person when nobody seems to be listening.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT FOLLY

Folly does not always appear dramatic.

Sometimes it appears as:

Careless speech.

Quick anger.

Neglect.

Poor preparation.

Bad timing.

Immaturity.

One foolish choice.

That is what makes folly dangerous.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The size of the foolish act does not always determine the size of the damage.

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT ANGER

Verse 4 teaches us how to respond when anger rises against us.

The answer is not always:

Run.

Shout.

Retaliate.

Fight.

Sometimes the wise response is:

Remain calm.

Stay steady.

Respond gently.

Spiritual Principle

You cannot always control another person's temper.

You can control whether their anger becomes yours.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT WORK

Work requires more than effort.

It requires:

Skill.

Preparation.

Attention.

Safety.

Wisdom.

A dull axe illustrates wasted energy.

Key Truth

Hard work matters.

Wise work matters too.

XXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT SPEECH

The chapter gives several warnings about words.

A fool:

Talks too much.

Talks foolishly.

Talks destructively.

Talks confidently about things he cannot know.

The wise person:

Speaks carefully.

Speaks graciously.

Speaks with restraint.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Before speaking, ask:

Is it true?

Is it wise?

Is it necessary?

Is this the right time?

XXVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Leadership requires:

Maturity.

Discipline.

Clear judgment.

Responsibility.

Self-control.

The nation suffers when rulers use leadership mainly for personal pleasure.

Spiritual Principle

Leadership magnifies character.

If character is wise, leadership can bless.

If character is foolish, leadership can multiply damage.

XXVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT LAZINESS

Laziness often does not destroy immediately.

It destroys gradually.

One neglected repair.

Then another.

One ignored responsibility.

Then another.

Finally:

The roof leaks.

The structure weakens.

Key Truth

Neglect is destruction in slow motion.

XXVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT MONEY

Money has practical usefulness.

It can provide:

Food.

Housing.

Transportation.

Tools.

Resources.

Opportunities.

But money is not God.

Spiritual Principle

Money can answer financial needs.

It cannot answer eternal needs.

XXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What do the dead flies in verse 1 represent?

They illustrate how a relatively small amount of folly can ruin something valuable.

One foolish decision can damage years of wisdom and honor.

Question 2

What does verse 2 mean about the right and left hand?

It describes the different directions of wisdom and folly.

Wisdom guides toward sound judgment.

Foolishness repeatedly leads toward wrong decisions.

Question 3

How does a fool reveal himself?

Through:

Speech.

Conduct.

Choices.

Lack of judgment.

Foolishness eventually becomes visible.

Question 4

What should we do when someone in authority becomes angry with us?

We should avoid impulsive reactions.

Calmness, patience, and wise speech may help settle the situation.

Question 5

Can leaders make foolish decisions?

Yes.

Authority does not guarantee wisdom.

That is why leadership requires humility and good counsel.

Question 6

What do verses 8–9 teach?

They teach that actions have consequences and that even legitimate work should be done carefully.

Question 7

What does the dull axe represent?

It represents ineffective effort caused by lack of preparation.

Sometimes greater wisdom is more useful than greater strength.

Question 8

What does verse 11 teach about timing?

Skill used after the damage has already occurred may be useless.

Wisdom recognizes when action is needed.

Question 9

How does foolish speech destroy a person?

Foolish speech can:

Damage reputation.

Create conflict.

Spread sin.

Expose ignorance.

Bring consequences.

Question 10

What kind of leadership harms a nation?

Leadership marked by:

Immaturity.

Self-indulgence.

Drunkenness.

Lack of discipline.

Neglect.

Question 11

What does the leaking roof teach?

Neglected responsibilities eventually create visible damage.

Question 12

Why should private speech be guarded?

Because private words may eventually become public, and because God is aware of what people say even when others are not listening.

XXX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 10 asks several searching questions.

Is There a “Little Folly” I Am Ignoring?

Could one small compromise damage something valuable?

How Do I Respond to Anger?

Do I become angry simply because another person is angry?

Am I Prepared for My Responsibilities?

Am I swinging a dull axe harder instead of stopping to sharpen it?

What Do My Words Reveal?

Do my words show:

Wisdom?

Grace?

Self-control?

Or:

Pride?

Anger?

Foolishness?

Am I Diligent?

What have I neglected that is beginning to deteriorate?

How Do I Handle Leadership?

If I have authority, do I use it responsibly?

Am I Self-Controlled?

Do I know when enough is enough?

Would I Be Comfortable If My Private Words Became Public?

Is my private speech consistent with my public character?

XXXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Protect a Lifetime of Wisdom from a Moment of Folly”

A person may spend:

Twenty years.

Thirty years.

Forty years.

Building:

Trust.

Character.

Ministry.

Reputation.

Relationships.

Then one foolish decision can damage what took decades to build.

That is the lesson of:

Dead flies in the perfume.

Principle:

Do not trade long-term honor for short-term foolishness.

XXXII. SHARPEN THE AXE

One of the greatest lessons in this chapter is:

“If the iron is blunt ... he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.”

Many people assume every problem requires:

More work.

More hours.

More effort.

More pressure.

Sometimes what is needed is:

Better preparation.

Better tools.

Better counsel.

Better planning.

Better skill.

More wisdom.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Before working harder, make sure you are not simply working duller.

XXXIII. THE POWER OF CALMNESS

Ecclesiastes 10:4 teaches that calmness can settle great offenses.

That is a valuable principle for:

Marriage.

Leadership.

Churches.

Workplaces.

Families.

Conflict.

When someone raises the temperature:

Wisdom does not always raise it higher.

Sometimes wisdom lowers it.

Spiritual Principle

Calmness is not weakness.

It is strength under control.

XXXIV. LEADERSHIP AND SELF-CONTROL

The difference between verses 16 and 17 is largely the difference between:

Indulgence.

And:

Discipline.

Bad leaders feast at the wrong time.

Good leaders know:

When to work.

When to rest.

When to celebrate.

When to exercise restraint.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The person who leads others must first learn to lead himself.

XXXV. NEGLIGENCE IS SLOW DESTRUCTION

A leaking roof usually did not begin leaking yesterday.

The damage developed.

Maintenance was delayed.

The problem grew.

This applies far beyond houses.

Neglect can damage:

A marriage.

A family.

A ministry.

A church.

A career.

Finances.

Health.

Spiritual life.

Principle:

Deal with small problems before they become large ones.

XXXVI. WORDS THAT TRAVEL

The chapter closes with a warning.

Do not assume:

“This is private.”

Words have a way of traveling.

Today that principle is even easier to understand.

A private statement can be:

Repeated.

Forwarded.

Recorded.

Shared.

Misquoted.

Publicized.

Wisdom therefore says:

Do not merely manage where you speak.

Manage what kind of person speaks.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Character is safest when there is nothing in private that requires a different public version of you.

XXXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10 teaches that wisdom often appears in ordinary decisions.

Wisdom is not merely:

Knowing theology.

Knowing facts.

Having intelligence.

Wisdom is knowing how to live.

It knows:

When to remain calm.

When to prepare.

When to speak.

When to stop speaking.

When to work.

When to sharpen the axe.

When to exercise restraint.

When to deal with neglect.

The chapter warns us not to underestimate folly.

A small foolish decision can damage:

A good name.

A marriage.

A ministry.

A career.

A testimony.

A friendship.

Years of trust.

Therefore:

Guard the small decisions.

Guard your temper.

Guard your speech.

Guard your work habits.

Guard your private conversations.

Guard your responsibilities.

Do not become careless merely because something seems small.

Small flies ruined the perfume.

Small yeast affects the whole batch.

A small fire can burn a forest.

A little folly can outweigh much wisdom.

The chapter also reminds leaders:

Your leadership matters.

If God has given you responsibility over:

A family.

A church.

A business.

A ministry.

A community.

People are affected by your character.

Lead with:

Wisdom.

Discipline.

Restraint.

Humility.

And do not neglect the ordinary things.

A roof collapses because maintenance was ignored.

Likewise, lives often break down because small responsibilities were repeatedly postponed.

So:

Sharpen the axe.

Prepare wisely.

Work diligently.

Speak carefully.

Remain calm.

Lead responsibly.

Maintain what God has placed in your care.

And protect a lifetime of honor from a moment of foolishness.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom You give us through Your Word.

Protect us from the small foolish choices that can create great damage.

Help us understand that little compromises can produce serious consequences.

Guard our character.

Guard our reputation.

Guard our testimony.

Give us wisdom in the way we think.

Give us wisdom in the way we respond to anger.

When others become angry, help us remain calm.

Give us gentle words.

Give us patience.

Give us self-control.

Father, help us work wisely.

Show us when we need greater effort.

But also show us when we need to stop and sharpen the axe.

Give us wisdom to prepare.

Give us wisdom to plan.

Give us wisdom to learn.

Give us wisdom to use the right tools.

Protect us from careless actions.

Help us recognize danger before damage occurs.

Guard our mouths.

Let our words be gracious.

Keep us from foolish talking.

Keep us from endless talking.

Keep us from boasting about a future we cannot see.

Teach us to speak truth with humility.

Father, give wisdom to leaders.

Give them:

Maturity.

Discipline.

Integrity.

Self-control.

Good judgment.

Protect them from selfish indulgence.

And when You give us leadership responsibility, help us remember that authority is stewardship.

Protect us from laziness.

Show us anything we have neglected.

Help us repair what is beginning to break.

Help us strengthen relationships before they collapse.

Help us address problems while they are still small.

Guard even our private speech.

May our private words honor You as much as our public words.

Make us people of integrity.

Help us live in such a way that we do not need one character in public and another in private.

Above all, make us wise.

Help us protect what You have entrusted to us.

Let wisdom guide our:

Work.

Speech.

Leadership.

Relationships.

Choices.

And may our lives honor You in both the great decisions and the small ones.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a foul stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.” — Ecclesiastes 10:1

Central Truth

Wisdom produces calmness, preparation, diligence, disciplined leadership, and careful speech, while even a small amount of folly can damage reputation, waste effort, corrupt leadership, destroy relationships, and undo much that wisdom has built.

Ecclesiastes 10 in One Sentence

The Preacher warns that even small acts of folly can destroy great good while showing that wisdom brings calmness, careful preparation, effective work, gracious speech, disciplined leadership, diligence, and restraint in every area of life.