

Ecclesiastes 10

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2026

Preacher: Ben Panner

[0 : 00] Ecclesiastes 10 verses 1 through 20. If you would please stand with me for the reading of God's word as you are able.

! Again, that's Ecclesiastes 10, 1 through 20. Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench. So a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler.

Folly is set in many high places and the rich sit in a low place. I have seen slaves on horses and princes walking on the ground like slaves. He who digs a pit will fall into it and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

[1 : 06] He who quarries stones is hurt by them and he who splits logs is endangered by them. If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer. The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness and the end of his talk is evil madness. A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be and who can tell him what will be after him.

The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child and your princes feast in the morning. 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.

Through sloth the roof sinks in and through indolence the house leaks. Bread is made for laughter and wine gladdens life and money answers everything. Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich.

[2 : 22] For a bird of the air will carry your voice or some winged creature tell the matter. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen.

Well, let me pray for us. Jesus, you are the living word. And we pray that you would nourish us today. And as we come to your written word, Lord, would you please give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

And hearts that are ready to receive your word and faith and obedience. That we would follow you rightly, Lord. Help us break through the hardness of heart that we might have.

And help us to sit under your word rightly. That we may respond to it. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. But when we think about growth in life, it's often connected to listening to or learning from the right people around us.

So think about a university student. They pick a certain class because the professor may have a specific expertise that they want to learn from. Or maybe they choose another course because the subject is uniquely relevant to them.

[3 : 42] We want to listen and we want to learn. Think about the workplace. We look to the veteran employee because they have a unique set of skills. And we want to look at them and learn from them because how they have acted in the workplace has led to some kind of success.

We want to watch and learn. Or maybe just in daily life. We look to people who are godly and mature. And we long to sit around their dinner table so that we can glean from their experience of

godly wisdom.

They're people that we want to be like. So there's likely places that we would turn to to learn about how to live in life. Our text, though, gives us an unlikely place to turn to and learn from.

It's not a person with a successful expertise or godly experience. And especially not somebody with godly maturity. Today, we are going to learn from a fool.

My title for the text today is A Crash Course on the Fool. A Crash Course on the Fool. The dominant description of chapter 10 here in Ecclesiastes is the fool.

[4 : 55] One commentator put it this way. A fool refers to someone who lacks the proper fear of God and therefore is prone to go the wrong direction in life. So we need to think for a moment.

Why do we need to spend so much time today looking to and learning from the fool and his foolish folly? Well, let's think just last week. Last week, we were reminded that it's better to be a living dog than a dead lion.

It's better to be a mangy, scavenging dog than a regal, royal lion. One would be alive and one would be dead.

I'd rather be a living dog. But though it's good to be alive, chapter 10 reminds us that we live in a world full of folly. And our own hearts in this world are prone to wander.

So moments of foolishness, we all have them. A tendency toward folly, it's in every single one of us. And so this crash course on the fool is meant to motivate our hearts to keep choosing wisdom again and again in a world of folly.

[6 : 10] Even though wisdom may have limits and can't bring ultimate advantage to us in a broken world, as we've learned throughout this whole series, wisdom will always be worth it, even if we can't see all of the benefits in front of our eyes.

So today, this text is here to teach us this. To grow in wisdom, we must learn from the fool. If we want to grow in wisdom, we have to learn from the fool.

And we're going to see that in Ecclesiastes chapter 10. So this passage is really organized by way of contrast. There's this dominant refrain of the fool, but it's contrasted often with these little moments of wisdom for us.

We're going to see five angles on the fool. With five lessons for five different areas of life to help us choose wisdom over folly.

We're going to see the fool and authority. We're going to see the fool and society. We're going to see the fool and work. The fool and words.

[7 : 11] And then the fool and power. So let's start with verses 1 to 4. The fool and authority. These first couple verses, in a sense, we get a mini portrait of the fool and his folly.

Look at verse 1. Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench. So a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. If this is a course on the fool, this image is probably going to be on the syllabus for us.

This sweet aroma of perfume. You can probably think about that now and smell it. It's valuable. Its smell was desirable.

But just imagine these nasty little flies landing in it and dying. And then giving off a stench that is so strong that it overwhelms the perfume.

A little folly can ruin a big thing. A foolish response at home. A foolish decision at work. A foolish trip on the weekend.

[8 : 20] A foolish post on the internet. A foolish investment of money in a moment. A little folly can have a big influence.

Just like dead flies stinking up beautiful perfume. That's the influence of the fool and his folly. What about his inclinations in verse 2?

It says, The wise man's heart is inclined to the right, but the fool's heart goes left. In the Bible, often going to the right is often described as this moral right way of righteousness.

God's way. Well, the fool wants nothing to do with that way. The fool is going to go left every time. His inclination is to choose their own way.

To be inclined towards proud independence away from God. So there's an inclination towards the way of foolishness. There's also ignorance in verse 3.

[9 : 18] They lack sense. They talk to everyone else about everybody else's foolishness, but they can't see it in themselves at all. So the folly of the fool's folly is a powerful influence.

And his heart is inclined away from God. And the fool lives in this proud ignorance where everybody else seems to be the problem. So think about it.

To grow in wisdom, we need to learn from the fool. What lessons are we already starting to see from this mini portrait of the fool? Well, the preacher gives us almost a test case in verse 4 to help us.

He puts this scene before us. He's almost saying, imagine you're before an angry authority. And their anger actually rises up against you. Well, remember those dead flies?

Be careful not to add even a little bit of folly to that situation. Don't add fuel to the fire. Because even a little bit can have a lot of ruin.

[10:18] Instead, what does the preacher say in verse 4? He says, remain in your place humbly. Remain calm. Respond gently. Don't fight anger with anger. Verse 4, like we said, is this contrast.

It's demonstrating wisdom in contrast to the way of the fool to help us navigate our way in life under authority. You see, the wise are not ignorant to their own tendencies.

And the wise seek to bring calmness and healing to a situation, not to inflame it with their own foolish anger. Think of our wise king, Jesus.

He didn't fight fire with fire. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten. But he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

So if we want to grow in wisdom here at Christ Church Chicago, we need to grow in humble, gentle posture towards those who are in authority positions over ourself.

[11:24] That seeks calmness and healing for that situation. We need to learn from the fool. And in doing so, hopefully it's going to stir us up toward the way of wisdom.

Especially as we find ourselves in situations under an authority that may even be angry or unjust.

But in this crash course on the fool, the preacher moves in verses 5 to 7 to the fool and society.

See, verses 5 and 7, they really show us the impact of a foolish leader who is over a kingdom. Look there with me. The king makes an error and he sets folly into positions of influence in society.

And the result of it is that everything gets flipped upside down. You see, when foolishness and folly is on top in political positions of society, the normal ordering of life is off.

There's upheaval. There's disorder. And even those who might have capacity to do good and have positive influence in society, they're quickly relegated to the bottom and the outside.

[12:35] We only need to look at the news to be reminded that, yes, kingdoms can be very powerful and yet they are so fragile. When folly is in positions of influence in society, people end up getting hurt.

Chaotic disorder starts to ensue. To grow in wisdom, we need to learn from the fool and his ways.

So what do we learn from a foolish leader and his full foolish leadership?

Well, these verses on one level, they help to set an expectation for us. An expectation for life in the public sphere. They help us to know why things are the way that they are.

When our country, from decade to decade, often might feel upside down at different moments, it should grieve us, but it shouldn't surprise us one bit.

Because each society is vulnerable to the folly of those who are in charge. But there's an implied contrast for us in these verses.

[13:39] You see, the way of wisdom, in contrast to the folly in leadership, the way of wisdom would be this. One of sacrificial care. One of prudent order.

And one of righteous doing good. In whatever sphere of influence we may find ourselves in. So I wonder for Christ Church Chicago, what spheres of influence do we find ourselves in?

Has God placed this church in? From Woodlawn, to Hyde Park, to Kenwood, to Chicago at large? To our school system, to the university right here in our backyard?

To classrooms, to the office? I wonder about these spheres of influences and these spaces if we are going to be led by wisdom. That we might give ourselves to not the way of folly that turns things upside down, but a sacrificial care.

And a love and a certain order that is seeking the good of those that are under our charge. We need to learn from the fool. And in doing so, hopefully we're going to be stirred up toward the way of wisdom.

[14:50] Well, the crash course on the fool keeps going. It's needed for every single one of us in this room. And we move to the realm of work.

The fool and work. Look at verses 8 and 9. I'll read those out. It says, He who digs a pit will fall into it. And a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

He who quarries stones is hurt by them. And he who splits logs is endangered by them. Very simply, it's just talking about that accidents in life and at work are simply unavoidable.

Some things are out of our control. And some dangers and difficulties just are going to come about and we can't do anything about it. But verses 10 and 11, they actually give two more proverbs for us that I think reveal different responses that we could have in light of the unavoidable things of life.

You see, wisdom can either be applied or wisdom could be avoided. It could be avoided like a fool. Verse 10, where it's talking about this iron that's blunt and one does not sharpen the edge.

[16:03] He must use more strength. But wisdom helps one to succeed. You see, a fool is just going to keep using a dull blade. And they're going to keep wearing themselves out over and over.

And it's going to cause more work. But what is the wise person going to do? Before they even get started, they're going to sharpen that blade and go be able to do their work with much ease and much help.

Or the snake charmer. You see, the snake charmer needs to actually charm the snake before it bites. Otherwise, all his experience, all his expertise is going to amount to absolutely nothing.

What these proverbs are pointing to for us is the need for practical, patient planning and thinking about things before we enter into them.

We can't avoid the challenges. We can't avoid the accidents. We can't avoid the difficulties. They're going to come. They're unavoidable. But there is a place for practical, patient planning in life that if we avoid, we're actually going to open ourselves up to even more opportunities.

[17:10] But we can have a kind of patience, a kind of planning when it comes to the workplace that can help us to succeed more than if we avoid that. You see, fools avoid that.

What does the fool do? They rush into decisions without thought or consideration of any of the consequences on themselves or others. That's what fools do.

They run straight into it no matter what. I wonder about your work life. Are you prone to quick, reckless decisions? If we do that, we're opening ourselves up to even more potential conflict and even more difficulty.

To grow in wisdom. It means in part to grow in this patient planning and preparation that can set ourselves up and others up on a right, good trajectory.

The way of the fool. It should be motivating us to choose wisdom over and over and over again. A little folly can have a big impact in relationships.

[18:15] It can have a big impact on society. It can have a big impact at work. What about our words? You know, some studies say that we speak around 10,000 or more words in a single day.

That's pretty amazing. Some of you are like, wow, I talk way more than that. But I don't know. That was surprising to me. Maybe because I don't talk a whole lot. I don't know. But that's a lot of opportunity for folly to have its way.

The fool and his words in verses 12 to 15. You know the phrase, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can destroy relationships.

That's what I think the fairies should be. I think they need to change that. And it's true. Words hurt. Words can harm. Words can have a disastrous effect if they're foolish words.

Look at verse 12. Starting to talk about the fool's mouth. See, unlike the wise man, the wise man uses his words in his mouth to give grace to others and win favor from others.

[19:27] But the fool's mouth causes harm to himself and certainly is of no value to other people. And the fool's words in verse 13, it leads him towards even more evil and wickedness.

It's like this snowball effect. Just a little bit of foolishness. A little bit of foolish talk. And it starts to go down the hill and get bigger and bigger and bigger and then become an avalanche of words of destruction upon others.

Leading to more evil. Leading to more consequence. Leading to more wickedness. The fool, even in verse 14, multiplies his words. Constantly speaking of, constantly boasting of things that he cannot actually know.

Nobody knows what's to come in front of us. We can't predict the future. But what the fool does is they start to make boasts about what they do not know and what they cannot actually predict.

It's this pride and arrogance that is coming forth from the fool's mouth. If we go to the New Testament, there's a lot to say about words in the New Testament.

[20 : 31] The book of James speaks to the dangers and the folly of our words. It talks about the tongue being untamed and the impact of that. Is that an untamed, unwise tongue is going to burn relationships and spread like wildfire and cause devastation.

You see, foolish words, they're a restless evil. A deadly poison. A relational weapon that can cause mass destruction. Gossip.

Slander. Lying. Boasting. Criticism. 10,000 words a day. How have you been prone this day, this week?

What would that be? 70,000 words in a week. How have you been prone to use dangerous, destructive words like a fool? In your family.

With your roommates. At work. In church. How have your words been used to harm? Well, the end of a fool's words is evil madness.

[21 : 41] But to be wise with our words, we need to learn from the fool. Instead of words that consume us or others, we need to fill our mouths with gracious words.

Listen to Proverbs 16. Gracious words are like a honeycomb. Sweetness to the soul and health to the body. What honeycomb is for the body, gracious words are for the soul.

Gracious words are sweetness to the weary person. They're strength for the worn down. They are of help to the sinner. Listen to Proverbs 16. Give honeycomb. Give gracious words.

Give truth and love for the good of those that you are speaking to. The words of the fool and its impact should humble us, should cause caution from us, to use our 10,000 words a day to actually speak truth and grace to others.

Well, this crash course on the fool, it keeps going. Because we have more to learn. And we'll consider the fool in power in verses 16 to 20.

[22 : 48] You see, in these verses, what we find is an immature, inexperienced leader in power contrasted with the wise, discerning leader in power.

The first one is a woe. The second one is a blessing. And it keeps going by way of contrast, I think, in the rest of this section into verses 18 and 19.

The immature leader is consumed with partying and self-indulgence. And the wise, discerning leader is disciplined and principled and actually brings about a level of flourishing.

You see, the kingdom of the immature leader is one in verse 18 that's going to be known for laziness. It's going to be known for folly. That is going to lead to a crumbling community.

But the kingdom of a mature leader is going to experience laughter, flourishing, joy, even financial provision that is going to provide for these things and the flourishing of the kingdom.

[23 : 45] But when we find ourselves under the first kind of leadership, a foolish leadership, immature power, prone towards self-indulgence, where do our thoughts and our words naturally go?

Isn't it easy to just trash, to just tear down, to just attack those who are in power with our thoughts or our words? Our preacher here today is reminding us of the dangerous use of words and letting folly get the best of us.

Don't curse those in power, lest your foolish comments get out and come back to your harm in some way. Now, this doesn't mean that there's no place for a prophetic voice that would speak against wrong or injustice.

The Bible has those categories. The Bible has those examples. And there are certain tones and ways to actually respond and motivations to do that in society.

But the preacher is talking more about just these natural, offhand, unrighteous, angry, maybe even jealous attacks on those who are in power.

[25 : 00] And I think what it's pointing us to is that really in this land of free speech that we live in, we actually need more restrained speech. We need to have speech that is under control as we think about those who are above us.

The fool in power. The fool in words. The fool in work. The fool in society. The fool in authority. A crash course on the fool.

To grow in wisdom, though, we need to learn from him. We need to let him teach us that we might go in the way of wisdom. Well, there's one more thing that I want to point us to from this chapter.

And it's really at the foundation, I think, of all of this. It's one more thing about the fool. And it's the foundation of the rest. It's the fool in the heart.

Go back to verse 2 with me. A wise man's heart inclines him to the right. But a fool's heart to the left.

[26 : 05] Again, the wise man's heart is inclining him to the right. Meaning this way of God. This righteous way that he is called to go. Representing morally good in a godly way.

While the left is the complete opposite. Really, what this is pointing to is the core of the problem of the fool. It's his heart's disposition toward God.

His heart wants to go his own way. It is resistant to God. It refuses the fear of God. It rejects God's ways. And the New Testament picks up on this theme of the heart.

Jesus said this. For from within, out of the heart of a person, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, evil, slander, pride, and foolishness.

And Jesus also taught this. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

[27 : 12] The heart is the issue. And the heart is the foundation. Now, every person, even the wisest among us, can act foolishly at times.

And whether you're a Christian here today or not, we cannot avoid folly perfectly. But it really boils down to this. Is that when you recognize folly, and you recognize sin in your own life, does it turn you to God in humble repentance and a humble surrender to ask God for help to lead you now in the way of wisdom?

Or does your heart turn you back to yourself? Or back to somebody else to try to be the solution to help you? Surrendering to God is absolutely necessary for our heart disposition to be changed.

We can't do it on our own. But God can. I love what Titus 3 says. Titus 3 describes what God can do in the gospel for a foolish person.

It says this, God can take fools and make them his family.

[28 : 42] God can take your folly and offer you forgiveness. God can take your foolishness and help you by the power of his spirit to lead you on the way of wisdom, to follow Jesus Christ.

God can change your foolish heart and teach you how to live in the way of wisdom. But surrender is needed. Your heart needs to stop going to the left, away from God.

And it needs to trust in Jesus to give you a new heart. And those who do so, you're going to start growing in wisdom as you turn to him. There's many of you here today who already have surrendered your heart to God.

And your heart disposition has already been changed. What is verse 2 pointing to us? It's actually wanting you to consider your heart's dependence on God.

So, if you're a Christian, every one of us, you are still going to struggle with those old foolish ways. And in those moments, you are going to need to go to God and independence, ask for his help to walk in the way of wisdom.

[29 : 53] Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 5. Church family, in a world full of folly, our hearts are prone to wander.

We need dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to change us and renew us and help us walk in the way of wisdom. And walk in the way of Jesus. Ask God in prayer that the spirit of wisdom would give you discernment how to respond to authority.

Search the scriptures that the spirit of wisdom would illuminate your heart and mind of God's will for your life at work or with your words or in society.

Things like this, gathering with God's people, the spirit of wisdom can actually teach us the way of wisdom. Even if our heart's disposition towards God has changed, we still need a heart dependence on God each and every day.

The fool and the heart is to teach us about our own heart's disposition towards God. So a crash course on the fool. It's intended to stir every one of us up to stop going to the left and start going to the right in the way of wisdom.

[31 : 25] And wisdom is always going to be better. Even if we can't see its benefits, even if we can't see the fruit of it, we don't want to go down the path of folly. We've seen that today. God, help us to choose wisdom.

Wisdom must win. And to grow in wisdom, we need to learn from the fool. Let's pray. Father in heaven, you sent Jesus Christ, the true wisdom, to this earth to love us, to save us, to empower us.

That we might live more and more and grow in the way of wisdom, Lord. We know that there is a tendency towards folly in our life. We live in a world full of folly.

And we need your help. Would you change our heart's disposition and also give us an ongoing dependence on you from the heart that what would come out of us, Lord, would you change our heart's disposition and also give us an ongoing dependence on you from the heart that what would come out of us, Lord,