

**Folly is Fatal**  
Ecclesiastes 10:1-20  
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In a 2019 survey, 32% of Protestant churchgoers said they read the Bible every day, and 27% read it a few times a week. However, a 2022 survey found that only 10% of Americans read the Bible daily.

According to the American Bible Society's annual report, while two-thirds of Americans identify themselves as Christians, only 6 percent of that group have a biblical worldview. Incidentally, it's no coincidence that biblical literacy and biblical morality have plummeted simultaneously.

Many struggle with Bible reading simply because they don't know where to read. Pastor Kyle prepares a new Bible reading plan every month, which I find to be very helpful. This month, we're in the second half of the minor prophets. You can pick up a copy at one of the resource kiosks or access it digitally on our website or app.

With fewer people knowing the Bible, many don't realize the genesis (pun intended) of the phrases they use. Here are some sayings in our society that find their source in Scripture.

- *"A drop in the bucket"* comes from Isaiah 40:15: ***"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales."***
- *"To escape by the skin of your teeth,"* refers to having a narrow escape. Job 19:20: ***"...I have escaped by the skin of my teeth."***
- *"See the writing on the wall"* is a way to say that something bad is about to happen as first described in Daniel 5:5: ***"Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace..."***
- *"Go the extra mile"* is from the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said in Matthew 5:41: ***"And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."***

As we come to Ecclesiastes 10, we find two more common cultural sayings.

- “A fly in the ointment” is from verse 1: **“Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”**
- “A little bird told me” comes from verse 20: **“...for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.”**

As a way to get the Bible in our heads and hearts, let’s read Ecclesiastes 10 together.

***Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. <sup>2</sup> A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left. <sup>3</sup> Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. <sup>4</sup> If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. <sup>5</sup> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: <sup>6</sup> folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. <sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves. <sup>8</sup> He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. <sup>9</sup> He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. <sup>10</sup> If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. <sup>11</sup> If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.***

***<sup>12</sup> The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. <sup>13</sup> The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. <sup>14</sup> A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? <sup>15</sup> The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. <sup>16</sup> Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! <sup>17</sup> 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! <sup>18</sup> Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. <sup>19</sup> Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. <sup>20</sup> 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.***

This chapter is made up of short sayings, much like we find in the book of Proverbs. While the topics seem random, we can categorize them according to two contrasting ways to live: *we can live wisely, or we can live foolishly.* Whereas the

first nine chapters of Ecclesiastes establish the way of wisdom, chapter 10 warns us about the foolishness of folly. We see this in the use of the words *fool*, *fools*, *foolish*, and *folly*, which are used nine different times.

A fool is not someone with a lack of intellectual ability, but someone who has lost their moral compass. Simply put, the fool is one who doesn't fear God or follow His ways. The fool knows the right thing to do but instead does the opposite, or simply does nothing. Proverbs 1:32 says the ***“the complacency of fools destroys them.”***

Here's our main idea: *It's better to go the way of wisdom than to fall into foolishness.*

**1. Don't let a foolish decision wreck your reputation.** Listen again to verse 1: ***“Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”*** This is the exact opposite of the reputation of the wise person described in Ecclesiastes 7:1: ***“A good name is better than precious ointment...”*** This continues the thought from the second half of 9:18: ***“...but one sinner destroys much good.”***

Solomon is using a pungent illustration (no pun intended) to communicate how easy it is to wreck one's reputation. A perfumer would utilize tree bark or plants, along with various spices, and blend them together with different oils to give off a sweet fragrance. Flies would be attracted to this and often land in the ointment where they would decay and give off a repulsive and repugnant odor.

How many of you have Asian Lady Beetles in your home? If you've tried to kill them or vacuum them up, you know they emit a terrible odor. The point is that a small amount of folly can make things go foul in a hurry. It's easier to cause a stink than to create sweetness.

I think of King David, known as a man after God's own heart, who after 40 years of faithfulness, stayed home from battle and then neglected to fight the battle within himself when he lusted after Bathsheba while she was taking a bath. After committing adultery and murdering her husband, awful consequences were unleashed in his family and his kingdom. Or how about Noah, who spent decades building the ark by faith, only to get drunk after the flood and embarrass himself in front of his own children. Moses learned this truth the hard way when, after years of faithful obedience, in one outburst of anger he whacked the rock in the wilderness and was prohibited from entering the Promised Land.

These are powerful warnings about how just one unguarded moment, one careless decision, or one hasty word can destroy the reputation of even the godliest man or woman. Derek Kidner writes, *“It takes far less to ruin something than to create it...it is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness.”* Your reputation is delicate, and sin’s consequences are devastating. 1 Corinthians 5:6 says, **“Do you not know a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”** While I don’t know that I’ve ever disagreed with Donny Osmond before, but *one bad apple does spoil the whole bunch, girl.* (Do you see what I did there?)

I remember leaving the house early a couple weeks ago and smelling something really foul in the air. I checked to make sure it wasn’t me before jumping in the car. When I arrived at my destination, the smell was there as well. I checked my breath and put a mint in my mouth, but the gross odor was still present. After doing some research, I learned the foul smell was from liquid fertilizers that farmers sprayed on their fields. Let’s linger on this point as we consider some questions:

- What’s the #1 area in your life where you could wreck your reputation and cause a stink in people’s nostrils?
- Have you allowed anything small into your house that is causing a stench? What little compromises have you been ignoring or excusing? Lust? Coveting? Gambling? Revenge? Alcohol? Drugs? Another addiction? An unforgiving spirit? Anger? Lying?

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**2. Guard your beliefs or they will lead to foolish behavior.** We see this in verse 2: **“A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left.”** This is not a political commentary or a slam on left-handed people. As one left-handed person has said: *“If the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body, then only left-handers are in their right minds.”* The word **“heart”** in Hebrew represents the core of a person, or the inner self. The heart is the seat of the mind, emotions, and will. It’s where people think, feel, and make choices. When our hearts are being steered by wisdom, we’re more likely to head in the right direction.

The word **“right”** refers to the position of honor, strength and integrity as used by David in Psalms 16:8: **“Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”** On the other hand (pun intended), the word **“left”** in the Bible refers to what is wrong,

bad, or evil. We see this in Matthew 25:33 when Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats: ***“And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left.”***

When a person makes foolish decisions, their very attitudes and actions announce to everyone around that he or she is a fool according to verse 3: ***“Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.”*** A fool can’t hide his beliefs or his behavior because it comes out in the way he lives. In other words, a fool is easy to spot. His behavior broadcasts his foolishness like Proverbs 13:16 says: ***“Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly.”***

I like how Christopher Yuan put it: *“If you try to do right without thinking right, you could end up doing wrong.”*

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**3. Cultivate a calm spirit to diffuse anger.** Do you find yourself getting easily upset and worked up? Do you find it difficult to remain calm during this election season? In verses 4-7 we’re urged to respond with calmness: ***“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.”***

When we’re in the midst of a heated exchange, Proverbs 15:1 is a good antidote: ***“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*** Proverbs 25:15 is similar: ***“With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone.”*** As we look at our leaders, we often see folly in ***“many high places”*** as described in Proverbs 28:12: ***“When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.”***

Let’s ask God to cultivate within us a spirit of calm as we trust in His sovereignty because *it’s better to go the way of wisdom than to fall into foolishness.*

**4. Be prepared for bad things to happen.** If we choose to exact revenge, or seek to harm others, things can come back on us according to verse 8: ***“He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.”*** This

is similar to Proverbs 26:27: ***“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.”***

Even though OSHA tries to keep the workplace safe, verse 9 tells us accidents will still happen: ***“He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.”***

**5. Take the time to stay sharp.** It’s important to take the time to prioritize the preparation of your tools. We see this in verse 10: ***“If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one succeed.”***

We’ve had a second team down in North Carolina for Hurricane Relief this week. I reached out to Steve Curry who was also on the first trip. This is what he said:

*“As a carpenter for 45+ years, I’ve learned the importance of sharp tools. They do a better job and require less effort. Less effort equates to working safer by not forcing a tool. Chainsaws are much the same. Sharp chains cut faster and more efficiently than dull, and it is much easier on the saw and safer for the operator. If you dull a chain, it is worth the time to sharpen it rather than waste time trying to force a dull saw through a log. As I read Ecclesiastes 10 it speaks to me of the importance of being in the Word and having knowledge of Scripture so that when the opportunity to witness comes, we are prepared.”*

Right on, Steve. Some people work twice as hard and only see half the results because they don’t stay spiritually sharp.

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**6. Act in a timely fashion.** While it’s important to prepare, we also need to make sure we don’t procrastinate. We see this in verse 11: ***“If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.”*** Snake charmers were common entertainers in that day. Snakes have no external ears, so they pick up sound waves through the bone structure of the head. Charmers appear to hypnotize a snake by playing and waving around an instrument called a pungi. If the charmer waits too long to start to begin, he may get bit and lose out on a chance to make money.

Is there anything you've been putting off?

**7. Watch your words.** Have you ever been hung by your tongue? Me, too. Check out verses 12-13: ***“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.”***

During World War II the government printed posters which showed a drowning soldier in the ocean, with four words at the bottom: *“Loose Lips Sink Ships.”* When soldiers were in port, it was important that they not tell anyone where their ship was headed because there were spies around. A soldier who talked too much could literally lose his life and cause the death of hundreds of others.

Proverbs 10:21: ***“The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.”*** Proverbs 15:2 says, ***“The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.”*** Let’s not be like the guy described in Proverbs 18:2: ***“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”***

Ecclesiastes 10:14 says some people talk incessantly while not really saying anything: ***“A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?”*** Solomon cautions against this because the more we talk, the greater our chances of transgressing with our tongue as we read in Proverbs 10:19: ***“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”*** Proverbs 29:20 reinforces this: ***“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”*** We’ve all experienced the horror of saying something too quickly as we open mouth and insert foot.

**8. Don’t follow the way of a fool.** The way of wisdom is not to follow the way of fools because verse 15 says they don’t know where they’re going: ***“The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.”***

Beth and I did our best to give directions to wayward football fans during our Fall Festival of Fun as we wore the colors of Heaven during Trunk or Treat. We enjoyed helping people find the Lambeau way. I’m not sure if we had much success judging by all the persecution we received from Bears and Vikings fans. I could tell when parents didn’t like the Packers because they would stand far away. I decided to ask some kids if they were Packers fans. One boy hesitated, looked back at his dad who was wearing a Bears sweatshirt, eyed the candy, and said, “I

*am tonight!”* Later, I saw some unkind comments on Facebook from a couple of Edgewood members. One guy remarked when he saw our picture: *“Horrifying...I thought there were rules about scaring kids.”* Another wrote, *“My husband told us to skip this one because it was the Packers. We didn’t realize it was you.”*

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**9. Avoid self-indulgence.** Our culture does not value restraint as many imbibe and indulge on whatever pleasure they can find. Verses 16-17 paint a picture of those who simply live for themselves: *“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!”* The whole book of Ecclesiastes warns of the danger of wasting our lives by indulging in excess pleasures while search for purpose and meaning.

When I read verse 18 I think of the excellent work our trustees do to keep our facility and grounds looking great: *“Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.”* Just this week a new white fence was added to the north of the volleyball area. The trustees are also implementing a plan to prevent snow and ice buildup on the roof, putting together a proposal to expand the restrooms in the EdgeKids area, and considering options for how to solve space issues in our parking lot.

Related to this, Darlene and Joy do a superb job as our custodians! There’s something going on almost every day of the week, with big events like Fall Festival of Fun, Awana, Edge Student Ministry, Celebrate Recovery, and Second Winders maximizing our space. It’s has to be hard for them to have the building looking pristine before an event, only to have it messed up afterward. Over the years, I’ve shared Proverbs 14:4 with Darlene: *“Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean.”* I’m sure our Life Center looked like a lot of cattle had been through it Thursday night. As we pointed out during Grow Time, our building is a not a monument to look at, but a tool for ministry. Buildings don’t change lives, but what happens in them does.

Verse 19 summarizes the lazy person’s lifestyle: *“Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.”* Eat all you can, drink all you can, and get all you can is the motto of many Americans today.

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**10. Refuse to speak ill of others.** This last mandate found in verse 20 will mess with each of us: ***“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.”***

Famous people, including politicians, have gotten in trouble when an open mic has recorded things they meant to stay private. I’m told the golden rule in politics is to always assume the microphone is on.

Jesus puts us all on notice in Luke 12:2-3: ***“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.”*** According to Jesus, the microphone is always on.

Let’s summarize what we’ve learned.

1. Don’t let a foolish decision wreck your reputation.
2. Guard your beliefs or they will lead to foolish behavior.
3. Cultivate a calm spirit to diffuse anger.
4. Be prepared for bad things to happen.
5. Take the time to stay sharp.
6. Act in a timely fashion.
7. Watch your words.
8. Don’t follow the way of a fool.
9. Avoid self-indulgence.
10. Refuse to speak ill of others.

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I’m reminded of what happened, when two teenage daughters asked their father if they could go to a movie. After reading some reviews, he denied their request because the movie contained nudity and immorality. His daughters appealed, *“But dad, the movie is two hours long and those scenes are just a few minutes of the total film!”* The dad held firm, *“My answer is no.”*

The two teens slumped down on the couch. As they sulked, they smelled some brownies baking in the oven. When they were done, their dad brought several on a plate. After they eagerly took some brownies, their dad said, *“Before you eat, I*

*want you to know I made them with the best organic flour, free-range eggs, organic sugar, premium vanilla and expensive chocolate. But there's one ingredient that wasn't in the recipe. I got it from our own back yard. There's no need to worry, because I only added the tiniest bit of it to the brownies. So go ahead, take a bite and let me know what you think."*

The girls wanted to know more about the added ingredient, so their dad assured them it was only a very small amount, less than a teaspoon. He told them they wouldn't even taste it. They persisted, wanting to know what it was. Their dad replied, *"Well, OK, if you insist. The secret ingredient is organic dog droppings."*

They both dropped their brownies and began inspecting their fingers with horror. *"DAD! Why did you do that? We can't eat these!"* Knowing he now had their attention for an unforgettable teachable moment, he said, *"That's why I won't allow you to watch that movie. You won't tolerate a gross ingredient in the brownies so why should you tolerate a little immorality in the movie?"*

### **Action Steps**

1. Repent right now of any foolish belief or behavior you've been holding on to.
2. Identify one thing you've been procrastinating about and tackle it today.
3. Sharpen yourself spiritually by striving to read the Bible every day and joining a Growth Group.
4. Concentrate on bringing the fragrance of Christ to every conversation you have as you live on mission with your neighbors.
5. In order to cultivate calmness while living in our culture, pause and pray for our election on Monday at 6:00 p.m. and then attend the unreached prayer night for the nations at 7:00 p.m.

### **Lord's Supper**

1 Corinthians 11:28 says we're to not take communion flippantly: ***"Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."*** The bread represents His body, and the cup is a reminder of His blood which paid the ransom price for our forgiveness and freedom. As we prepare to celebrate communion and remember His work of redemption, let's spend time in confession, repentance, and recalibration.

### **Confession Time**

We practice open communion, which means you don't need to be an Edgewood member to participate, but you do need to be a born-again believer.

Our deacons and pastors will distribute the trays by passing them down each row. When the tray comes to you, simply lift a cup straight out. You'll notice there are two cups stacked together. Give a little twist and hold one in each hand until everyone is served so we can partake together.

BTW, all the bread is gluten free, and we use grape juice instead of wine.

### **Distribution of Elements**

Forever family, before we take the bread, let's focus on these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: ***“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”***

Before we drink from the cup, consider these words from 1 Corinthians 11:25-26: ***“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”***