

# How to Live When Life Seems Foolish, Uncertain, and Brief (Ecclesiastes 10:1-12:8)

**Big Idea:** Pursue wisdom in a foolish world; take risks in an uncertain world, and enjoy yourself in your short life.

I don't know about you, but I've really enjoyed Ecclesiastes. We're almost done. We're looking at a fairly long passage today, and then we're going to look at the conclusion next week.

Here's the thing about Ecclesiastes. It can be very depressing. It is very honest about how hard life can be. For this reason, it is deeply relatable. If you are tired, if you have been beaten up by life, then Ecclesiastes is for you. No easy answers, no shallow answers. Ecclesiastes isn't afraid to wrestle with the tough issues of life and give us honest answers.

Because Ecclesiastes can be depressing, the Preacher is doing what all good preachers do. He's anticipating our reaction in the passage we just read. He knows that in the face of everything that he's told us about life being disappointing, we'll be tempted to give up. The Preacher wants us to react rightly to the bad news that he's given us.

How do we live in a world that seems foolish, uncertain, and brief? That's the real question we need to face.

- If foolish people seem to get ahead, then why should we bother even trying to be wise?
- If life is uncertain, then how do we handle all of that uncertainty? Do we hedge our bets? Or do we just give into the uncertainty and live dangerously?
- If life is short, how should we live?

What's the best response to all the bad news that the Preacher has given us in the book? That's what the Preacher is going to tell us in today's passage.

So today is going to get very practical. How do we live in a world that seems foolish, uncertain, and brief? Buckle in. Here's his first answer.

## **In a Foolish World, Pursue Wisdom (10:1-20)**

Let's start in chapter 10. At first glance, it's very difficult to follow the train of thought in this chapter. One of the books I'm reading on Ecclesiastes says, "Out of all the passages in Ecclesiastes, this one is probably the most difficult to interpret and

preach" (Sidney Greidanus). Martin Luther observed, "Solomon really makes some harsh transitions!"

It took me a while to figure out the overarching theme of chapter 10. But if you look at this passage, there is a contrast that comes up over and over again. It's the contrast between wisdom and foolishness. Foolishness is a set of thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, or judgments that lack sense, prudence, and discretion. Wisdom is the opposite. It's a set of practical skills associated with understanding and living a successful life.

And all of chapter 10 is about living in a world of both foolish people and wise people.

- So in 10:1, which continues from the previous chapter, wisdom is better (9:17-18) even though a little folly can spoil wisdom's gain. All it takes is one foolish person or one foolish action to do a lot of good.
- In 10:2-20, wisdom is better than folly, even though "folly is set in many high places" – even though foolish people sometimes get ahead and wise people don't. It's hard to live in a world where fools get in positions of influence. They can do a lot of damage there.
- The Preacher gives a lot of illustrations of what happens when people don't use wisdom (10:8-11): digging a hole as a trap and falling into it yourself; breaking through a wall in haste and not looking for the snake that may be hiding there; doing dangerous work without taking the proper care; not

maintaining the equipment you use in your work. He's describing things we see all around us. Foolishness is everywhere you look.

- On the other hand, in 10:12-15, you see the good that wisdom does. You see the necessity of wisdom in our words (10:12-15).
- Finally, you see the necessity of wisdom in government (10:16-20). We need wise rulers who know what to do and when to do it.

This passage jumps all over the place, but the thing that shows up over and over again is the difference between wise people and fools. It's describing two ways to live and the benefits of both. It's showing us what foolishness and wisdom do. Foolishness destroys societies. It destroys our workplaces. It destroys lives. On the other hand, wisdom saves cities. Wisdom facilitates good work and wise government.

So how do we live in a foolish world? Pursue wisdom. Don't give into the despair that comes from seeing so much foolishness all around you. Look at the benefits that wisdom can bring. Wisdom can help you succeed (10:10). The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor (10:12). Wisdom can make a world of difference. Pursue wisdom.

How? One of the best ways to get wisdom is from God's Word. Proverbs says, "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). The best way to get wisdom is from God's Word. Read it. Absorb it. Lean into it.

Don't give into the foolishness of this world. In a foolish world, pursue wisdom.

Okay. But what about uncertainty? The Preacher has shown us over and over again how uncertain life is. There are no guarantees. How do we handle the uncertainty of life?

Here's his answer:

## **In an Uncertain World, Take Risks (11:1-6)**

Read verses 1 and 6 of chapter 11:

Cast your bread upon the waters,  
for you will find it after many days...

In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. (Ecclesiastes 11:1,6)

There's so much here! He's saying to engage in international trade, and wait for the goods to sell, and the ships to return with fine goods from foreign lands. Diversify (11:2). Study how things work so you know what to do (11:3-4). Take chances, because you don't know what will work out (11:6).

Don't play it safe. Live a life of holy boldness. Be fearlessly generous. Take what God has given you and invest it to serve others. There is so much at stake. You can make a difference with your life. You were put here to bless others!

As Scripture says elsewhere:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

"God invites us to be venture capitalists for the kingdom of God" (Phil Ryken).

Yes, life is uncertain, but don't let that stop you from taking holy risks. You don't know what God will do through your efforts. Trust me. You will be surprised. Don't be stingy. Invest your life and everything you have in serving others. You don't know what God may do through you as you give your life away in love to serve.

In a foolish world, pursue wisdom. In an uncertain world, take risks.

But there's another theme that keeps coming up over and over in Ecclesiastes. It's death. Over and over again, the Preacher keeps reminding us that we will die, and that death erases everything we accomplish in life.

How do we handle the fact that life is short and we will die?

# **In This Brief Life, Enjoy Every Moment (11:7-12:8)**

For the seventh time in this book, the Preacher tells us to enjoy life. This time he tells us to enjoy life in light of how brief it is. And he has an important reminder for you especially if you are young.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. (11:9-10)

The reason to enjoy our life now is because your time is limited. You don't have time to waste. "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'..." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). And then he describes, in vivid detail, what's going to happen in 12:1-7. Basically, your body will gradually break down. You won't always have the health you enjoy now.

So what should you do? Enjoy life while you can. Realize that opportunities aren't unlimited. Don't postpone the opportunities God has given you. As you do so, remember your Creator while you have time. Drop any sense of self-sufficiency you may have and commit to him. Do it in your youth. The earlier the better. Spend your whole life committed to him. You will never regret it.

Getting to know your Creator, Judge, and Savior before we grow old and die is one of the most important things you could ever do. No matter how old you are, you have the opportunity to use the rest of your life beginning now, resolving to waste no more time, but to live every moment for the glory of the one who is your Creator, Judge, and Savior. If you haven't already, come to the one who has done everything for you to be made right with God. Spend the rest of your life remembering and serving him.

**Pursue wisdom in a foolish world; take risks in an uncertain world, and enjoy yourself in your short life.**

Years ago, Jonathan Edwards made these resolutions.

- Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.
- Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.
- Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
- Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.
- Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure.

Father, may we pursue wisdom. May we take risks. May we enjoy life. And may we remember you our Creator. May we do so in the strength of your Spirit and for the glory of our Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.