

Avoiding a Meaningless Life

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Text: Ecclesiastes 10:1-11¹

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Series: Ecclesiastes (Finding the Meaning of Life)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 10**. This evening we are talking about “How to Avoid a Meaningless Life”.

As human beings, it is very possible to live our entire lives from the wrong perspective. Many people sincerely believe they are right, but are totally wrong. People can think they are hitting the target, but be missing it by a mile.

This world is filled with empty, wayward people. They are filled with what the Bible, and Solomon here and in the book of Proverbs calls “folly” or foolishness. It simply means doing something without the foresight of the consequences that follow. Theologically, it is someone according to Psalm 14:1, who forgets God and lives life as if He’s never going to meet God.

The world is filled with people who live foolish lives based on emotions or carnal lusts and satisfactions.

We all agree that we were created to worship and adore God. The desire for satisfaction and meaning in life is put in us by God. We were made with an addiction that only God can satisfy. Yet a great majority of humanity are what the Bible calls a “fool”. Someone who tries to find satisfaction and meaning in this life. They search for it in relationships, in work, in money. When none of that works out, some will even turn to other addictions to numb the pain: entertainment, music, pleasure, or even substances that alter reality.

According to a report in the August issue of *Archives of General Psychiatry*, a journal of the American Medical Association, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of antidepressants since 1996. It's not only stressed out middle-aged folks being treated for problems caused by supposed depression, either. ***Perhaps the most disturbing part of the new study is that it shows a broad expansion in the patient population being put on these drugs – starting with children as young as six.***

A whole lot of people are not living in reality. They don’t want to face life.

I. How to **identify** a foolish, meaningless life.

- A. The fool is always over powered by **folly**, no matter how little it may be (vs. 1).
Verse 1, “Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a stench; so a little

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

folly outweighs wisdom and honor". It doesn't take much to ruin what has the potential for much blessing. A little fly in the perfume makes it stink.

1. Come on, we all know about this. It's like a story I'm told that occurred before I was born, but will never be forgotten. My cousin saved up all his money and bought a brand new 1967 Cobra. Driving it home from the dealer, with no insurance, he got distracted and wrecked the car. A little folly destroys what we all intend for good.
2. Of course we are not concerned about cars here tonight, but the lives of people.

- There may be some girls here tonight that have kept themselves pure, but in a night of heated passion will lose their purity and give away that which is priceless, and dirty what God intends to be precious and reserved for a man who has pledged his life to that girl for life. You have that perfume spoiled by the nasty fly of fornication.
- There may be a marriage here tonight that is on the rocks, and you have a choice to make tonight. Are you going to destroy the love and oneness that God has given you because of selfishness and immaturity? **Matthew 19:6**, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

I get a question from time to time about marriage. "Pastor, what if I married the wrong person?" Ok, let's consider that. What if you went against the will of your parents, and the good sense of your own instincts, and married for all the wrong reasons? My question is this – are you legally married before God? Then God in His mysterious providence has allowed you to be married for His own purposes. And you are going to have some difficult days, guaranteed. You will reap what you've sown if you've disobeyed parents and relinquished your common sense in this relationship. But by no means do you ever have the right to divorce. **Matthew 19:6**, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." God's put you together! Don't separate what God put together.

Instead use your marriage to grow and change in Christ. Love the unlovable. You are called to be like Christ. Lay down your life for a fellow sinner. A hard marriage makes a solid and powerful Christian. Don't forget that. Don't stink up your testimony, and make the Gentiles blaspheme by getting an easy out. You may get away with it in our society, but you will have to face God and give an answer for it.

- B. Foolish people are not necessarily **stupid** people. Some of the most brilliant people in the world are fools that live a meaningless life.

Folly stinks up the lives of some of the most brilliant and wise and honorable people! It comes to characterize a person. **Verse 1**, "Dead flies make the

perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor". A little folly stinks so much that it far outweighs all the wisdom and honor of a man's life.

- Think of Einstein. We know him as the most brilliant scientist ever to live. God's not impressed with Einstein's knowledge. God gave Einstein that knowledge. If Einstein's brilliance were cologne, it would be the best kind. But Einstein was also a notorious fornicator. He lived a very scandalous life, especially at the time, rejecting marriage, and instead shacking up with his girlfriend. **Verse 1** applies well, "Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor".
- Think of the pastor who faithfully serves, and then ends in a moral crash. Sad, but it happens every day. The tempter stops at nothing and no one and we are all prone to have a great fall. I can tell you tonight that I have clean hands and a pure heart. I am blameless by the grace of God. But there is no one, including pastors and teachers of the Word, that are above temptation. I often pray to the Lord: If I am going to compromise my testimony, please kill me before it would ever happen. Jill and I have prayed since we were teenagers. "Lord, do not allow us to enter into ministry if we are going to bring shame and dishonor to your name".
- You think of a guy like John Edwards, the politician, who was a candidate for President and Vice President, and wrecked his marriage and career in a scandal. It happens every day.

The fool doesn't think in the moment of temptation about the future, about what might happen. They think of the here and now. That brings us to our third point.

C. Third, the fool leads by his "**gut**" (vs. 2). **Verse 2**, "A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left". One paraphrase I think gets the gist of it: "A wise man's heart leads him aright, but a fool's heart leads him astray".

Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

You want to live a meaningless life? Instead of putting your emotions and passions to death, be controlled by your emotions, by your lust, by your pleasures. People do this, and they end up addicts, or they end up divorced and alone. Can any one testify here tonight? I can! Thank God the Lord saves us and points us to be led not by our passions but by His Word.

If you want to be wise, you often have to ignore your emotions and put to death your passions and lusts, and throw out your "own understanding". Isn't that what **Proverbs 3:5-6** tells us? "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not

lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

The fool’s heart leads him to the world. He’s intoxicated by it. Yet he is blinded to the fact that though he gain the whole world, without Christ he will lose his own soul.

The wise person does not lean to his own understanding. So much of what occurs in this life we really cannot understand. We get discouraged only knowing half the information. We are very, very prone to making wrong judgments with our heart. Don’t lean on your heart. Instruct your heart with the word of God, and then be led in the right direction.

Illustration: Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a man who sat in the front row of a large conference and slept through his message every night. It disturbed him so much that the last night, he was about ready to call the man during his message, but decided not to at the last moment. To his surprise the man’s wife introduced him and said he had listened to Bro. Swindoll all his life. The man was in stage 4 cancer, and it was his dying wish to hear Bro. Swindoll in person.

Our heart can often lead us astray. A fool will always live according to his gut, or his lust, or his passion or his emotion.

D. Fourth, the fool demonstrates his foolishness, yet he himself is **unaware** (vs. 3). He lacks sense. Everyone but him seems to know it!

Verse 3, “Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool”. The idea is when the fool is in public, the way he acts and the way he talks expresses to everyone that he is a fool. They think they’re the center of the universe. They act as if all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge will die with them. The fact that they think they know it all shows they know nothing. The fact that they are unteachable shows that they are proud and blind to real wisdom. A fool, in short is the center of his own universe.

Proverbs 18:2, “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”.

Application: Don’t ever think you can’t learn something from someone. Be teachable. If you are a criticizer and a complainer, you are telling everyone you are a fool. Some people are passive, they don’t want to say anything. They are passive and afraid. Get rid of that. That’s foolish.

- Other people are aggressive and mean and unloving and domineering and even at times diabolical. Get rid of that. When you walk down the street everybody knows that's foolish.. If you act that way, you lack sense. If you are so passive you can't tell your children no, you lack sense. Get some sense into you!
- How do you get sense and wisdom? Before you walk down the street—before you go out in public, get alone with God!! He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. You want to walk the way with sense, speak the Truth with sense, live the Life with sense, then get to know Christ and His Word!

If you think a little sin doesn't matter, or if you are acting on your own emotions and passions and instincts, or if you think you are the center of your own universe, then you are on your way to living a very meaningless life.

Transition: There are many who live this way. How do you deal with these people? Glad you asked! Solomon tells us how to deal with them.

II. How to **deal** with those whose lives are meaningless and full of folly. Folly is simply life without God. It is sin. **Psalm 14:1**, "The fool has said in his heart, no God". How do you deal with those who live meaningless lives?

A. When dealing with a fool, don't be **controlled** by your emotions (vs. 4).

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

How should you deal with someone that is simply out of control. Solomon tells us, "do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest" (vs. 4). Don't leave the room. Don't storm out. Be calm. Solomon said it well in **Proverbs 26:4**, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself."

Come on, when we get angry, most of us are tempted to either clam up or blow up. A growing Christian is going to do neither. We grow in ninefold aspects of the fruit of the Spirit: "self control" (KJV, *temperance*, **Galatians 5:22-23**).

Proverbs 25:28 tells us "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." Some men can control and guide companies but they cannot control their own heart or their words. The fool is often controlled by emotions, and that includes fools in high places.

B. Realize folly is found in **every** place (vs. 5-7).

Verses 5-7, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. 7 I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.”

Basically Solomon is saying that we live in a maddening world where stupidity, folly, debauchery and wickedness is exalted and put up like a crown achievement to be pursued when what is good and right and real and makes a difference walks on the side of the road.

You can tell where a society is at by looking at who it honors. You know, 100 years ago, the famous people were doctors and scientists and astronauts. And now, you can't turn on the TV without finding out Brittany Spears and how she is neglecting her children in order to go partying. Now we don't have news, we have something called “Infotainment”. It's basically the “freak of the week”, and people get famous for being stupid. And if you are really, really stupid, you might even get your own reality TV show!

And so people who ought to be penniless because they are fools, are actually making money off their own stupidity.

“Folly is set in many high places” (vs. 6). I mean the earth really stopped when LeBron James was choosing which basketball he wanted to play for. It was so serious the president addressed the situation.

I could go on, but you get the point. We've got serious problems when we start exalting folly as a nation.

C. Finally, understand folly's **destructive** nature. Realize every good thing can be turned into something bad (vs. 8-11). The possibility of folly is everywhere. Everything in this world that we love can be turned into an idol. Something that seems innocent can turn into your destruction in a moment. Be careful!

1. Verse 8 shows us the destructive nature of **sin**...

Verse 8, “He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall”.

- Dig a pit to trap someone, and you are likely to fall in it!
- Break through a wall to steal something, and you might find a snake lurking for you!

While the consequences of sin are not always this immediate, anyone who does evil is taking an unnecessary and dangerous risk. We always reap what we plant, though it's not always immediately recognizable.

2. **Verses 9-10** tell us of the destructive nature of **life**. A fool takes no advice and very little precaution. **Verses 9-10**, “He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. 10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.”

- In quarrying large stones, there is great danger to be injured or maimed.
- In cutting logs, my wife’s family will tell you that it’s great money, but you might die if a tree falls on you.
- If you don’t sharpen your knife, you’ll have to use more muscle.

Some of these things seem so elementary, yet most of us are like proud men who don’t want to read instructions! According to **2 Peter 1:3**, the Word of God has everything we need for life and godliness. When we refuse to look into it and take heed to it, we are going to get hurt!

3. **Verse 11** tells us there is **danger** in not applying the wisdom and understanding we already have.

Verse 11, “If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.”

- In ancient times, before there was animal control, there were those who knew how to deal with snakes. They were called “charmers”. You see them in the cartoons caricatured, but it was something that was necessary, as Solomon alludes to. Hey, if you know how to charm snakes, and you decide because it’s too difficult, or not worth it to charm the snake, your snake charming skills do you no good.
- Let me put it another way. If you know the Word and don’t apply the Word, it does you no good. You’re going to get bitten by the world! If you know you need to cut off a temptation and you leave it there, you shouldn’t be so surprised when you fall. You may miss the bite here and there, but eventually you are going to get bitten!

Conclusion: So how should we approach folly? How should we approach those whose lives are so prone to foolishness and sin? What about those who are truly Christians, but are seriously struggling with former sins and need help in applying God’s Word to their life?

The most merciful thing we can do is to warn people of the frailty and uncertainty of life and the imminence of their ultimate meeting with God.

Our message hasn’t changed. Turn from this world of sin. It’s folly. Turn in faith to Jesus. He will save you. Life can end suddenly. Sin is destructive.

Without Christ's mercy, you will pay for your own sin in hell forever. Repent and turn to Christ. Live for Him.

Don't be the center of your universe. Let Christ be your world. Turn from the pleasure of sin that is temporary, and find lasting joy and satisfaction in Christ. Turn to Christ—He is wisdom. Don't face this world without meeting with Him and walking with Him. There are too many traps and dangerous places. Walking in this world without Christ is like walking without a hard hat. You might get through ok here and there, but it will catch up with you! Be careful! Be wise! Walk with Christ. Avoid meaningless living!