

How to Waste Your Life

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Text: Ecclesiastes 10:12-20¹

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Series: Ecclesiastes (Finding the Meaning of Life)

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

John Piper shares a story from the February 1998 edition of *Reader’s Digest*, which tells about a couple who “took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.”

This is what a lot of people are banking on! That they can get to the end of their life and do nothing! What a waste! This is the dream: Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: “Look, Lord. See my shells.” *That* is a tragedy.²

Most people waste their life and live for trinkets. They for that which is passing away!

Living this life without Christ is a total waste. Jesus asked in **Matthew 16:26**, “what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?”

We are going to see tonight that everything about a life without Christ is wasted. Our words, our work, our purpose, our potential, and even our peace are all thrown to the side and wasted on meaningless things that last only for this life.

Three thousand years ago, the wisest man ever to live (outside of the Lord) wrote a book telling us not to waste our life. Let’s listen to what he had to say. Ecclesiastes 10:12.

I. Fools waste their **words** (vs. 12-14).

Verses 12-13, “The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.”

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:34**, “How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

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

² John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 46.

A. The **wise person's** words build people up (vs. 12a). What words do is identify what is in the heart.

“The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor...” (verse 12b).

A godly or wise person—a Christ-centered believer is going to win favor with his words. Very simply, his or her words will edify and help others around him to grow.

Paul said it this way in **Colossians 4:6**, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

Look at the contrast of the wise man with the fool, the lost person who never thinks of the things of God.

B. The **fool's** words are wasted (vs. 12b-14). A fool according to **Psalm 14** is very simply someone who forgets God or simply says “no” to God. Solomon tells us how dangerous words that forget God are.

“The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but **the lips of a fool consume him**” (verse 12b).

1. The fool’s words are **self destructive** (vs. 12). Literally, the words of a fool “eat him up”. He cannot control his inner being.

James indicates that only with God’s help through a change of heart can we learn to control our tongue.

James 3:5-9, “So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?”

Of course the things that come out of our mouth reveal our spiritual state. People who know the Lord are growing in self control, and that includes our words. We have some of this indwelling sin in us as believers as well. We wrestle with it daily. If you are not in this struggle—you are either perfect already or you are blind!

We have to be careful about our words.

- Listen, you may gossip about someone, but it will come back and bite you! You may rage at someone or yell and scream at your children or loved one, but it will come back and bite you!
- Many a word in a marriage should have been left unsaid. Controlling our words as Christians demonstrate how we are growing in the Lord.
- Are you a complainer? Are you always sighing? You may not say things outwardly, but you know how to draw attention to yourself. We ought to be building others up and biting our tongue.
- If we don't bite our tongue, our words will come back to bite us!

Ultimately, the ability to control our words tell the story of our progressive sanctification. They reveal if we are truly born again. If we are saved, then we are going to be growing in the ability to control our words.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:36-37**, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” The lost will be brought before Christ on the day of judgment, and their words will “eat them up” and “consume” them. Words are fitting testimonies as to who we love and what we live for.

2. The fool's words tend to ***spiral downward*** (vs. 13).

Verse 13, “The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.”

We can apply this in many ways.

- Have you had an argument about something very insignificant, and the by the end of the conversation, you can't remember what the argument was about? Often we should just cover with love instead of starting an argument about a foolish insignificant thing. If we do, it often spirals into “evil madness” which is moral depravity. We often end up sinning!
- Unedifying silly talk can often end up this way—if the purpose is not edification—if the purpose is simply to make people laugh or to draw attention to ourselves, or to “one up” someone in wit—often this also turns into moral depravity. I've seen more than one conversation among Christians end up hurting a Christian brother or sister terribly through humor. Making fun of someone's appearance, or weaknesses

may be ok among the lost, but it is not ok among those for whom Christ died. He calls many who are weak and foolish. We are here to use our love, our humor, our kindness, and especially our words to reassure people and to reignite their hope.

- The person involved in foolishness often ends up in moral depravity. Be careful with your words! If they are not God-centered, they will easily spiral downward!
3. The fool's words just ***slip*** (without self-control) out of his/her mouth (vs. 14). **Verse 14**, "A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?"

An amazing thing happens to us when we get saved. We begin a battle. We start wrestling against our flesh and putting to death our sinful nature. That battle shows up in our words. We don't talk like we used to. That means sometimes things go through our mind that we have to reject. But someone who doesn't know Christ or a believer who is losing this battle, will often say whatever comes to mind.

A person who is growing in Christ will prepare himself for difficult situations. You will learn as you grow in Christ not to speak before you think! The one who does not have his eyes on Christ just says whatever comes to mind. Look again at **verse 14**.

Verse 14, "A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?"

A person who is not focused on God and not walking in close union with Christ will try to talk himself out of a situation. He can talk and talk and talk until he's convinced himself. He's not thought ahead about his words. He cannot tell "what will be after him".

A wise person speaks little. **Proverbs 17:27-28**, "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. 28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent."

II. Fools waste their **purpose** for living (vs. 15). We often ask "Where did we come from and where are we going." The fool works hard but he easily loses his way to his goal.

Verse 15, "The toil of a fool wears him, for he does not know the way to the city." A fool is truly lost. He has no purpose. He can't find his way to his destination. He doesn't know what his purpose in life. Life wears him.

A Christian has the end goal in mind. He is ultimately toiling for a city “not made with [human] hands” that is not located on this earth (Hebrews 9:11). It’s a place that Paul describes as “eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

So when your days are filled with headaches and frustration, sadness, disappointment and even serious tragedy and illness, your perspective gives you strength to carry on.

The person without Christ who doesn't know where he's going, what he's trying to be, what he's trying to accomplish, they tend to get exhausted by life because they're walking, but they're not going anywhere. They exemplify the treadmill that we've been talking about through Ecclesiastes, running their guts out but not going anywhere.

So keep this in mind.

- There are times in marriage where the going is uphill at an unbelievable angle. I mean, there are times in a marriage, at work, and even among the brothers in the church where you have days, weeks, months, sometimes even years, where it's hard and the going is difficult.
- But with the end in mind, being obedient unto Christ, we'll be able to sip coffee as old men and women, rejoicing in all that Jesus did, with the end in mind, difficult days don't overwhelm because we know the end.

So Solomon is saying that a person who has no idea where he's going, no idea who he's trying to become, no idea what life holds for him, no goals, not going anywhere, they have a tendency to get overwhelmed and wearied by life and lose their way.

III. Fools waste their **potential** (vs. 16-17). Now the following verses are applied to the government but give principles to us all.

Verses 16-17, “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! 17 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!”

What Solomon is saying is there is trouble when people don't grow up right. They don't learn maturity. They don't learn to wait until the right time to do something. They are given a leadership position before they are ready for it. They are children. Now they may not be physically children, but may simply be immature.

They end up eating not for health and sustenance, but simply to party! They end up wasting their potential and their credibility.

We've all met people who were super intelligent but had no self control and never wanted to grow up! What a waste!

Application: God wants us as Christians to grow up. He wants us not to be like the boy-king who can't finish anything but his next meal. He doesn't know what commitment is. God wants us to be faithful and finish the tasks that we start and to do what we do well.

Sometimes we want to give up and indulge in life and just forget about the hard stuff. You'll never grow that way. Those who can't wait end up throwing their life away as self centered, self-indulgent people. They are the whiners and complainers that never reach their potential and never get anything done!

IV. Fools waste their **money** (vs. 18-19).

Verses 18-19, "Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. 19 Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything."

God gives us many precious gifts. There are some who live life to eat all they can, enjoy all they can, and get all they can. People live for vacation, and not for what is important.

Do you get the picture? While the roof is sinking in, the house is leaking, but the person ignores it and goes on living for himself.

Now it is true that bread is made for laughter and wine does gladden life, and money does have it's place. But do you see the misplaced priorities?

God has given us many good gifts. Every good thing is from heaven. Every good gift is from the Father who never changes (**James 1:17**). But the fool abuses God's gifts and uses life for himself.

Listen, what ever God has prospered you with, use it wisely. Put God first. Don't be lazy. Don't procrastinate. All laziness and procrastination point to is selfishness.

V. Fools waste their **mind** (vs. 20).

Verse 20, "Even in your thought, 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."

You know what this is all about? Gossip and bitterness and unforgiveness. Do any of struggle with that?

We shouldn't even curse the king—an easy target that will probably never hear, much less those we are closest to. God may allow them to hear what we say.

Application: Have you ever run your mouth and get busted? I mean, have you ever walked into a room and there's like nine other people dogging somebody and you say one line but it's that one line that gets back to the person?

Here's an important truth. If you talk bad about others, you will not be trusted. People will wonder what you say about them behind their backs!!

The wise man understands that he lives in a sinful broken world, of which he is a part. We have to realize there's plenty in our own lives for people to talk bad about.

But here's the part that got me. I think I do a decent job of not bad-mouthing people out loud with my mouth, but he even says that the wise man, he won't even do it as he lays in bed at night.

You know you've had an argument with someone and you are laying in bed at night going, "Oh, why didn't I say that to him? That's so good." And you are just tearing them down in your mind. Solomon says—a wise man won't do that! That's a waste!

You know what the wise person does when they lay in bed at night? He says, "You know what, I don't battle flesh and blood, but I wrestle with spirits and principalities. I pray for my enemy. I will pray for his heart. I pray for my heart. Maybe I'm seeing wrong." That's the wise man.

Otherwise you are wasting your time with all that bitter poison in your heart. It doesn't hurt them. It hurts you! Don't speak bad even in your thoughts. It will come back to haunt you!

Conclusion: It's easy to waste your life. Live with yourself as the focus. Don't worry about self-denial for Christ or others. A wise person is careful to please Christ in every area of their life.

"In April 2000, Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards were killed in Cameroon, West Africa. Ruby was over eighty. Single all her life, she poured it out for one great thing: to make Jesus Christ known among the unreached, the poor, and the sick. Laura was a widow, a medical doctor, pushing eighty years old, and serving at Ruby's side in Cameroon. The brakes failed, the car went over a cliff, and they were both killed instantly. I asked my congregation: Was that a tragedy? Two lives, driven by one great passion, namely, to be spent in unheralded service to the perishing poor for the glory of Jesus Christ".³

The wise life is one of a single focus. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness". "For me to live is Christ". Put Christ as your overall focus of life, live for His kingdom and crucify yourself, and you will be wise and not waste your life!

³ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 45.