

“A Little Bit of Wisdom Can Make a Huge Impact”

Ecclesiastes 10:1-11:6

Solomon ended Ch. 9 with a story about how a poor wise man saved an entire town from being destroyed by a powerful king and his vast resources. And he ended by saying,

¹⁷ *The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.*

¹⁸ *Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.*

Yet, one sinner destroys much good. One foolish person can destroy a lot of work done by wise people in a very short time. At this point Solomon wants to elaborate on foolishness and its consequences and draw the reader's attention to pursue a wiser life. To make good decisions from an 'above-the-sun' perspective instead of a below the sun perspective.

Because just as one wise person can make a difference, the opposite is true as well. Small things can have negative powerful effects also. Solomon gives us the flip side next in Ch. 10:1-3 but also a positive aspect of wisdom in v.4.

As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

² *The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.*

³ *Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.*

⁴ *If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.*

Wisdom and Foolishness Both Bear 'Fruit' **(10:1-4)**

One bears bad fruit, the other bears good fruit. While one individual with a few wise words can save a whole city, the opposite is true as well. One dead fly can ruin a bottle of perfume. One poor decision, a wrong choice of words – even by a wise person – can result in a lot of damage. We've all said or did something that maybe was out of character for us, that hurt people. It only takes a little foolishness to ruin a relationship or a project.

Wisdom is a heart matter (v.2). When we read of the 'heart' in the Bible, the heart refers to the center of one's life, our soul, who we really are. The right was considered the position of honour and respect while the left was an expression of weakness and rejection. You can tell a wise person because their actions, words and thoughts incline toward what is honourable and true while a fool speaks and thinks without sense. Solomon says you can usually tell a fool by the way he conducts himself. 'Walking down the road' is one of the simplest things we do. A fool easily shows by his everyday actions that he lacks sense.

If a few unwise words can cause a lot of damage a little wisdom can spare you a lot of trouble (10:4).

“If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.”

Because Solomon was a ruler, a lot of his illustrations here and his proverbs come from observations he's made in the context of leaders and servants. We've all been there. We've all worked for employers or bosses who were unqualified for their position, so they would hide their deficiency by bossing people around. Solomon says if they unnecessarily lash out at you, don't be foolish and retaliate in kind. Keep your mouth shut and let them blow off steam. Solomon said in Prov. 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Sometimes you and I get on the receiving end of someone's frustration. They have to blow off some steam and you just happened to be the target. Solomon says, 'stay at your post', hang in there, don't argue, let them get it out of their system. Our calmness can help reduce someone's anger. Like a balloon with a hole in it, once the air is out, peace is restored. Patience goes a long way in the home, at work and even in church. And often (not always) the person whose anger rose against you will apologize because of our calmness.

Solomon continues to show us how the people in positions of power are not always the wisest people.

Entrust Wise People with Responsibility **(10:5-7)**

Another 'evil under the sun' that Solomon observed was when a ruler puts the wrong people in positions of responsibility ["fools put in high positions" and "slaves on horseback"] and those who should be in positions of responsibility are given menial jobs ["the rich occupy low ones" and "princes go on foot like slaves"].

Ironically, this would describe Solomon's son Rehoboam. When Rehoboam became king, the people cried out to reduce the harsh labour Solomon had placed on them. Rehoboam asked the elders what he should do and they said if you want to win favour with the people, reduce their harsh labour (1 Kings 12). But Rehoboam had unwisely placed his old buddies as advisors to the king and they said, show them who's the boss! Show them you're tougher than your father. He put the wrong people in power, listened to their advice which resulted in the eventual split in the kingdom of Israel.

Make wise decisions, not rash ones. Ask the right people, not those who you know will just agree with you. If you're in a position of responsibility, choose wise people to help you make good choices. Little mistakes can take a long time to be corrected. Had Rehoboam listened to the advice of the elders, he could have prevented a great tragedy. And this is what Solomon talks about next; the wisdom of preparedness

A Little Planning Can Prevent a Great Tragedy **(10:8-11)**

Using some everyday occurrences – digging a hole, renovating a building, cutting stones and splitting wood – Solomon encourages us to think before we work. Maybe it was Solomon who coined the phrase 'call before you dig'!

If you're going to dig a hole (maybe for a well) make sure it's safe, make sure it's a good place for it. If you're going to knock down a wall or move a pile of rocks, be careful. I've had snakes come

out from a pile of rocks. Or if you're renovating don't knock the house on your self. Don't just go in there swinging your sledgehammer. Use your head – not on the wall. I mean, think before you act.

If you ever watch the renovation shows, there is often a delay because they are tearing a wall down and they stop and ask if its load-bearing – then they dramatically go to a commercial – and they come back and offer a sensible (undramatic) solution.

Sharpen your chain before you cut wood. Make sure the log(s) don't move when you cut them. V. 11 talks about snake charmers. Snake charmers were popular sources of entertainment. However, if you were in too much of a hurry to get your money from the people and forgot to charm the snake first, then you'd get bit by the snake! Think before you do some work that has an element of risk to it. We've all learned from these mistakes right? We've all made a project longer because we didn't take some precautionary steps.

Solomon comes back to talking about the wisdom and foolishness of our words. Our speech reveals a lot about us. Solomon would encourage us to use less words when it comes to talking.

Fewer Words are Better than Many **(10:12-15)**

¹² *Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.*

¹³ *At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness—*

¹⁴ *and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming—
who can tell him what will happen after him?*

Proverbs is full of instruction about the tongue. My Bible lists six cross-references to Proverbs just in v.12 alone. "*Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious.*" Let your mouth be full of grace rather than grumbling. The fool is consumed by his own lips. He loves to hear himself/herself talk because they think they are so important. They multiply their words and talk as if they know everything but v.14 reminds us that no one knows what's coming - even though fools think they do. Excessive speech usually reveals how little he/she really know.

We all like to be heard, but let's be honest. Often we don't really listen to the people talking to us because we're in such a hurry to get our two. Let people talk and share about themselves. Give others your undivided attention and resist the impulse that we often have to talk about ourselves. It's a good reminder that life is not about you or me, but about bringing glory to God. Ps. 115:1 says,

¹ *Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness.*

I'm not sure what to do with v. 15. Perhaps it's talking about how the fool doesn't know where to go since it's the one time he doesn't use words because he's too proud to ask for directions. Or he's so weary thinking about the work ahead of him, he doesn't even know where to go to find his work.

What else did Solomon observe 'under the sun' and gives us some wise nuggets of truth to apply to our life?

A Life Invested Wisely Leads to Future Blessing **(10:16-20)**

- ¹⁶ *Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning.*
- ¹⁷ *Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time—
for strength and not for drunkenness.*
- ¹⁸ *If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.*
- ¹⁹ *A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.*
- ²⁰ *Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom,
because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.*

Another illustration from leadership. Woe to the land if a king was a servant – i.e.. an upstart, one who came to the throne through a rebellion of some kind. These types waste the government's money. They feast and drink in the morning – when they should be working and serving the people. There is not thought to others or the future. "Live it up now while I can. Party, drink, spend your money while I can!"

There is a time to work and time to party. Sometimes we're tempted to goof off because we want fun now. Showing restraint to do what we want will result in future blessing. For a leader it would be a solid foundation of the organization. All of us need to build a solid spiritual foundation of godliness and good work ethics. We can apply this in many ways. We need to restrain ourselves from doing what we want to do when we should be spending time in God's Word and prayer to start our day. Listen to His voice in the Word to prepare us to face the day in his strength and through His wisdom. Only when we've prepared ourselves spiritually first, then we can handle life's difficulties when they come.

Showing restraint to play when we should do our homework first. Showing restraint to lie around when we should be fixing the roof (v.18) as water drips. Showing restraint to do our own thing when we should be working to earn money (v.19). Showing restraint by waiting for marriage to enjoy sexual intimacy as God commands. Showing restraint in spending money on things we don't need or can't afford yet or waiting till we can. The Bible consistently teaches us about delayed gratification. Do what's right first and God will bless and lead in our life.

Solomon continues to speak about wise investing in 11:1-6 as he continues offering proverbial wisdom. You don't need a lot of money to make an impact for good – whether it's for yourself or for others. How does casting your bread upon the water help you find it later? Won't it sink and get lost?

The word for bread in Hebrew can be meant for 'income'. In 1 Kings 10 we read about how Solomon amassed his wealth – through trading of merchandise by ships on the water You loaded up your ship, sent it away and waited a long time before it came back, Lord-willing with good stuff on it. Very risky.

"Give portions to seven, even eight", means give your blessings to others who could benefit from it. We may not always be able to do especially if 'disaster may come upon the land' and you have lost opportunities to use your re-sources in other people's lives.

Vv.3-4 describes the non-risk taker, the worrywart. He may not go out and take a risk because it looks like it could rain or maybe a tree will fall on me. It may be too windy to do anything, I better not go out. "*Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.*"

Life is not predictable (v.5). Sow your seed in the morning, but don't just sit around at night waiting for it to grow. There's work still to be done there. Solomon is encouraging good risk. Life is an adventure. Life will soon end – maybe sooner than we hope. What a tragedy to have lived life

without using our resources to benefit others and build up our eternal portfolio. We can't take it with us but we can benefit from the fruit we reap that results from the sowing we've done.

What resources do you have that God wants to use for His glory? What talents and abilities do you have that God wants to use for His glory? Well, I'm too shy and I'm not that good and I. . . I. It's not about you or me, it's about God working through us. He dwells inside you through his Spirit. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." "I am with you always." "Be strong, take courage, do not fear, I am with you."

Why does God say these things over and over to us? Because we're afraid and we have wimpy faith at times. Faith is about letting God work through us. If He began a good work in you then He's committed to completing that good work in you and me. But I'm just a 'little' person, a nobody, I'm too old, I'm too young, I'm too whatever. We always have our excuses that say . . . 'I don't believe God is able to work through me.' If we call ourselves believers, then let's believe God can work.

Don't underestimate what can do through us by faith. You and I have been changed because we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour. He empowers us and equips us and strengthens us when we allow Him to work through us. Do not underestimate the power of the Lord even though you cannot see Him and you don't feel Him. He's with you waiting for you to invest your life for Him so that you and I who are small and just one person and just one church in just one small town, can do amazing things through God and for God that will have an eternal impact.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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