

Ecclesiastes 10:1–11 | “There’s Folly Everywhere!”
Preached on September 6, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 10:1–11, as we are continuing our study in the book of Ecclesiastes. *[pauseeee]*

The next couple of chapters will highlight the divide between wisdom and folly, and give us wise words to live by. *[pause]*

We could all use some more wisdom, so let’s listen to Solomon, the wise Preacher. *[READ 1–11]*

Have you ever looked around you and said, “It’s everywhere!” *[pause]*

When I look around, that’s what I think when I see advertisements—it feels like you can’t go anywhere or do anything without seeing some sort of ad. *[pause]*

Or maybe you’ve had ants in your house—you see one, then another one, and you look some more, and they are all over your kitchen. *[pause]*

You say to your spouse, “There’s ants *everywhere!*” *[pause]*

Well in our text today, it’s like Solomon is reminding us that folly is everywhere. *[pause]*

It’s not just something contained to one little area of life.

It’s not *only* found in politics, and not elsewhere.

No, folly is like weeds that have overtaken a garden—it’s not just the tomato plants that have been affected, but the whole garden is infested. *[pauseeee]*

Now before we go further, let’s think through what exactly folly is. *[pause]*

Most of us know that folly is the opposite of wisdom, and that it’s not a good thing, but have you ever thought about what it is? *[pause]*

Well folly is essentially living life, NOT according to what’s right and true—it’s like going against the grain of how God made the world. *[pause]*

This is because a fool disregards God and His ways, and seeks to go his or her own way, instead.¹ *[pause]*

Fools “despise wisdom and instruction,” and don’t listen to “reproof.”²

They are “reckless and careless,” and do not turn from evil.³ *[pauseee]*

¹ Psalm 14:1, Proverbs 12:15, 26:12, 28:26.

² Proverbs 1:7 & 15:5, respectively. (See also Proverbs 18:2).

³ Proverbs 14:16.

We are told that really folly is the default mode of everyone born in this world, for “folly is bound up in the heart of a child,” so it takes “the rod of discipline” to drive it from them.⁴
[pausee]

This means that we start out as fools, due to our sin.

And this is exactly why folly is so pervasive in our world: it’s because it’s the default mode of sinners, so no wonder it’s everywhere! *[pauseeee]*

So what we need is the intentionality of looking to God and His Word, or we will fall back into folly.

Therefore, may this morning be another time to ‘drive folly far from us’ by reminding us of the pervasiveness of folly, so that we are propelled onwards towards wisdom. *[pauseeeee]*

We see first that...

I. Folly can be displayed in life in general.

We see this in verses 1–3, as Solomon reminds us generally of wisdom and folly. *[pause]*

He first shows us that a little folly can do a lot of damage by using an image of some dead flies ruining perfumer’s ointment. *[pauseeee]*

Perfume, especially back in that day, was valuable.

They didn’t have all of the hygiene products and methods that we do, so perfume was critical to smelling good. *[pause]*

So here’s this valuable item, and all it takes is a few dead flies, and this expensive item is ruined.

And Solomon is saying that that’s like a little folly. *[pauseeeee]*

Wisdom and honor are valuable things—we all want to be wise and honorable people.

It takes a while to build up a reputation, but all it takes is *a little folly*, and that reputation can be ruined. *[pauseee]*

Think about how someone could do so many good things over many years, and yet that one foolish thing said or did can still remain in your mind. *[pause]*

This is why we must be intentional and careful about how we live...

Don’t be content with even a little bit of folly because a little bit can go a long way. *[pauseeeee]*

⁴ Proverbs 22:15.

Not only does a little folly do a lot of damage, but understand, too, that folly in the heart can direct your life. *[pause]*

Verse 2 points out that it's either wisdom or folly in the heart that directs one's steps. *[pauseee]*

If you have wisdom in your heart, it's going to lead you to live a certain way that's good, wise, and right.

But if you have folly in your heart, it's going to lead you to live foolishly. *[pause]*

This reminds us of what the Bible often tells us about how it's the heart that directs our life.⁵

So you can't blame your foolishness on your circumstances because wise people have done wisely in similar circumstances. *[pause]*

You can't blame your folly on other people because it's coming from *your* heart. *[pauseeeee]*

So many try to point the finger at everything else, but their own heart as the cause of their foolish decisions and life choices.

No, *your* steps show *your* heart. *[pauseeee]*

Solomon makes it clear that what's on the inside eventually shows up on the outside. *[pause]*

Since your heart directs your steps, that means that folly eventually comes out in a person's life. *[pause]*

People try to hide different things from others, but wisdom and folly in a person's heart cannot remain hidden. *[pause]*

It's like a leak behind a wall...

At first, you don't see any evidence of a leak, but over time, the leak is revealed, as you start to see that the wall is wet. *[pause]*

So also, what's in your heart cannot remain hidden.

As time goes by, as decisions are made, and as words are said, that wisdom or folly in your heart is eventually revealed. *[pauseeee]*

This is why he says that even as a fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and says to everyone he is a fool. *[pause]*

His actions and lifestyle can't help, but say, "Here's a fool!" *[pauseeeee]*

This is why wisdom is so needed in our lives...

⁵ See Proverbs 4:23, 16:23 and Matthew 12:34–35, 15:18–19 for a few examples.

It's because a little folly can do a lot of damage. *[pause]*

It's because folly in our hearts can direct our steps to nowhere good, and whatever is in our hearts is eventually revealed. *[pauseeee]*

This should cause each of us to evaluate our hearts, and to pursue the wisdom that only comes from God.

He has what we need, so look to Him, not yourself. *[pauseeee]*

Ask God for more wisdom, to change your heart, and to shape you into the likeness of Christ. *[pause]*

It's only through the Lord that we can be changed from the inside-out.

He does a mighty work of mercy, whereby he amazingly transforms us, as we heed His Word. *[pause]*

The outcome of our life, therefore, is a testament to grace, not a testament to our own sweat. *[pauseeee]*

We saw so far how folly can be displayed in life in general, but now let's see how...

II. Folly can be displayed in society.

When we look out at society, we can see foolishness on display. *[pause]*

It's not just found among our neighbors and co-workers, but it can be demonstrated in even the highest positions of authority, and how we react to those in authority. *[pauseeee]*

First, verse 4 points to how there can be situations where someone in authority is angry with you, and so you need to exercise wisdom in that situation. *[pause]*

He says that when the king is angry with you, "do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest." *[pauseee]*

When someone who is in authority is angry with us, it's tempting to want to react rashly. *[pause]*

We could be like, "OK, then I'm done, I quit," or we could want to stomp out the door in anger.

But wisdom slows you down, so that you don't foolishly do something that you'll regret. *[pauseeee]*

By remaining calm, it can calm down the person in authority.

And this relates to how Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." *[pauseeeee]*

Think about the times that you've been angry at someone...

If someone gets angry back, are you prone to calm down? *[pause]*

No, it causes you to get angrier, but when someone is very calm, it can actually have a calming effect on you. *[pause]*

So also, we need to remember *that* as we interact with people in authority over us. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe it's a boss, or a parent, or a governmental leader.

If you react with anger, it's not going to lead the person in authority to calm down or rethink his or her actions, but calmness can be calming. *[pauseeee]*

Realize that how you react to people can influence how people react to you. *[pauseeee]*

They could think, "You know what, I was kind of angry at what they did, but they seem so calm and kind, so maybe it was just a mistake. I'm willing to let this one go." *[pauseeee]*

We need to remember how folly can be displayed as we interact with others in society, especially those in authority, but we see more here...

We see how folly can be displayed in the *positions* that people get in society. *[pauseeeee]*

He says in verses 6–7, "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." *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever wondered, "How did *that* person get into political office?" or, "How did *that* guy get promoted?" *[pause]*

Or maybe it's the opposite: you've seen someone so wise, smart, and talented and they are constantly overlooked, and you are left scratching your head. *[pause]*

You aren't alone, for Solomon saw the same thing—this is nothing new. *[pauseeeee]*

Truly, "folly is set in many high places," isn't it?

We see unqualified, unwise, ungodly people all the time in high up positions, and they are making bad decisions that affect us all. *[pause]*

We groan under our leaders sometimes, and wonder, "Are these really the best choices from among us?" *[pauseeee]*

Then we look over there, and see someone who deserves to be in that position, and they are doing some lower job. *[pause]*

We see the unqualified and unwise riding high, and the qualified and wise walking low. *[pauseeee]*

This reminds us that our world evaluates people based on position. *[pause]*

If someone has a high up position then people act like they are the true “high-up ones,” but God doesn’t evaluate based on our positions, for folly can place someone there.

So don’t base your evaluations on position. *[pause]*

Understand that a high-up position doesn’t automatically mean that someone is qualified and wise, nor does a lowly position. *[pauseeee]*

While the world sets folly in high places and praises them, God knows what’s truly high and what’s truly low.

He tells us that, “He who is least among you all is the one who is great.”⁶ *[pause]*

It’s the one who is the servant of others who is the greatest,⁷ and if we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled, but if we humble ourselves before God, we will be exalted.⁸ *[pauseeee]*

To the world, we are often considered weak, lowly, and despised.

We are not always the ones promoted, lifted up, and praised, due to our faith and convictions, but just look at the cross. *[pause]*

There people think of Jesus’ death as weak, lowly, and foolish, but God used it to shame the so-called wise of this world, and to shame the so-called strong of this world.⁹ *[pause]*

So our boast can’t be in our worldly positions, nor can we despair due to the worldly positions that unqualified people receive.

What matters is how God views things. *[pause]*

So let’s view things through the wisdom of God, and let’s use the wisdom of God in society as we relate to others, and use wisdom as we lead in our positions. *[pauseeee]*

Folly can be displayed in life in general, in society, but also...

III. Folly can be displayed in our activities.

Have you ever done something foolish when doing some normal activity? *[pause]*

One time, I set up the coffee maker to automatically turn on in the morning at a certain time. *[pause]*

I put the coffee grounds in, put the water in the reservoir, and went to bed. *[pause]*

⁶ Luke 9:48.

⁷ A reference to Matthew 23:11–12.

⁸ A reference to Luke 14:11.

⁹ A reference to 1 Corinthians 1:26–31.

The next morning, I walked downstairs, eager to have that first cup of coffee, but there was coffee all over the place—it was a mess! *[pause]*

Here I had forgotten to put the coffee carafe back into the coffee maker, so the coffee brewed and then went right onto the table and ran down onto the floor. *[pause]*

I was annoyed with myself for foolishly forgetting such an essential part of making coffee. *[pauseee]*

Like my coffee-making mishap, folly can be displayed in our everyday activities, if we are not careful. *[pauseeee]*

In verses 8–11, Solomon goes through various activities, and reminds us that folly can be displayed *even there*. *[pauseeee]*

He talks about how someone who digs a pit could fall into it, and a serpent could bite the person breaking a wall. *[pause]*

Likewise, quarrying stone could lead to injury from that stone, and splitting logs could do the same. *[pause]*

Working with a dull ax could lead to having to work harder, and not charming a snake beforehand doesn't provide any benefit to the snake-charmer. *[pauseeee]*

Solomon shows us that there are legitimate dangers in a lot of our activities, and if we are not wise, we could get hurt. *[pauseeeee]*

Life is filled with activity...

There are times where we need to dig pits, break walls, quarry stones, split logs, and things like that. *[pause]*

These are all ordinary, everyday types of activities, but they all involve *risk*. *[pause]*

If we are not wise, we could fall into that hole that we're digging, or get hurt by that object that we're working on.

And I'm sure many of us have our own stories of how we got hurt doing an ordinary activity. *[pauseeee]*

So what's needed? Verse 10 tells us: "wisdom helps one to succeed." *[pauseeee]*

Since there is potential harm in our everyday activities, then that means that we need wisdom *everyday*. *[pause]*

You can't take a day off when it comes to wisdom because you will need wisdom to do what God has called you to do *that day*. *[pauseeee]*

I wonder if we even think about wisdom that way?...

Do we consider that we need wisdom to do even the basic, ordinary things of life, or are we too prideful to ask for help to do those tasks? *[pauseeee]*

Now how does wisdom help us to succeed in our activities? *[pause]*

First, wisdom helps us to be careful when working. *[pauseeee]*

Most workplaces emphasize safety as a priority. *[pause]*

When I worked at a factory, they would drill safety into our heads.

We had “safety meetings” and could face consequences, if we tried to do something considered unsafe. *[pause]*

There was even one of those boards that showed how many days since the last accident. *[pauseee]*

Safety is important when working because there are hazards that come along with it, and it’s wisdom that helps us to be careful when we are working. *[pauseeee]*

This is not to say that you won’t ever get hurt, if you use wisdom, but wisdom *limits* risk. *[pause]*

When digging a pit, wisdom says, “Maybe I should be careful where I stand, so I don’t accidentally fall into that pit.” *[pause]*

This wisdom-cultivated carefulness helps one to succeed, for they aren’t hurt and down for the count. *[pause]*

Fall into the pit, and you could break a hip.

Get bitten by a snake, and you may very well die, if it’s poisonous. *[pauseeee]*

Now, like anything, carefulness can be taken too far, where someone is *overly* cautious and obsessive about it, but that doesn’t come from wisdom, it comes from fear. *[pause]*

But when someone exercises proper carefulness when working, it is not a lack of courage, but an indicator of wisdom. *[pauseeee]*

Do you use wisdom to be careful when you work? *[pause]*

Don’t discount the fact that God cares about the little things like this, and wants us to use wisdom in our everyday activities. *[pauseeeee]*

Not only does wisdom lead us to be careful when working, but wisdom leads us to think ahead and prepare. *[pause]*

Look again at verse 10, “If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.” *[pauseeee]*

A person swinging an axe that’s dull is going to have to use more strength and it could lead to exhaustion.

But if they used a little wisdom, they would know that, if only they would take some time to sharpen that axe, they wouldn’t have to use so much strength. *[pauseeee]*

I have this hatchet that I use to chop up firewood, and recently I sharpened it and used it again, and what a difference it made! *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever heard of the phrase, “Work smarter, not harder”?

Well that’s what it’s talking about here. *[pauseeee]*

If we use some wisdom by thinking ahead and considering what we could do to make something go quicker or easier, then it pays off in the end. *[pause]*

It takes some time and thought, but know that the preparation is worth it. *[pauseee]*

Folly says, “Just get it done!” But wisdom says, “Before I start, what’s the best way to do this?” *[pauseeee]*

Do you use wisdom in your everyday activities? *[pause]*

Realize that God wants us to be *thoroughly* wise people. *[pause]*

Not just wise in one area over here, but wise in every area of our lives.

From the biggest decisions we make to the smallest ones, God wants us to be wise. *[pauseee]*

As Christians, our wisdom should shine forth not only in the church building, but at our place of business, and in the backyard. *[pauseeeee]*

Putting together all the pieces of what we saw in this passage, we see that...

Folly is pervasive in life, so we need to use wisdom!

Folly can be seen in life in general, in society, and even in everyday activities—there’s folly everywhere! *[pauseeeee]*

Don’t let this knowledge cause you to let down your guard because *it could tempt you to give in.* *[pause]*

You see your co-workers living foolishly and seeming to have it easy, so you are tempted to join in. *[pause]*

You see others cutting corners, not thinking through their activities, and being fine, so you think that you'll just do the same. *[pause]*

Don't do it...

Remember the danger of folly: just a little bit can ruin what's valuable and shape the direction of your life. *[pause]*

Remember how if you are not careful and think ahead, you could open yourself up to risk. *[pauseeee]*

Lift up the importance of wisdom, no matter how much folly is lifted up in our world.

Cling to the way that God has laid for you to walk, and walk it! *[pause]*

Know this—you can ask God for wisdom, knowing that He “gives generously to all without reproach,” and wisdom will be given to you.¹⁰ *[pauseeeee]*

Another temptation of seeing folly everywhere is that *it can tempt you to give up*. *[pause]*

You look around you and see people foolishly put into high positions in society, and now, you are like, “What's the point of even living wisely?” *[pause]*

The world and its folly is lifted up as great, while the church and its wisdom is put down, but remember that what you see isn't what's going to be. *[pause]*

God rules over all, and what He values is what we should value, no matter what is going on at the moment. *[pause]*

He will someday make it clear what's truly valuable, and so we rest in the knowledge that He tells us that ‘wisdom is better,’ knowing that it truly is. *[pauseeeee]*

Now as we view this text in light of Christ's arrival, there's something that we must understand...

This wisdom that Ecclesiastes gives us for everyday life isn't separate from following Christ—it's really a part of it. *[pause]*

Following Christ *involves* living wisely in the circumstances God has placed us in, whether that be in life in general, in society, or in our activities. *[pauseeee]*

So do you live wisely, knowing that it's an expression and outworking of your relationship with Christ? *[pauseeee]*

Knowing and following Jesus is the wisest thing that you could do, for He's the Lord and Savior, who died for our sins and then rose again. *[pause]*

¹⁰ James 1:5.

Jesus talked about how it's those who listen to and obey his words, who are like a wise man who built his house on the rock.¹¹ *[pause]*

It's *that* person who's prepared when the storm comes because he has wisely chosen to build his life upon Christ and His words. *[pauseeee]*

Do you live your life grounded in Christ?

That's how you can live wisely in both the big things and the small, ordinary things. *[pauseeee]*

Yes, there's folly everywhere, but we don't have to be overtaken by it...

For amidst the waves of folly, we can cling to the rock of wisdom, Jesus Christ, who gives peace, hope, life, and stability to those who trust in Him.

¹¹ A reference to Matthew 7:24–27.