

How do I live life?

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you've ever read the book *Cautionary Tales for Children*, *Cautionary Tales for Children* by Hilaire Belloc, and it was originally published in 1907, so I don't think there's anyone who was around at the time then, but it was written for the admonition of children, a kind of moral instruction.

And so Belloc's stories tell the unpleasant things that happen to children if they behave badly. And so they're basically cautionary tales about different characters. And so there's Jim, who ran away from his nurse and was eaten by a lion.

And then there's Henry King, who chewed bits of string and was cut off in dreadful agonies. And then there's Lord Lundy, who was too freely moved to tears and thereby ruined his political career. And then Matilda, who told lies and was burned to death. And then there was George, who played with a dangerous toy and suffered a catastrophe of considerable dimensions.

And my personal favourite is Rebecca. Rebecca who slammed doors for fun and perished miserably. So that's from *Cautionary Tales for Children* by Hilaire Belloc.

[1 : 14] Now in our text from Ecclesiastes chapter 10, what we see is that the teacher, the writer of Ecclesiastes gives us some cautionary tales. That's what chapter 10 is all about, because what he's doing is he's exploring how wisdom is better than folly.

And so he gives us various examples from everyday life. And they're meant to be cautionary because he's mainly describing fools and their foolishness. And so when it comes to how we live our lives, the teacher of Ecclesiastes wants to caution us against folly so that we live by being wise. And so as we look at this text, the question we've got to ask ourselves is, am I living wisely or foolishly? How do I live my life? And so let's look at what he says under four headings.

They're on the sheet. The first is the fool's life, verse 1 to 7. The second is the fool's labor, verse 8 to 11. The third, the fool's lips, 12 to 14 and 20.

And then fourthly, the fool's laziness, verse 15 to 19. So first of all, let's look at the fool's life, verse 1 to 7. So verse 1, we read, As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

[2 : 30] So he's saying a good perfume is spoiled by dead flies because if they fall in, then the sweet-smelling perfume can easily turn into a disgusting stench.

And so the point is that it only takes a little foolishness in life to have a massive impact. And we know it's true. Just think about it. One silly mistake can mess up a good reputation.

One rash word can cause great pain and hurt. One angry outburst can end a career. One lapse in judgment can end a marriage. One reckless moment can end a life.

It just takes a little folly to unravel a wise and honorable life. Derek Inder, one of the commentators in Ecclesiastes, says, It is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness.

I like that. You've got to read a lot of pages in the commentary where you get a phrase like, It's easier to make a stink than to create sweetness. And so the teacher really gets to the heart of the matter, which is the matter of the heart.

[3 : 35] Verse 2. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Now this has got nothing to do with politics. Because in ancient times the right hand were in the right hand associated with weakness.

And it was a way of talking about good and bad, blessing and cursing. And so the heart that inclines to the right describes the wise person going in the right direction in life.

And the heart that inclines to the left describes the person who's going in the wrong direction in life. Because the heart is the core of a person's being. Everything in life flows from the heart.

The heart is the center. And so our heart will either be inclined towards God, which is wise, or away from God, which is foolish. And so the teacher says you could spot a fool, a Milo, by the way they behave.

He says in verse 3, even as a fool walks along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are. So fools just naturally draw attention to themselves.

[4 : 41] They stick out like a sore thumb. You can see them in Glasgow city center, normally when the sun's out and taps are up. Or anywhere where there's a crime. You can spot the fool.

And everybody is in no doubt about how stupid they are. And they think their behavior is funny, but really the joke's on them. And so the advice from the teacher is don't be a fool.

And so he gives an example in verse 4. If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post. Calmness can lay great offenses to rest.

And so the advice is to stay calm even when somebody is angry at you. Don't do something in the heat of the moment that you might regret later on. And so he's describing the person who walks out of his job, slams the door, because his boss is angry with him.

In other words, storming out and slamming the door might have seemed impressive at the time.

And it might feel good for all 10 seconds. But in the cold light of day, throwing a hissy fit at work and going in the huff is never smart.

[5 : 47] But you've got to go back, replace your steps, and apologize. Far better to be wise by being calm. That's what he's saying. But he's also saying, we do live in a crazy world where there are leaders who are fools.

And very often fools get the top jobs. So verse 5. There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler. Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.

I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot. Like slaves. And so in ancient society, only certain classes of people got into positions of power.

And it was normally those with wealth and those with influence. And so the teacher saying, fools in powerful positions goes against the general order of how things usually work.

So slaves on horseback, princes on foot, describes people who are in the wrong positions. And he calls it evil because the wrong people have been elevated to positions of power.

[6 : 53] And you know, we can hear what he's saying, can't we? Foolish leaders are always trouble. Foolish leaders are always trouble.

That's the fool's life in verse 1 to 7. Secondly, we see the fool's labor. Verse 8 to 11. That's his work.

And so in these strange series of work pictures, verse 8 to 11, they describe just the fool's work.

Because when it comes to work, fools are their own worst enemies. And so the point is that the following is self-destructive. Look at verse 8. Whoever digs a pit may fall into it.

Whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. So digging a pit here might be malicious for the pit. It's for somebody to fall into.

Or it could just be an innocent activity. But the teacher is saying it's the fool who falls into the road pit. And then there's the breaking through of a wall by being bitten and being bitten by a snake.

[8 : 17] And I guess the assumption is that he shouldn't have been breaking through the wall in the first place. And so it serves him right that he's bitten by a snake. And so the message really is, don't be a fool and get caught out by your own stupidity.

Because whether your work is evil or whether your work is foolish, it will be self-destructive. And so he goes on in verse 9. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them.

Whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. So he's saying there are dangers and risks in normal labor. And so this example sounds more accidental than evil.

So somebody smashes up stones and a huge stone falls on their foot. It breaks their toes. Or somebody chops logs and a log jumps up and hits them in the face.

It happens. I was strimming the edges of our garden last summer around the edges of the grass with my strimmer. And I was strimming around a small snail. What kind of thing hit me in the eye?

[9 : 23] It was so sore. And so my wife can help me send me afterwards. You should put the goggles on. You're strimming the grass. And so what the teacher is saying here is that there are going to be dangers in any kind of work.

And so we shouldn't be foolish in how we work. Because if we are, we'll have nobody but ourselves to blame. Now, again, another example.

Verse 10. If the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed. But skill will bring success. So he's saying fools rush in.

They don't take time to sharpen the axe. And so the fool uses more strength than he does. Skill, showing more sweat and sense. Whereas sharpening the axe first is a sensible thing, the wise thing.

Because it will give more success and less strength. So this is a kind of guy who ignores the instructions for his IKEA furniture. And he watches up what should have been a couple of hours on a Friday night and turns it into a whole long weekend job.

[10:29] And then when he's eventually finished, all he's got left standing is a monument to his stupidity. And so when his wife and children come and inspect his work, his wife says, It doesn't look like that in the picture here.

And his children say, Why is it squinted? And what are all those extra holes all about? It's just an example. It's not a personal example. I'm just saying. It's an example we're all familiar with.

But the teacher suggests that you need to work smart. And not in a stupid way. Where we prepare properly, first, in advance.

Because if we do, it will save time and effort. And of course, this goes way beyond manual labour. It's not just talking about work here. This applies to our general approach in life.

Because the more thought and careful planning and good preparation and skill, the more of that that goes in to a project, whatever it is, then success will come.

[11:31] But we will achieve little if we don't prepare properly. So if you want your marriage to be healthy, it will transform itself. You've got to work and invest time in it.

You want to parent your children well. Well, it won't happen without planning. You want your church plant to grow. Well, it won't happen by sitting back and just expecting everything to happen.

It will need time to plan and to prepare for the future. So wisdom requires that we don't just drift along and we don't just cut corners.

So that's one aspect of work. But what the teacher does is he also gives a contrasting example of the fool's labour in verse 11. If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee.

This is the classic, you only had one job. And the job was charming the snake, but the charmer was too slow in doing it. And so the snake bit.

[12:30] Just picture the scene. The charmer gets to his spot in the busy marketplace. He doesn't get to work. He faffs about. He chats to the other traders. He goes off and he buys himself a coffee, maybe even a bacon roll.

And all this time the snake is patiently waiting in its basket, but it can't wait forever. And eventually it sticks its head out and bites somebody on the ledge.

And so because the charmer didn't do any charming, then he can't do any charging. Because the snake has bitten too soon. He goes home with the money in his pocket.

Can't feed his family. Why? Because he didn't get on with the job at hand. He had one thing to do and he failed to do it. And so it would seem that the point here is that we should just get on and do what we have got to do.

Because foolishly wasting time will mean things will only come back in vicarious. And so how should we apply this? Well, don't delay in doing what you've got to do.

[13:33] So do we really need another meeting? Do we need another estimate? Do we need to wait any longer? Do we really need more evidence? Probably not. It's more likely that the opportunity will be lost and will pay the consequences.

So if you take verse 10 and verse 11 together, we see how we shouldn't work. Or we see the foolish way to work. So whether that means taking more time to prepare, then that's a good thing to do.

But at the same time, we should also take action before it's too late. And that waste time and hang on forever. So that's the fool's life, first of all.

Second, the fool's labor. And then thirdly, the fool's lips, verse 12 to 14. So more than anywhere else in life, our foolishness is exposed when we open our mouths.

But it's not just the ability to know what to say. It's also the ability to know when to keep quiet and to shut up. So verse 12 says, Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips.

[14:40] So it's good to listen to words from the wise, because they're gracious, but not so the fool. So the teacher says, fools are consumed by their own lips. In other words, he's saying, literally,

fools eat themselves up by their own words.

They destroy themselves by what they say. They don't need anyone else to destroy them. They're the ones who do it. It's when they open their mouths. But words don't just reveal foolishness. Words can also be downright evil. And so verse 13, At the beginning of their words are folly. At the end, they are wicked madness.

And fools multiply words. So if fools don't know when to stop, then their words will soon turn into wicked madness.

And so it began as just some foolishness can quickly turn into evil. And we've all seen it happen. So a fool says something, and they haven't been stopped in their tracks.

[15:42] And so they keep going, which means their words take on some kind of undeserved legitimacy. And then they carry on talking, and talking, and talking. But what they say soon spirals out of control.

It goes from bad to worse. And then it denigrates into evil madness. That's what the teacher is saying. And so their lips don't just spide wickedness. They reveal their mental unstableness.

And so he's saying you need to be wise in what you say. Because what we say with our lips is significant. It really is. And if we continue to make a habit of seeing foolish things, then we will probably end up seeing evil things.

Which means we don't just hurt others. We also destroy ourselves. And so we need to be careful and not careless with our lips. And so this is a clear warning.

Second half of verse 14 says, No one knows what is coming. Who can tell someone else what will happen after them? So this is not just about life and the future he's talking about, but also the future after life, when we're dead.

[16:49] Because our words can be our undoing. What we say can have serious consequences. Why? Well, because the words we speak reveal our hearts.

It's our hearts that cause our lips to speak the way they do. And Jesus himself was so strong on this. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 12.

He says, For the mouth speaks, but the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for the empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

So he says, The mouth speaks, but the heart is full of. Now the teacher here highlights another danger in what we say just at the end of the chapter in verse 20. Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and the bird on the wing may report what you say.

[18:02] Hear what he's saying? A little birdie told me so. He's warning against speaking badly about someone else, in the context, namely it's the king, and the likelihood that the bad words that are spoken will get back to him.

But it's a warning for whatever we say about anyone, isn't it? We need to be careful of what we say, because you just never know when that little birdie will take your words, fly away, carry them, and treat them to the person that you never expected would hear them.

Words can go places where we never intended them to go, and are heard by people that we would never have expected to hear them. And so these are cautionary tales, aren't they?

Cautioning us not to be foolish with our life or with our lips, but to be wise in what we say and in what we do. So that was the third point, the fool's lips.

And then fourthly, we see the fool's laziness. Verse 15 to 19, because the fool adopts a lazy approach to life. Verse 15, the toil of fools wearies them.

[19:15] They do not know the way to time. So fools are lightweights. They quickly and easily tire. They are too quick at finding excuses for why they can't do things.

And so the teacher sums this up by showing us the picture of a fool who can't even find his way to time. That's hard, isn't it? How can you not find your way to time, to Glasgow Queen Street, or Glasgow Central, or Buchanan Street?

And it's because the fool puts little effort into anything and everything that he does. So verse 16, Woe to the land whose king was a servant, and whose princes feast in the morning.

Blessed is the land whose king is of no birth, and whose princes eat at a proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness. What he's doing here is describing leadership again.

He's saying that fools with power are very dangerous, and pity the land that is led by a fool, because they're lazy when it comes to leading, because they're too busy feasting, he says, and getting drunk.

[20 : 21] And so when he talks about the princes feasting in the morning, he's not talking about them having some kind of great, foolish Scottish breakfast with bacon and eggs and black reading and all of that.

No, what he's saying is, the eating is the rollover of the drunken party from the night before, about princes being so wasted the next morning that they aren't fit to lead their country.

Whereas the country, he's saying, that as a wise ruler who eats for strength, and not to get drunk, well, they're blessed. So pity the country that is led by a fool and suffers because of that leader's foolish behavior.

But also, pity the business that's led by a fool, pity the school that's led by a fool, or the church that's led by a fool, or the family that's led by a fool.

Fools only end up making a mess of everything. And that's what the teacher describes with his next word picture, verse 18. Through laziness, the rafters sigh, because of idle hands, the house leaks.

[21 : 30] It sums up the fool, where laziness just leads to destruction. Again, it's a bit of a DIY verse. My father-in-law taught me that DIY stands for do it yearly.

But the fool in the story is worse than that. He is do it never. Because the teacher's describing the fool who never gets around doing anything that needs to be done.

They're too lazy to climb the ladder to fix the leak in their roof. And so the house could fall down. All because the fool can't be bothered doing anything about it.

And so there's a lesson here, isn't there, about being lazy and just leaving everything to deteriorate. Or putting things off that really ought to be done. And it is a recipe for disaster.

Whether that be repairs in the home, or repairing a relationship, or sorting an issue at work, or at church, or developing a ministry, or whatever it is, if we put off things that need to be done, we're being foolish.

[22 : 34] Because laziness is destructive. And so it's the fool who fails to take charge, or who fails to take responsibility, for those things that are under their domain.

But the teacher here doesn't just warn us about foolishness in life, because, again, he says, as he often does throughout his book, he shoots through with a shack of light, because he wants us to enjoy life.

Verse 19 says, A feast is made for laughter, wine makes like merry, and money is the answer for everything. Now that might sound strange to our ears, because it sounds like he's encouraging hedonism, and he's encouraging greed.

So what does he mean? Well, I think he's telling us to adopt a wise approach to money. He is right, in a sense. Money is the answer for everything.

But he's not saying here that money brings satisfaction, or money brings happiness, because he's already told us that it doesn't. But he is saying, money can do a great deal of good, if we use it wisely.

[23 : 38] Yes, money is what we need to eat, and to drink, and to live, but it also gives us the ability to do a whole lot more. And so the wise person won't just look after themselves, they'll want to honour God, of the money that God has blessed them with.

Because if God has been generous towards us, and we know him, and love him, then we will want to be generous towards him, and the people he has made.

And so money can be used greatly in gospel work, or kingdom work. Money is needed to plant churches, money is needed to send missionaries, money is needed to train ministers, money is needed to reach communities, money is needed to mobilise workers, money is needed to serve cities.

And so we'll be wise, if we invest the money that God has given to us, in kingdom work. Because it's an eternal investment. And so, yes, the fool can be lazy, in their approach to life.

Well, what he's saying is, the fool can also be lazy, in their approach to money. Like, keep it cold a bit, for a rainy day, instead of prayerfully, and strategically using it, to do great good, in advancing the kingdom, of God, right now.

[24 : 58] Okay, so, we've seen the fool's life, we've seen the fool's labour, we've seen the fool's lips, we've seen the fool's laziness, and through all of this, the teacher wants to caution us, against

foolishness, and to encourage us to live wisely.

And that is what we must do, by way of application of this passage, we must live wisely. But here's the thing, we can't do it. It's impossible for us, no matter how hard we try, to live wisely, we constantly fail.

We fail, because we were created, to worship, and obey God, and love others. But instead of, living for God, and loving our neighbour, we've rejected God, and we have lived, self-centred, and foolish lives.

And all of this started, way back in the Garden of Eden, when sin entered into, human experience. Because Adam and Eve, chose to disobey God, and they wrongly believed, that by eating from the tree, of the knowledge of good and evil, that they'd be wise.

And so as a human race, our relationship with God, was broken. And so have our relationships, with other people, been broken. And so is our relationship, with the created world. It's all being broken.

[26 : 18] And that's why the teacher, continues to speak about, evil under the sun. Because it's a consequence, of our human rebellion, against the God, who made us.

And the result, of that disobedience, and rebellion, is foolishness. Foolishness in our world, and foolishness, in our lives. And so our default position, as human beings, is that we, are in a position, of sinful folly, against our loving, creator God, who made us, and who knows what's best, for our lives.

Because even wisdom, can save us, from the punishment we deserve, for our sin, or change the way, life is under the sun. Only Jesus Christ, can do this.

Jesus is the wisdom, of God. And so while Ecclesiastes, exposes our foolishness, the good news, is that God, sent his son, the fulfillment, of all wisdom, to pay for our sin, and to save us from it.

And that's why, we must turn from our sin, and trust in Jesus' death, on the cross, so that we might be saved. And so it's only, when Jesus has done this for us, that we will go, and live wisely.

[27 : 37] And Jesus told us, what this looks like, in a story. The story of the wise, and foolish builders. Let me read it. Matthew chapter 7. Therefore everyone, who hears these words of mine, and puts them into practice, is like a wise man, who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, and the streams rose, and the winds blew, and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation, on the rock. But everyone, who hears these words of mine, and does not put them into practice, is like a foolish man, who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, and the streams rose, and the wind blew, and beat against that house, and it fell, the great crash. So, get this, according to Jesus, the difference between being wise, and being foolish, not just in how we live our lives, right now, but in the end verdict, the end result of our lives, the difference is, hearing the words of Jesus, and putting them into practice.

That will determine, whether we are wise, or foolish. And so, what is God's verdict, on your life?

What is God's verdict, on my life? It all comes down to, whether we listen to Jesus, and do what he says.

And if we listen to Jesus, we'll run to him, for forgiveness of our sins, and we'll walk, in his ways.

Let's pray together. We thank you, our God, for sending your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to save us, from our sinful folly, and rebellion, against you.

[29 : 15] Lord, the world we live in, is broken, and it needs restoring, but it's broken, because as men, and women, we have turned our backs, on you, rejecting your rightful rule, over our lives, and the result is, devastation, and foolishness, everywhere.

Dear, we thank you, for the great hope, that we have, that in and through, Jesus Christ, our sin can be forgiven, and we can be restored, to a right relationship, with you. And we can live, with the hope, as we follow Jesus, that one day, everything will be, sorted out, and everything, will be restored.

All because Jesus, lived, and died, and rose again, and will return, with all things right. And so we give her, thanks and praise, in Jesus name, Amen.