



How to Ruin Your World, Your Life & Everything Else

Pursuing Wisdom Under the Sun, Part 9

Ecclesiastes 10:16-20

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When the Great Wall of China was built along its northern borders, it was built to protect the empire from invading nomadic tribes.

Built over the course of several centuries, one archeological survey determined that the entire wall, including all its various branches, eventually covered some 13,000 miles.

It typically towered 30 feet into the air and stood some 18 feet thick.

As amazing as it was, China would be invaded several times by enemy armies; not because they figured out how to scale the walls, but how to bribe the gatekeepers. By bribing the gatekeepers to betray their country, these invading armies marched through open gates.

Gates are only as good as the character of the gatekeepers.

The ideas of national safety and the character of leaders are the focus of King

Solomon here in his private journal called Ecclesiastes.

Solomon is going to give us a description of gatekeepers/leaders/rulers/people in authority. And they are defined not by their military power, or weapons or defense systems, but by their character and integrity and purity.

If you'll turn with me to chapter 10, verse 11, at first you may think that this is the perfect time and the perfect text to rail against the political world and the government and bad leadership and high taxes and how terrible the world out there really is.

I mean, just notice how verse 16 starts out:

*Woe to you, O land, when
your king is a child, and
your princes feast in the
morning!*

Ecclesiastes 10:16

In other words, they just lay around all morning eating and drinking.

And you may be thinking, “I wish I had their job. Sleep in, lounge around and eat all morning.” This is why you are saving up for retirement, right?

This passage seems like the perfect excuse to let the rulers get an earful.

But the more I read this passage and the more I thought about it and studied it, it occurred to me that there is a direct application here, not just for the rulers, but for their subjects; not just for leaders, but for believers.

A verse that came to mind was **1 Peter 2:9** where the apostle Peter refers to the believer as:

a **special priesthood** — that’s quite a role of leadership;

a **people who are related to God** — that makes us royalty;

so that we might show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light — that we are the ultimate influencers in society, as representatives of the true and living God.

But this potential role as leader is filled with pitfalls and temptations that will keep us from leading and living and influencing in a way that honors God.

It struck me that in these verses, Solomon is basically giving us Satan’s strategy that effectively opens the gates for the enemy to come on in.

Let me unpack these verses with 5 statements — this is the process of how to ruin your country, certainly, but how to ruin your own life, and everything else.

Become Pampered and Permissive

The national motto can be reduced down to two words:

Me first!

Notice verse 16 again;

*Woe to you, O land, when
your king is a child, and
your princes feast in the
morning!*

Ecclesiastes 10:16

In other words, the path to destruction involves taking full advantage of our position and essentially laying around all morning doing nothing. To paraphrase, “we are not going to do anything we don’t want to do, until we want to do it.”



Do you know anyone who was given power but does not do anything with it? Who sees problems but does not solve them? How do you interact with that type of person?

The closest thing I can think of to this kind of posh living were those sleepovers at my grandmother’s house on Friday nights. Once a month — we would rotate among the four of us boys, growing up —

we each got a Friday night, once a month. So, I had to share this with my three undeserving brothers.

And one of the best parts about it was that we got to sleep in on Saturday morning — we got up when we wanted. No chores. No homework. No piano practice. And to make it even better, she gave us coffee to drink, and we could watch cartoons on television. We didn't have a television in our home until I was 12 years old. And then you had to use a pair of pliers to change the channel — you remember those special TV's?

So, this was big time; I'm 7 years old drinking coffee in my pajamas, watching cartoons. And she would let us choose our own cereal to eat — and she bought it ahead of time. I always chose Captain Crunch because it was good for me. I could eat the entire box all by myself. All we had back at my house for cereal was Bran Flakes. Now I know why.

It was okay to experience this once a month — and I guess my parents put up with it — but this would have been devastating if it was a lifestyle.

Solomon is describing a lifestyle of pampered indulgence. In fact, the context here is feasting that leads to excess; to gluttony and drunkenness.

You will notice that he sounds this warning: Woe to you O land; woe to you; watch out; trouble is coming; and this goes for any person and any nation, not just the nation of Israel. Any nation is in trouble when it is governed by a

pampered leader and the permissive society.

Solomon uses the word here for child, “woe to you O land when your ruler is a child.”

The Hebrew word for child (na'ar) doesn't automatically refer to little children. Solomon called himself this word — a child — when he assumed the throne, at the age of 30 (1 Kings 3:7).

John Phillips, *Exploring Ecclesiastes* (Kregel, 2019), p. 304

Solomon isn't referring to chronology, he's referring to maturity.

We are in trouble in the home; we are in trouble in the church; we are in trouble as a country, when we are led by people who are growing old, but not growing up.

It's easy to point fingers. But we can open the gates into our own lives by spiritual immaturity. And you do not become spiritually mature by attending Sunday school without fail for 30 years, although that should help.

According to God's word, growing up spiritually involves walking in obedience with Christ whereby ***we grow with a growth that is from God (Colossians 2:19); like newborn babes we long for milk so that by it we might grow up (1 Peter 2:2).***

Spiritual growth demands a rejection of becoming pampered and having our own way.

Now at this point, Solomon provides the only positive description of leadership in this series of statements.

He describes effective leadership and influence when we:

Become Dignified and Disciplined

The national motto of this individual is simply:

Do right!

Verse 17;

*Happy are you, O land,
when your king is a son of
the nobility, and your
princes feast at the proper
time, for strength, and not
for drunkenness!*

Ecclesiastes 10:17

In other words, there is a dignity and self-discipline in the life of good leaders. They want to do their job, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of those around them.

Solomon is describing here the kind of leader that brings happiness, wholeness, blessedness. Solomon is delivering what we would call a beatitude: **Blessed are you, O land** — and that's comprehensive enough to include that home, that neighborhood, that office, that classroom, that church, that community, and that country, which has the blessed joy of being led by someone of self-discipline and self-restraint, who cares about others.

In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Warren Wiersbe wrote on this verse the comment; "A hireling in office asks, 'What is best for me?' A politician asks, 'What is best for my party?' and a true statesman asks, 'What is best for my people?'"

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ecclesiastes: Be Satisfied* (Victor Books, 1990), p. 123

And by the way, for the believer, here's the opportunity for us to demonstrate that rare distinctive in our world — that for us it isn't all about the love of power; it's about the power of love.

What motivates us isn't power, but love.

Paul the apostle wrote that Christ motivated him and constrained him and pressed him in loving and serving others (**2 Corinthians 5:14**).

And with that, Solomon reverts back to the description of how to lead the wrong way and basically ruin everything.

Here's the third description:

Become Inattentive and Indifferent

Notice verse 18,

*Through sloth the roof sinks
in, and through indolence
the house leaks.*

Ecclesiastes 10:18

The national motto of this leader is simply:

Maybe tomorrow!

The roof is leaking? We may get to it tomorrow.

In Solomon's world, roofs of homes were flat, held up by wooden beams and sealed with lime. The lime would eventually crack and peel, allowing rain to seep in.

William D. Barrick, Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament (Christian Focus, 2011), p. 179

Back then, there was nothing as alarming as realizing your roof is leaking.

And Solomon uses that as an illustration to show that even this alarming sign of trouble does not rouse the indifferent leader.

Maybe you have experienced this alarming sign in your own home. That little spot on the ceiling is a sign of something far worse.

Years ago, in our first house, I remember the ceiling in our twin boy's bedroom developing that little brown circle in the ceiling drywall. Since the bedroom they shared as young boys was upstairs, we knew it had to be the roof. But the roof had been recently shingled in that area, before we bought the house. So, this was alarming to say the least.

When the roofers came out, they discovered that the previous homeowner had evidently gotten away with laying new shingles over rotting wood.

That's the idea here — the roof is leaking; you can ignore it because you don't want to bother with it, or maybe cover over it so that it doesn't show up until later — and maybe by then you will be out of town and it will not be tracked back to you.

The inattentive and indifferent leader isn't going to sweat the details, they will not bother investing the time and effort and funds to do something the right way.

And that is a great way to ruin everything in your relationships, your job, your world and in everything else.

Fourth, Solomon effectively says, if you want to ruin your world and everything else:

Become Selfish and Shallow

Now the national motto for this person is simply:

Get rich!

Notice verse 19:

*Bread is made for laughter,
and wine gladdens life, and
money answers everything.*

Ecclesiastes 10:19

Some Old Testament scholars believe this is actually a drinking song — a silly song that would be sung in the pub when someone raised their mugs with their friends.

Bread is for laughter; wine makes you happy; and money solves everything.

What Solomon is doing here is repeating the shallow and selfish attitudes of those in power.

It may sound more familiar if I put it this way: let's eat, drink, and be merry — and oh, by the way, let's get all the money we can in the meantime.

And to this day — 3,000 years later — for most people out there, money is the answer for everything.



Have you ever struggled with finances? If that happened, did you remember to trust God, or try to figure it out on your own? Does money ever feel like a security blanket to you more than God does?

Money will fix every problem, every pain, every hardship, every loss. Just get more money.

Phillips, p. 307

Which is why the average person who buys a lottery ticket really cannot afford to buy that ticket. They are hoping and believing that if they win, it will solve everything.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, adds the verb for humility here in this text which makes the phrase read, “Everything humbly obeys money.”

Gregory Thaumaturgos Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes: Septuagint Studies 29; translator: John Jarick (Scholars Press, 1990), p. 272

You could say it this way: everything bows at the shrine of money.

Money was as much a god in the world of Solomon as it is in our world today.

Solomon had gone down this path — this was his personal testimony: every dinner plate he had was made of solid gold, he

made silver as common as gravel, and he ruined everything.

He’s not quite finished here. One more way to pursue the wrong things in life and ruin everything:

Become Obstinate and Opinionated

The motto for this attitude is best summarized in two words:

So what!

Or maybe – “Who cares!”

Solomon is warning a person who reaches a point where they will speak their mind, no matter what.

Notice verse 20;

Even in your thoughts, 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.

Ecclesiastes 10:20

It’s as if Solomon says here, with hyperbole, “don’t even think those thoughts! Don’t say them — don’t even think them.”

They might leak out.

Notice here, even in the privacy of your bedroom, Solomon writes, don’t curse and demean or run down your boss or that political leader or that rich relative who has more than you think he should

have — don't talk about things like that — and don't even say them out loud.

He writes here, ***a bird of the air might carry it away.***

This seems to be the basis for the common expression to this day that a little birdy told me.

Don Givens, *Storms of Life: Ecclesiastes Explained* (Xulon Press, 2008), p. 128

Will Rogers, the humorist philosopher put it this way: "Live so that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip."

Ibid, p. 129

Think of the lives that have changed by a little bird repeating the message.

You're thinking, a little bird can't do that much harm.

How about this one?



A little bird told me is more literally appropriate to our generation than Solomon could have imagined.

There's now a platform for you to share your immediate thoughts; reactionary

words; unkind words; rude, vulgar, hurtful opinions.



What do you use social media for, if you do use it? Do your posts uplift and encourage those around you? Or do you complain, grumble and argue in your posts?

Think of the reputations that have been ruined and the jobs lost, and lives changed because this little bird carried someone's thoughtless words to the world at large

Solomon's advice is simple — don't say anything you really don't want inspected or repeated.

The world exalts people who speak their mind; those who say whatever they feel.

Solomon puts it all in perspective here; and we can apply all of this, not just to the White House but your house and mine: here's the way to ruin your country, your home, your church, your relationships, your life and everything else.

Let's review the strategy that opens the gates to the enemy of our soul:

- Become pampered and permissive
 - have the words, "me first" on the tip of your tongue in every occasion.

- Become inattentive and indifferent
 - the theme song is “maybe tomorrow!” Problems can wait; and when I get around to it, I’ll do as little as possible.

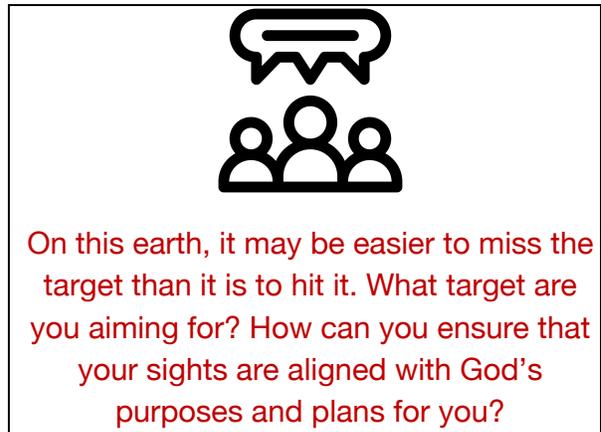
- Become selfish and shallow
 - the motto is simply “get rich!” Eat, drink and be merry and if at all possible, get rich. Money is the answer to everything.

- Become obstinate and opinionated
 - live with a loose tongue and motto in life that says, “who cares, I’ll say whatever I want to say no matter what.”

To run after these things in life is to aim your life in the wrong direction.

I read recently about Matt Emmons who had the gold medal in sight. He was one shot away from claiming victory in the 2004 Olympic 50-meter rifle event. He was a skilled marksman and this contest was all his. It was a three-position challenge and for his third shot, he didn’t even need a bull’s eye to win, he was that far ahead of the others. His final shot just needed to be on target. It was a clean shot — the target showed nearly a perfect aim.

But what was later described as an extremely rare mistake in elite competition, Emmons actually fired at the wrong target. Standing in lane two, he fired at the target in lane three. It was a great shot, but he was aiming at the wrong target.



Solomon is delivering to us a description on how to aim your life in the wrong direction and miss the target.

The wisest thing you will ever do, to begin walking in the right direction, is to repent of your sin at the cross of Christ.

The word repent literally means to turn around; to change direction; to allow Christ to lead you away from yourself and your fallen world and walk with Him.

And then, by following Him, let’s together lead and influence and guide and serve the world around us in the best way possible. How? As royal priests belonging to God, let’s live by showing the glory of our Lord who has called us out of darkness into a marvelous light.

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