

“Wise Beyond Words” (Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20)

Have you ever heard of Ed Faubert? Faubert is what you call a “cupper.” In layman’s terms, he’s a coffee-taster. The man is so gifted that his astute taste buds are actually certified by the state of New York! So refined is Faubert’s sense of taste for coffee that even while blindfolded, he can take one sip of coffee and tell you not just that it is from Guatemala, but from what state it comes, at what altitude it was grown, and on what mountain.¹

If you’re like me and you enjoy a good cup of coffee, you’re impressed with this man’s uncanny taste buds. His coffee wisdom is incomparable. But I have to ask this question: Why is it that so many Americans know so much about so many things that don’t really matter? Take me for example: I know a lot about sports. I know various athlete’s height, weight, strength, 40-yard dash times, and alma maters. I also know quite a bit about music. Growing up in the 1980s, I could tell you a few things about glam, metal bands, boy bands, and country acts. I even know many of their lyrics. But I ask you this: Who really cares about my pearls of wisdom? I know I don’t. I want to be wise where it really matters.

The legendary Mister Rogers once said, “Life is deep and simple, and what our society gives us is shallow and complicated.”² Fred Rogers was right. In Eccl 9:13-10:20, we will see that life may indeed be deep, but it is also rather simple. Yet, in order to experience life as God intends, we need to follow His Word. In this passage, Solomon tells us that “*wisdom helps make a life.*” He then gives three challenges for us to implement as we navigate through life.

1. Appreciate wisdom in others (9:13-18). Solomon emphasizes the worth of wisdom. In 9:13-15, he begins with an intriguing parable. He writes, “**Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed³ me. There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.**”⁴ In this parable, a poor, wise man outsmarts a great king. He saves the day, yet he is unrewarded with wealth or social esteem. Whether the poor man delivered the city by diplomacy or military strategy is not the issue. The point is that the city owed its survival to him, but he received no reward or lasting respect.⁵ The sad truth is: wisdom is sought out only in desperate times; otherwise, only those who have wealth or power are in a position to demand public attention.⁶ Although the wise man failed to personally profit from his labors, his wisdom was not profitless for others or for his world. In fact, this poor man’s wisdom impressed Solomon (9:13) so much that he draws three conclusions from this parable (9:16-18):

- **Godly wisdom is greater than strength.** In 9:16a Solomon writes, “**Wisdom is better than strength.**” If you want to understand the truth of these words, go to your high school reunion. The students who were boring nerds look great and are successful. The cool party-animal jocks are all burned out. You see, even though our society glorifies strength it is short-lived. We lose strength as we advance in years, but the wonderful truth is that we can gain wisdom as we grow older. Wisdom works. It is based on eternal principles. Plug into wisdom and your life will be a success.

A strong young man at a construction site was bragging that he could outdo anyone in a feat of strength. He made a special case of making fun of one of the older workmen. After several minutes, the older worker had had enough. “Why don’t you put your money where your mouth is?” he said. “I’ll bet a week’s wages that I can haul something in a wheelbarrow over to that building that you won’t be able to wheel back.” “You’re on, old man,” the young worker replied. The old man reached out and grabbed the wheelbarrow by the handles. Then he turned to the young man and said, “All right. Get in.”⁷

This older man outsmarted the younger, stronger man with his wisdom. Wisdom may not bring accolades and popularity, but it tends to win the day. This is especially true in the church. Although our church has outstanding ministries for children and teens led by many younger adults, we need to continue to appreciate those who are older and wiser and who have laid the foundation for these ministries. The prayers and faithful service of many older and wiser saints who have remained committed to our church have made our present ministries possible. We must never forget the debt that we owe those who have served behind the scenes for many years and in many ways. We need to express appreciation for the wisdom that God has placed in our midst.

- **Godly wisdom is not always heeded.** In 9:16b-17 Solomon said, **“But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded. The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”** Sadly, wisdom frequently goes unrewarded. We have all heard the expression, “Give credit where credit is due.” Well, unfortunately, in our fallen world this does not always happen. Often, godly wisdom and counsel falls upon deaf ears, or at best, goes in one ear and out the other. Therefore, when people do heed godly wisdom we ought to get excited. When a husband/father says, “I will not take that promotion because my family and church will suffer,” we should express our appreciation. When a spouse says, “I will not file for divorce even though I may have biblical grounds,” we ought to express our appreciation. When a high school student walks with God and is obedient to his or her parents, we ought to express our appreciation.
- **Godly wisdom can be overcome by sheer folly.** In 9:18 Solomon writes, **“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”** As effective as godly wisdom is, a single person—“one sinner”—can cancel much good. This phrase “one sinner destroys much good” is like our, “one rotten apple ruins the whole barrel” or “one bad egg spoils the omelette.” Throughout the Bible, there is an abiding principle: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (1 Cor 5:6). We must guard ourselves from being contaminated by sin which will destroy godly wisdom. Television is not wicked in and of itself. But I know this: Many of us are being influenced by sinners through the tube. Moreover, our children are being influenced by sinners. The average American watches 1,680 minutes of television per week. The average parent spends 38.5 minutes per week in good conversation with their kids.⁸ Who do you think has more influence on our kids? The answer is obvious. May we not be overcome by foolishness.

[Solomon states that we should appreciate wisdom in others. Why is this so important? The answer is: God’s wisdom is greater than man’s strength. Solomon now goes on to exhort you and me to...]

2. Avoid foolishness at any expense (10:1-7). In the midst of a passage praising wisdom, Solomon warns us of the dangers of foolish behavior. In Ecclesiastes 10, he uses the word “fool” nine times. In Solomon’s three books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon), he uses the words “fool, fools, foolish, and folly” a staggering total of 128 times.⁹ We could call him a “fool buster.” Consequently, he writes an entire chapter replete with proverbs that will help us to behave with wisdom instead of foolishness. In 10:1 he shares a most unusual proverb: **“Dead flies make a perfumer’s oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier¹⁰ than wisdom and honor.”** This particular proverb may not be a terribly pleasant thought, especially if you are wearing perfume. It is Solomon’s vivid way of illustrating how a tiny bit of foolishness can destroy the powerful fragrance of a person’s dignity and reputation.¹¹ This is the source of the well-known phrase “a fly in the ointment.” Notice, this comes right after the statement in 9:18 that “one sinner destroys much good.” The point being made is that it takes far less effort to ruin something than it does to create it. Or perhaps another way to put it is that it’s easier to make a stink than to create sweetness. Flies are insignificant creatures in the overall scheme of things. A perfumer’s oil, on the other hand, is a very costly substance created with care and skill. Still the insignificant can spoil the valuable. We must always remember that *wisdom helps make a life.*

Although there are probably many legitimate applications of this proverb, there are two I'd like to zero in on. First, the fly may be a person. One person who is out of sorts with God can lead a whole group into sin. One person who is negative can put a wet blanket on everyone's hope. One person who is super-critical can create single-handedly an atmosphere of discouragement. Are you a fly in the ointment at your home, at work, or at church? Second, the fly may be a flaw in character. One fault unchecked or one secret sin cherished can poison a person's entire character. May I suggest that you choose to swat one fly before it lands in your perfume. Perhaps it is a bad attitude; maybe a bad habit; perhaps a tendency toward being irresponsible or unreliable; maybe an omission of something we should be doing that if not corrected could lead to spiritual deterioration.¹² It's easy to think, "It's just a little thing;" a "little" relationship, a "little" flirtation at the office," a "little" edge in a tone of voice, a "little" padding on the expense account," a "little" experimentation in the wrong area—just a little thing.¹³ But we must remember that a little thing can ruin everything. *Wisdom helps make a life.*

In 10:2 Solomon writes, **"A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left."** First of all, this is not a political statement! God is not a Republican or a Democrat. He is a Theocrat—He alone rules His kingdom. We could call Him a benevolent dictator. Even though it is a campaign season, I will leave this alone. In Israel the right hand was the place of strength, skill, favor, and blessing.¹⁴ The left hand was considered the place of weakness. That's why you hear people say, "I can beat you left-handed." It means I can beat you with my unskilled hand.¹⁵ Solomon is saying that a wise man typically does the "right" thing while the fool does the "left" or wrong thing. My condolences to you if you are a lefty and you find this offensive.

In 10:3, Solomon continues his theme of foolishness with another proverb: **"Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking¹⁶ and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool."** The "road" is not a literal highway but the fool's metaphorical way of life. The Scriptures are portrayed as a well-worn, clearly marked path.¹⁷ Deviation from the path (in any direction) meant sin and rebellion.¹⁸ The fool doesn't have to do a lot to demonstrate his foolishness. It is easily manifested in how he lives his life.

In 10:4-7, Solomon discusses our response to various leaders. In 10:4 he writes, **"If the ruler's temper rises against you,¹⁹ do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses."**²⁰ This is an extremely practical verse. Solomon says, "When your boss gets angry at you, let it go. Never let another person's actions determine your reaction. Just hang in there and deal with the person. Keep your cool and maintain your composure. In doing so, you may one day gain a hearing with your superior."²¹ It is important to note the phrase "do not abandon your position." I have worked for difficult people before, and my tendency has always been to want to quit. Yet, what I have learned is that difficult people are everywhere. This is why Solomon says, "Calm down. Breathe. Don't quit and run to a new place trying to run away from a broken world." We must all recognize that there will always be some people that we just can't stand. These individuals may be in your family, work, school, neighborhood, or church. It's easy to get angry and frustrated with these people. It's natural to wish they weren't a part of our life. Life without them would be so much easier but we would be spiritually flabby. Because of them, we are forced to grow in areas that would otherwise remain undeveloped for God.²²

Solomon closes out this section in 10:5-7 by saying, **"There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler—folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land."** In life, role reversal occurs.²³ Often those who work hard or are successful lose their positions to less competent and qualified people. This is especially true in our society. A hundred years ago, the famous people were doctors and scientists. I know it may be hard to believe but even lawyers and pastors were respected. And now, you can't turn on the TV without finding out what's new with Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton. With all due respect to these ladies, I have no idea how they keep getting on television. It baffles my mind. These ladies need to recognize that *wisdom helps make a life.*

[Solomon urges us to avoid foolishness at any expense. Why does he harp on this? Ultimately, because he knows that foolishness can destroy our lives. Solomon now goes on to exhort us to...]

3. Apply wisdom to life (10:8-20). In this final section, we will clearly see that wisdom is “skill for living.” Solomon provides four concrete ways that we can make wisdom work for us.

First, apply wisdom in getting a job done (10:8-10). Solomon writes, **“He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them. If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.”** These five illustrations make the point: Think before you act. You can have incredible energy, gusto, and perseverance. You can go out and dig a massive pit. But stay away from the edge or you might fall in and break your neck. Avoid the perils of your own work. Be wise as well as energetic. If you are clearing the stones from an old wall, be careful. All your strength could get you killed if there is a copperhead on the other side of that wall.²⁴ It’s not enough to have energy; you better have wisdom to go with it. If you are an excavator, be careful when you cut out a piece of rock because it has to fall somewhere. Don’t let it hit you on the head. Be smart with your energy, diligence, and talent. If you’re cutting trees the same advice holds true. The tree has to fall somewhere, so be careful. And if you don’t have enough wisdom to sharpen your axe you are going to make your work a lot harder. Stop and sharpen that edge. If it’s dull you will have to strike harder and harder until you get out of control, miss the log, and hit yourself.²⁵ It’s typically better to work smart instead of harder. If you exercise wisdom, you will have success.

Second, apply wisdom in controlling your words (10:11-15). In 10:11 Solomon writes, **“If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.”** This verse first looks like a random thought, but actually is the key to this entire section. You’ve probably seen a snake charmer on television. It’s quite a talent to be able to charm a snake, isn’t it? But if the charmer gets bitten, his talent didn’t do him any good. The charmer had the skill but he didn’t use it. Solomon’s point is that you need to use the wisdom you have. Otherwise, you may as well not have that sense, for it is of no service to you. It’s not enough to know how to charm the serpent; you have to actually apply your knowledge before you’re bitten. Let’s apply this idea to life. You probably have many areas in life where you know the right things to do. You could give a list of wonderful principles for marriage, parenting, money management, sexuality, friendships, and work. You know all the right answers in your head. But that’s not the most important part, is it? If the serpent bites, the person who knows how to charm a snake is no better off than one who doesn’t. So the important thing is not just that you have the knowledge but that you actually use it in marriage, parenting, and so on. You have to use your wisdom. Our churches are filled with Bible-believing people who have mangled their lives because they were bitten by the snake. They didn’t put their wisdom to use. What about you? Are there areas of your life where you know the right thing to do but just aren’t doing it? Are you praying with your spouse? Are you reading the Bible with your kids? Are you out of debt and using your money wisely to fulfill the Lord’s calling on your life? If the answer to any of these questions is no, you need to put your wisdom into practice.²⁶ *Wisdom helps make a life.*

In 10:12-15, it becomes clearer that Solomon’s focus is on controlling our words. He writes, **“Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?”²⁷ The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.”²⁸** It is sad to say but both the foolish and wise alike can multiply their words. Yet, consider the following benefits to silence or at least to talking less: (1) you can listen carefully to what others say; (2) you have time to frame your thoughts; (3) your companions will value your words because you have listened to them; and (4) you run a much lower risk of saying something foolish.²⁹ A wise person once remarked that it’s better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

Third, apply wisdom in leading others (10:16-19). In 10:16-17 Solomon writes, **“Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning, Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility³⁰ and whose princes eat at the appropriate time³¹—for strength and not for drunkenness.”** In these verses, Solomon informs us that some leaders try to solve problems with pleasure—food and drink. Food is for activity, not for inactivity. We eat to live; we do not live to eat!! One who controls the base appetite to eat probably can control other areas where self takes control. Self discipline is crucial in a leader! We are affected by the tone set by those at the top of any organization. This is true of both good and bad leaders. Laziness, incompetence, or moral failure in any organization will cause it to collapse. This is true from the White House all the way to your house. So Solomon gives us some guidance. An image of bad rulers is compared to good ones. The first priority for bad rulers is to fulfill their own appetites and desires. Good rulers, on the other hand, are disciplined. They enjoy good things in moderation, so they can concentrate on governing well.

In 10:18, Solomon shares another memorable proverb: **“Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.”** Picture a guy sitting at home with a bottle of beer in his hand, watching television. He’s supposed to be doing work, taking care of things, providing for those for whom he is responsible. He’s supposed to be a steward of the tasks entrusted to him. But the house is falling down. The roof is leaking. The bills are stacking up. The beer belly is growing larger.³² Solomon says that this is not an appropriate response. While effort alone will not guarantee success, lack of effort will almost certainly guarantee failure.

What is it that you know you need to do this week that is not done in your life? It will take you less than three seconds to answer that question. I already know what it is in my life. Now that you know what it is, name it. Plan it. Schedule it. Do it. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; because in the grave where you are going there is no planning, no foresight, and no work. You want to rest? You will have plenty of time to rest in the grave. Until then, stay busy doing what needs to be done.³³

In 10:19 he writes, **“Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.”** There may be a hint of sarcasm in Solomon’s voice. Throughout this book, he has taught that there is no answer for anything. On the other hand, lots of money would help anyone searching for pleasure in an attempt to escape life’s harsh realities. Yet, only wisdom matters.

Lastly, apply wisdom in withholding criticism (10:20). Solomon states that the wise person should not even criticize someone in the privacy of their bedroom. Listen to these words: **“Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.”** Many will ask the question, “What shall I do when those in authority over me are fools?” Solomon says, “Be careful what you say about those in authority over you. Loose lips sink ships. They also sink careers and friendships.” Of course, it is hard to keep reckless words a secret, but we must realize that words can travel like the speed of light.³⁴ Those who hear juicy gossip and slander often use them for self interest (i.e., tell the king in order to gain favor). This is the origin of the little expression: “A little bird told me.” Birds don’t talk, of course, but Solomon is reminding us with this illustration that a wise person doesn’t say something in private that he wouldn’t want someone to hear in public.³⁵ We should watch what we say because we never know who is listening. Remember, “The walls have ears!” We should always utilize discretion, caution, and control. Sam Rayburn (1882-1961), democratic politician from Texas, said, “Among my most prized possessions are words that I have never spoken.”³⁶ Today, will you recommit yourself to holding your tongue? Will you strive to believe the best about people? Will you refuse to participate in gossip? If someone wants to talk to you about another person, will you shut him or her down? The truth is: gossip and slander can destroy churches. May you and I see gossip and slander in the same repulsive light as we do child molestation. We would never want to be party to this because it is sinful and we know the damage that it does. The same is true with gossip. It is utter foolishness.³⁷

A man walked into a convenience store, put a \$20 bill on the counter, and asked for change. When the clerk opened the drawer, the man pulled a gun and asked for all the cash in the register. The man took the cash from the clerk and fled, leaving his \$20 bill on the counter. So how much did he get from the drawer? Fifteen bucks. Go figure.³⁸ We read this story and we think, “What a fool!” Yet, we often exchange God’s wisdom for man’s foolishness and don’t think anything of it.

How should you respond to God’s Word today? I would suggest memorizing James 1:5: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” If you and I humbly come to the Lord and ask to exchange our foolishness for His wisdom, He will grant this prayer every time. He will also change your life in the process. *Wisdom helps make a life.*

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Scripture References

Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20

Luke 2:52

John 13:13-17

Matthew 5:38-47

Romans 12:14-21

James 4:13-17

Proverbs 13:20

Study Questions

1. Why is wisdom to be preferred over strength (9:13-18)? Why is wisdom unimpressive to most people? Do I express appreciation when I observe wisdom in others? Why am I so quick to forget the good that others do on my behalf? How do I respond when others fail to appreciate what I do for them?
2. How can a little foolishness ruin great wisdom (10:1-3)? When did I make a foolish mistake that ended up hurting others? What did I learn from my error? How did I seek to confess and correct the hurt? What was the result?
3. Have I ever worked under someone who was a fool (10:4)? Why is it critical to hold my temper when my boss is angry with me? How should I respond when I find myself in unfair situations at work? Read James 1:19. What type of employee would my fellow coworkers say I am? Would they say I respect my boss and those who work alongside me?
4. How would I describe my work ethic (10:8-10)? Is my work performance exemplary? Does it stand out to my boss and coworkers? Read Ephesians 6:5-8 and Colossians 3:17, 23. Am I wise in how I lead those that I have been given responsibility over (10:16-19)? Read Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 4:1.
5. In what circumstances do I tend to talk too much (10:11-15)? What steps can I take to say less today? Read Proverbs 10:19. How can I squelch my tendencies to gossip and slander (10:20)? How can I help others to guard their tongues? Read Luke 12:3.

Notes

¹ Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2007), 54.

² Fred Rogers, the Mister Rogers of children's television, from *Christianity Today* (3-6-00), 45.

³ The word translated "impressed" is the Hebrew adjective *gadol*, meaning "great." *Gadol* is only translated "impressed" in Eccl 9:13. Solomon uses this word twice in the very next verse (9:14) where it is rendered "great" or "large" in most English versions.

⁴ Cf. Eccl 4:13-15. In both 4:13-15 and 9:13-15 Solomon seems to draw from real life situations. This is supported by the verbs in Eccl 9:13-15 which function either as past definite actions (describing a past situation) or as hypothetical past actions (describing an imaginary hypothetical situation for the sake of illustration). The LXX uses subjunctives throughout 9:14-15 to depict the scenario as a hypothetical situation. See NET Study Notes.

⁵ In 2 Sam 20:15-22, a wise woman delivered the city by having the men of the city cut off Sheba's head and throw it over the wall. But even in the historical account, we are not given her name. And when we add this to what Solomon says we can assume that she was soon forgotten.

⁶ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1993).

⁷ Preaching Today Citation: Submitted by John Beukema, Chambersburg, PA.

⁸ Church Leaders Intelligence Report Enclosed: 04.30.08.

⁹ See Eccl 10: 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, and 15. David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 249.

¹⁰ The terms "weightier" and "honor" are parallel. "Weightier" (*yaqar*) is from the same root as "precious," "prized." It is a play on the Hebrew concept of that which is heavier (i.e., metals) is more valuable. The word "honor" (*kabod*) is also a word play on "heavy" (e.g., Eccl 6:2; Ps 62:7; 84:11; Prov 3:16, 35; 22:4; 25:2). This term is often translated "glory" (e.g., Ps 3:3; 4:2; 19:1; 24:7, 8, 9, 10 [2x]). See Bob Utley, "Ecclesiastes": unpublished sermon notes.

¹¹ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 250.

¹² Michael P. Andrus, "Sharp Goads and Hard Nails" (Ecclesiastes 7-11): unpublished sermon notes.

¹³ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 252.

¹⁴ E.g., Gen 48:18; Ps 16:8; Isa 41:10.

¹⁵ Tommy Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 159-160.

¹⁶ It is interesting that the phrase "his sense is lacking" is literally, "the fool has not heart" (i.e., he cannot think clearly, he lacks judgment, cf. Prov 6:32; 7:7; 9:4, 16; 10:13, 21; 11:12; 24:30). This is just a clever way of saying that folly affects every area of one's life. Utley, "Ecclesiastes."

¹⁷ E.g., Ps 119:105.

¹⁸ E.g., Deut 9:12, 16; 31:29.

¹⁹ The Hebrew says "rising, his spirit rises." The double use of the word "rise" (*alah*) is given to intensify the meaning of the word ("it soars").

²⁰ This is advice for those who serve the king (or other leaders). It links up with Eccl 8:1-4 and 10:16-7, 20.

²¹ In Proverbs we read, "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone" and "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (25:15; 15:1).

²² Ray Pritchard, *Something New Under the Sun: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Living* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 251-252.

²³ Cf. Eccl 9:13-18; Prov 29:2.

²⁴ The comment about the serpent biting the one who leans against wall (Amos 5:19) would be humorous in that culture. Since the walls were made of stones and everyone knew that snakes enjoy the cool shade and crevices that go with a stone wall, only a fool would causally lean against one without first checking it for snakes.

²⁵ Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God*, 163.

²⁶ Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God*, 164-165.

²⁷ This is a recurrent theme (cf. Eccl 3:22; 6:12; 7:14; 8:7; 10:14). The future is hidden, even from wisdom. Wisdom is far better than foolishness (cf. 10:15), but it is limited by this fallen period of human history.

²⁸ Hundreds of years later, James likens the tongue to a horse's bit and a ship's rudder (Jas 3:3-4). The point is: The discretion (or lack thereof) we use in our speech dictates the direction of our lives. This is repeated throughout God's Word. If only we could grasp its significance.

²⁹ Pritchard, *Something New Under the Sun*, 261. See also Prov 10:19.

³⁰ According to Solomon, a noble ruler should be a descendant of rulers who are disciplined in the course of their life (10:16-17). Though this seems to be elitist to us, Solomon's point is that rulers should have a healthy upbringing, have adequate resources, and be well-trained and prepared and equipped for the responsibilities of

leadership.

³¹ This concept of a divinely appropriate time was first introduced in Eccl 3:1-11, 17; 7:17; 8:5, 6, 9; 9:8, 11, 12 (2x); 10:17 (esp. 3:11).

³² Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 265.

³³ Pritchard, *Something New Under the Sun*, 266.

³⁴ See Jesus' words in Luke 12:3: "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops."

³⁵ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 276.

³⁶ "Sam Rayburn": http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Rayburn.

³⁷ For an excellent discussion on gossip see Daniel Hill, "Ecclesiastes": <http://www.gracenotes.info/>.

³⁸ Preaching Today Citation: "Strange World," Campus Life, Vol. 56, no. 2.