



---

## Living with the End in Mind 10 – Wisdom Brings Success Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are in Part 10, a long series, 12 parts in Ecclesiastes. We've been going through the Book of Ecclesiastes. We're coming to the end of Ecclesiastes. In two weeks, we finish with Chapter 12, and I want to give you a little homework assignment as we prepare for that. I would love to hear your "You know your getting old" jokes. So, if you want to go ahead and email those into the office.

I heard a great one this week. I did Date Night Comedy with my comedian buddy, Paul Harris in Sioux Falls. Paul is getting some gray in his hair. I don't know if he's listening today. But he's getting some gray in his hair and he and his wife were talking about being in Nashville where you kind of age out. He was wondering if he should die his hair to not look so old. Their seven-year-old daughter looked at Paul and said, "It's not your hair that makes you look old; it's your face."

Everybody in here has a story from a child or a grandchild on "you know you're getting old." So, send those in to me. One of my favorites comes from Gary Smalley. He said, "A guy was out on the dance floor with a new young lady he was dating. His Cardiologist came up to him and said, "What are you doing?" The guy said, "You told me to find a hot momma and be cheerful." The cardiologist said, "I said you have a heart murmur and to be careful."

Anyway, I'm only 50 but I've got the "You know your getting old when..." I count on my even more senior friends to help me with that.

Today, we're talking about wisdom and how wisdom brings success. Some of you are going to dive into this chapter and you're going to hear some things and says, "I've pursued that path and I didn't get the success I thought I would get." We're not talking today about a guarantee of outcome like, "Do this and this will happen." But if you want to pursue success in life, you want to find success as a citizen of the United States of America on the job, you're going to see in the text today that wisdom is the path to take as you pursue that. And you are going to get some dry humor in the text today. Some scholars call it dry Hebrew humor. When we get to some of it, I'm just going to let it sit there. I think you'll figure out we get it early. We start with Chapter 10: 1 as we get a very graphic word picture. I love how the scripture uses word pictures to teach us and to instruct us in the ways of wisdom.

***As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.*** I think all of us in here can relate to this. Even when you pursue wisdom, honor, live a life of favor, it doesn't take but a little bit of folly to mess all that up. We see it every day. The one inappropriate text or direct message can sabotage someone's life or ministry. One harsh word spoken at a game to an official or a coach.

A person of honor can look foolish. Or how about a dare from a friend to do something reckless, and your body still bares the scar of that dare. We get what it means to pursue a life of wisdom and how to be wise and what a little folly do can to mess all of that up.

So, today, we are choosing the path of wisdom not the path of foolishness. **2 *The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.*** Now... Shut it. Shut it. Know your role, congregation member and shut your mouth. That's what I want to tell people. In ancient thought, the right hand was the place of honor and favor, and the left was just the opposite. We're choosing the right path, the path of wisdom.

Then Verse 3 tell us you can't really hide your foolishness. **3 *Even as fools walk along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are.*** Don't you love that scripture is just clear. Don't you love that we don't have to sit here and be like, "What's he really saying?" Fools make themselves known. Fools are obvious. The same is true for those who choose wisdom. I want to be a wise person. I want to be a wise husband, a wise dad, a wise citizen. And I don't want a little folly. What's a little folly. A little folly can't hurt. A little folly can make you a dead fly stinking up the perfume.

So, here's what we're going to see today: A cool head and a guarded tongue. A cool head and a guarded tongue will give you a life well lived. Keeping a cool head, not being hot tempered, but being even tempered, and watching what comes out of your mouth. Saying less or saying nothing at all. And when you do speak, it's gracious words meant to build other people up.

And that's where we start today. Keep a cool head and don't be moved by foolish leaders. We're going to see this play out today in the workplace and in our national life. Some of you are too easily swayed by foolish, national leaders. Look at what the scriptures says. **4 *If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest.*** Followers of Jesus, because we know who the source is and our source is Jesus, it's not a political figure and it's not your boss. As we are going to see in a moment, we should have trust. And when leaders act foolishly, we shouldn't come at it from a place of craziness.

Some of you have experienced this in recent years. You're like, "I haven't moved. I think in 2023, I believe the exact same foundational doctrine and fundamentals of the faith that I believed in 2020 and 2015 and 2010. I haven't moved." But people will accuse your of moving. You've changed, you're woke, or whatever. Your like, "I don't feel I've changed one thing." But when everyone else around you is moving, the follower of Jesus says, "I am going to stay anchored in Christ... period." And whatever craziness happens around us, whoever is elected, whoever is in charge, whatever is said at a state of the union address, whatever white, hot air balloon flies over our states, everybody calm down.

Look, you hate this message already because calmness ain't your thing. You like getting worked up. Also, some of you know that every time you go back to a family gathering, there is at least one family member who has quit their job since the last family gathering. You're like, "Where are you working now?" Because they can't remain calm when their leaders are foolish. Some of you have been in meetings, some of you have been led by foolish, unqualified bosses. Calmness, even tempered, gracious words, as we are going to see.

Today, we, as followers of Jesus, we go down a different path, a path with Jesus leading us and Jesus as the source. We don't have to get worked up, even when we are led by those who are foolish.

**5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun...** So, we've all seen this. We've seen it in government, we've seen this in the work place. ...**the sort of error that arises from a ruler: 6 Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. 7 I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.** As I was studying this this week and thinking about the workplace... I get kind of passionate about wanting to help our workforce. I know Branson deals with it. Every city in the country I've visited deals with this. Looking for workers for your business, whether it's a theater, a show, restaurant, a store, a gas station, your skilled labor, your plumber, electrician, carpenter, you're looking for workers. You're looking for someone who shows up on time, who is passionate and gives it their all, shows up and gives 100%. It's hard to find right now.

When someone tells me they are a Christian, shouldn't that put a higher expectation on them. Like someone tells you they follow the Lord, it's like, "Then I'm not going to have any problem with you showing up on time, passionate about what you do and giving it 110%." Why? Colossians 3: 23 – **Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.** I don't know about you but when you go into a place and you are met with someone that has a smile and they are excited to be there and they are go-getters, isn't that exciting to be around. We love being around passionate people whatever it is they are doing. That's what Paul is saying. Whatever it is you're doing, be passionate about it. "How can I be passionate about it when my boss is a fool?" okay. As working for the Lord, not for human masters. Jesus is your ultimate boss, and he's watching, and you can serve him every day of your life and that's going to feed this passion.

So, where we are going to go in the rest of this text is the workplace. We are going to see some dangerous tasks and we're going to get some wisdom for the workplace. There is some instruction in here, and I think some application for us whether we are the worker or the owner, the leader. We want to all move in wisdom.

**Pay attention on the job and always be aware of danger.** We can't escape it, but we can mitigate it. there are jobs that have hazards with them, but if you've ever had a boss that leads out the meeting with bring your brain to work today, we get it right here in Ecclesiastes 10: 8-9.

**8 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. 9 Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.** Some scholars have said this is just speaking about improper timing that happens on the job. It's going to happen and there is really nothing you can do about it, but most scholars, the majority of scholars you read as you dig into this Hebrew wisdom, is that yes, there is going to be some danger on the job and risk to be taken, but as long as we are aware and pursuing wisdom, it's going to be less. Not eliminated, but less.

Right out of college, at 22, I was an associate pastor at a church. I also worked for a Lowes Distribution Center. They had this big sign. I remember seeing it every day when we walked in. It was a big, big sign that had just a blank and then "Days, Accident Free." Anybody have that on a job site that you worked

at? And when we hit 90, you got a barbeque dinner. There were probably 1,000 employees at the Lowes Distribution Center. Anybody here ever been on a standup forklift? It's the most ignorant design of a machine I've ever seen in my life. You turn the thing left and it goes right. You turn the thing right, it goes left. Well, I was the reason one day when we were at like 53 days accident free. In front of my boss, I hit one of the metal guards on the... you've seen videos of those things falling over. I'm an IT guy at the Lowes Distribution Center, but we had printer paper that had to get to the third floor so they could get the labels off on boxes and get them in the semis. I said, "I'll find a friend. I have friends around here and I'll get somebody to do it." He said, "No, you do it, Ted." I'm on this thing every few months. I'm on it 10 seconds and I crash it into a beam. As I'm going to get my drug test... I was ticked, I was mad. I go, "Listen, the guy who designed that machine should be getting the drug test. I am clean. I haven't been on a drug. I'm not on drugs."

Anyway, you get the dangers. Here's what we're told, "Pay attention, bring your brain to work, be alert, be aware." We all teach our kids early on. And we get to this. I bet you didn't even know it was in the Bible. **Work smarter not harder.** Wisdom is going to cause you to make decisions at work that doesn't just exert energy, but you're actually doing it in a way that doesn't take as much energy and you're actually more productive. Here's what I'm going to encourage every plumber, HVAC, electrician, whatever your skill, whatever your trade, I want you to put Ecclesiastes 10: 10 on the bottom of your invoice.

**10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.** Your translation of the Bible may say wisdom will bring more success. We probably get this better with the chainsaw in the Ozarks. I have a Cobalt battery powered chainsaw. I can do about seven or eight cuts per battery. It's very effective. But I know if I want those seven or eight cuts, it's got to be sharp, so I put the tailgate down on the truck and I take that long file... It's an 11-inch blade so I do some serious business out in the woods. I sharpen that blade. I go out there and I make my first cut. You know it, you hit the dirt, you hit a rock. I'm still shocked by how dull it gets so quickly. But I'm out in the woods now. I'm a five-minute walk from my garage. What do I do? I don't go back to the garage. I stay out in the woods. If you want to know how you cut with a dull chainsaw, the safest way to do it is to apply as much pressure as possible. That's what you're doing because I am now working with a dull blade.

Do you know what would save me time? What would save me time and make me more productive is to drop the chainsaw, go back to the garage and get the file, walk back and sharpen the blade. Now I'm going to make the cuts quicker, it's going to be safer. I'm more alert, I'm more aware. That's what some of us need to be reminded of today. Whatever your skill is, whatever you're called to do, yes, bring passion to your job, bring skills to your job, but never stop sharpening your skills. Continue to take classes. Take the time. Lean in. If I could encourage the young people in here. In your 20s, your skills are not as sharpened as that guy who has been on the job for 30 to 40 years. Take him or her to lunch. You're like, "but they don't do as much." But they have so much to offer.

It's the story I heard this week of a factory. The big machine that made all the money broke. They hired a guy to come in, and this expert walks around the machine, listens to it, leans in on it, takes a black magic marker and draws a circle and says, "There's your problem." They said, "Thank you very much; send us a bill. He sent them a bill for 10,000 dollars. They thought that was too much. They said,

“Could you send us an itemized invoice?” The invoice simply said, “Drawing circle with black magic marker - \$ 5.00. Knowing where to draw the circle - \$9,995.00.” That’s skill and that’s wisdom. Yeah, sharpen your skills. If you are a communicator, if you’re a teacher, if you’re a doctor... I go to the American Association of Christian Counselors. Every two years, they need something called a CE, which is Continuing Education. Stay up on what’s going on. Whatever your skill is, new technology comes out. Learn it, never stop. Don’t get 50, 60 years old and be like, “I am done sharpening.” Because then you are just going to put energy into it. We all need to be continually sharpening our skills.

I want to say this in Branson because I hear the gripes all the time. You and I need to be better at valuing skilled workers. We need to value what they bring. You’re like, “He showed up to my house, spent 10 minutes, and gave me a bill for \$300.00.” Well, guess what? You don’t have the knowledge or the skills to fix the HVAC. And you can stay out there for days. I’ve done it. I have flipped that breaker I don’t know how many times. It still ain’t working. I don’t know what I’m doing. But when I hire that guy after sweating for three days, he brings his skill and gets the job done.

You’ve seen this in an auto shop. And I absolutely love this. I think everyone of you should have this in whatever your trade is. It’s simply the mechanic hourly rate. “\$100.00 per hour is what I charge to fix your car unless you watch and then it’s \$150.00. It’s \$175 if you want to help. Its \$200.00 if you put some work on it yourself before you brought the problem to me. And \$250.00 if you tell me how to do my job.” As Travis Kelce said, “Know your role and shut your mouth.” That’s where we’re going with the next point on this.

Watch your mouth and don’t talk too much. I just had in my notes ‘know your role and shut your mouth.’ But you don’t want to hear a preacher say shut your mouth, but I’ve said it four times already so I don’t know why I didn’t make it a point.

Here’ where we have to have calm down, a cool head, and a guarded, controlled tongue, and let’s see how all of that comes together.

**12 Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips.** You know someone at work that talks too much. You know someone on line that hates our current ruler. Fools are consumed by their own lips. **13 At the beginning their words are folly;** But then they don’t know how to shut up. Look at what it says. If they don’t stop talking, if a fool just keeps running their mouth, **at the end they are wicked madness...** So, it just builds. The fool just keeps running their mouth. If you are at a place right now where you are working for an unqualified fool, the best way forward is not to constantly run you mouth and tell him how he or she is doing their job wrong, telling them how you would do it if you were in charge.

Clay Scroggins will be back with us this summer. He wrote a great book called *How To Lead When You're Not In Charge*. Because a fool is just wicked madness. **14 and fools multiply words.** They multiply their words. They just continue to go. **No one knows what is coming—who can tell someone else what will happen after them? 15 The toil of fools wearies them...** A fool thinks they can predict what’s coming. So, instead of how to lead when you are not in charge, let’s just take this for a moment and get into some other proverbs for just a second.

What to say when you don't get your way. What to say when you don't get your way, whether it be on the national level with the ruler or whether it be with an unqualified fool at work.

Proverbs 17: 27-28 gives us two first steps **27 The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint...** (less). Wisdom speaks less. They don't have to always be giving the answer. **...and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.** I want to be known as even-tempered. And a little folly can throw this all off. **28 Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent (say nothing), and discerning if they hold their tongues.** Isn't that something? We think we have to run out mouths to show wisdom and the scripture says to keep your mouth shut – this is where you really seem intelligent.

I served on a board here in this town with one of the wisest guys in this town, full of wisdom. Most meetings, he's just sitting there listening and nodding. If we could just learn that. Be present, talk less, know when to say nothing. And when we do speak, Proverbs 16: 2 says, **Gracious words are a honeycomb – sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.** That our words would lift people up and build people up, encourage people.

We get to the last verse of Ecclesiastes 10. We don't want to just control our tongue or guard our words. We want to guard our thoughts. Guard your thoughts and your words. So don't just sit here today and just muster up and say, "I'm not say anything bad anymore and I'm not going to run my mouth online anymore."

**20 Do not revile the king even in your thoughts...** Why? Because that's where all your words come from. **...or curse the rich in your bedroom because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.** In other words, everything is repeatable. We don't have to just control our tongue, follower of Jesus, we do way more than that. We take a deep look inside because the heart is where everything is coming from. We say this about parenting in this church all the time. I don't want to ever be obsessed with the behavior or the words of my children. I want to be obsessed with the hearts of my children because this is where all the behavior and all the words come from. That's why your parents said time and time again when you were growing up, "What were you thinking?" You did something dumb, you said something dumb, they want to get into the heart, get into the mind because this is where it's coming from. And this is what we need to spend more time on.

This week, a pastor put a very inappropriate, sexual comment out online. He is an older pastor. I mean he was taken down pretty quickly. He should have been because it was very inappropriate and wrong. Everyone started going after him. I still believe, according to scripture, confronting people in sin is to be done one on one, face to face, not one to group. If I say something dumb and you see it, you don't need to confront me online, you can confront me face to face. But he came on and he said... I assume a lot of his friends came on quickly and one on one confronted him with this comment. The comments were brutal toward him. He kept saying, "The comments don't represent my character." It kept being said all week. Yeah, but those words came out of your heart. It just hit me that a little folly as dead flies stink up perfume.

You and I need to be taking a constant look at our hearts and what God is doing in our heart because you dwell on something in your mind, you let something fester, whether it be resentment, bitterness,

unresolved anger, and you just stew on it and stew on it. I'm telling you that eventually it will come out of your mouth. You and I need to do the work in the heart first.

Proverbs 21: 23 says, ***Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.*** Yes, guard your tongue, but even more than that, guard your heart. Do a deep, deep search of the heart. We've been quoting this verse as a family church and our family personally for years. Proverbs 4: 23 – ***Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.*** That little folly that may come out of your mouth, that little folly that may come out with your phone, that little folly that may come out of your computer is coming from your heart. Just as Jesus is my source of life, not a president, not an elected official, not any ruler, not any boss, qualified or unqualified... Jesus is my source of life and I want him at the wellspring. I want that for you, and I want that for me.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank you for what you continue to do here at Woodland Hills. That each one today would search the heart, starting with the question, "Is Jesus my Lord and Savior?" Beginning there. Making sure that Jesus is the source of life for them, That they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

That we would guard our hearts and our mouths whether it be online or in person and in conversations with family and friends that we would choose the path of wisdom at work, as citizens, as church members, as husbands and wives and fathers and mothers and sons and daughters. May that be true of each one of us here. We love you and we're grateful for all that you continue to do here in our hearts and in our lives. It's in the name of Jesus that we pray it, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.