



Live Generously

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 10-11

After a 20-hour flight on Ethiopian Airlines, my wife and I arrived at the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. About two hours after we landed, we met Jacob, our soon-to-be son, for the first time. This was a sweet moment that was etched in my brain. A few hours later, a taxi brought Reggie to our guest house. As we spent this week together in March of 2011, we wanted to really get to know the boys and connect with them. Unfortunately, we had to leave them in Ethiopia as we waited for the Ethiopian government to approve the adoption and then wait for the United States Embassy to accept the adoption and issue Visas to allow each of them to become US citizens.

We finally received the call right at the tail end of April and immediately got on a plane and flew back to Africa. This time, our goal shifted, and we wanted to explore Ethiopia a little more, which included a trip to Jacob's hometown. When we arrived there, it was a very busy place. We were greeted by dozens and dozens of children running around the streets as they saw us driving toward the orphanage. We got out of the van when we arrived, and Jacob started giving us the tour. The orphanage was about two to three acres big from what I could see. It had several buildings, including a chapel, an office, "dorms" for the boys and "dorms" for the girls, and a place where they would sit to eat. We spent about two hours there and got opportunities to play volleyball, shoot some hoops, and meet several of Jacob's friends.

All of those things stick in my memory quite a bit, but not as much as the memory I have of the little kid (probably around three years old) sitting in a kiddie pool and taking a bath. Although there were many alarming things about this elongated bath that this little girl had in the dirty water, the most troubling fact was the flies.

As she sat in this dirty water for 30-plus minutes, her face was covered with flies. Not just one fly, but many. It appeared that she had grown tired of swatting the flies away. It had become her normal.

Although Solomon talks about flies, he refers to the dead ones that create a bad smell in what otherwise would be something sweet. I share a similar proverb: we do not need to grow weary of dealing with the sin in our life. When we ignore our sin, soon, it becomes the new norm. Then we get deeper into sin, which becomes the new normal. Eventually, we are at a place where we are completely complacent, sitting in our own filth and not even trying to swat the sin that is right in front of our faces.

Open It

1. **What is a time that you left something undone that had major ripple effects (i.e., not fixing a roof and it caved in)?**

Read It

Ecclesiastes 10-11

Explore It

2. What makes the perfumer's ointment smell? (10:1)

3. What happens if you don't sharpen the edge of your tool? (10:10)

4. When should your princes have their feast? (10:16-17)

5. What happens to clouds that are full of rain? (11:3)

6. How does the spirit come to a child's bones in the womb? (11:5)

7. What two things have been identified as sweet and pleasant for the eyes, respectively? (11:7)

Apply It

As Christians, we spend years or perhaps decades building a reputation pointing to Jesus. Our reputation is important because it allows us to minister, encourage, and spur one another on. However, if we fail, even something small, we risk all of it going to waste. Solomon shares that with us in the opening verse of chapter 10. Even a small fly falling into our sweet perfume will ruin the entire batch. We are thankful for grace and for people loving us through our personal trials. However, we need to be on guard.

Read Proverbs 4:20-27

8. After reading this passage in Proverbs, what are some ways that you can be strengthened for today and prepared for tomorrow?

There is an old saying that goes something like this: “Better to Remain Silent and Be Thought a Fool than to Speak and Remove All Doubt.” There has been great debate on who coined this phrase, with many people pointing back to our 16th President, while others attribute it to Mark Twain. Still, others note it came from Mrs. Goose by Maurice Switzer.¹ I don’t think it really matters because you can find almost the exact saying in Proverbs 17. “Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.”²

9. When was a time that you should have remained quiet but instead opened your mouth and “told” everyone that you were foolish?

It seems like only yesterday that my wife, Shari, was working at what was called the Bank of Yorkville. She was the receptionist, so she welcomed customers and answered phone calls, along with several other tasks. Each month the bank leadership would hold meetings for the team, which included loan officers, tellers, and the receptionist. At one of those meetings, some 25 years ago, the bank President, Stan, shared some simple words of wisdom. He reminded everyone that they would likely make a mistake at some point in the future and how those mistakes often can make them into a better bank. He explained, assuming the mistake wasn’t catastrophic, people often judged an organization on how they responded to a mistake or misunderstanding, not on what the mistake was. As a bank employee, if you could hear the issue, keep a calm voice and respond gently by restating the issue, you could usually come up with a solution.

Verse four of this 10th chapter reminds us that “it is much wiser to give a soft answer that turns away wrath, or to show deference -- which means to acknowledge another person's feelings and rights instead of your own -- to the individual involved who may be offended. Even a ruler, even a king, can be placated by deference.”³

10. Where in your life can you practice a calm response? How can you make a soft answer your normal response?

¹ Quotersearch, A. (2019, July 4). Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt. Quote Investigator. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/05/17/remain-silent/>

² The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

³ Stedman, R. (n.d.). Message: The only way to go (Ecclesiastes 9:11-10:15). RayStedman.org. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/the-only-way-to-go>

In November of 1982, *Time Magazine* wrote an article that dug into the appointments of several Supreme Court justices in California. It explained that judges were being put on the court for political reasons, not merit. The article stated, "Chief among them was Rose Bird. Only 40, with no experience as a judge, she moved up from state agriculture secretary to head the court in 1977. In contrast to the gentle persuasion effectively practiced by her predecessor, Donald Wright, the bright, hard-working Bird offered aloofness and abrasion."⁴

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 says, "There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves."⁵

There are often cases where people are shown favoritism because they are friends with someone or have the same political leanings.

11. Why could exalting people that have no business to be exalted be a bad?

⁴ Beach, B. H. (1982, November 29). Law: No Longer Best or Brightest. *Time Magazine*, 120(22).

⁵ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

The other day I went to a friend's house to help him move some of his furniture from the basement to the second floor so that he could prepare his home to welcome some foster children. Knowing my buddy, I grabbed a handful of tools, which included my drill, drill bits, and a socket set. As Reggie, Jose, and I started taking down the bunk bed, I noticed that there were twenty 7/16" bolts to remove. Each of these bolts, as I removed them with the socket set I had with me, was three inches long. I knew that it would take quite a while, not just to loosen them, but on the other side of the event, when we were putting them back together. After a quick review of the tools that I had brought with me, I knew that I needed to make a quick run to the store.

I jumped into the car and headed to Wal-Mart, believing that would be the only store in the immediate area that could fulfill a drill bit 7/16" Nut Driver. As I made my first turn in Montgomery, I noticed *O'Malley's Auto Repair* and assumed they would have what I needed. I was correct, and three minutes later, I returned back to my buddy's house. I walked down into the basement, loaded the DeWalt drill, and ripped out bolts like nobody's business. What would have taken the boys and me an hour now took a few minutes. Why? Because I listened to Solomon. Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, "If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed."⁶

- 12. My father always told me to work smarter, not harder. That's a similar saying that Solomon provides. What things in your life should you become wiser about so that you don't have to work so hard?**

⁶ Ibid

An area just south of Newton, IL., recorded 14 inches of rainfall in just 12 hours, according to the National Weather Service. Thunderstorms brought damaging winds and heavy rainfall through midafternoon in August of this year.⁷ That is roughly equivalent to 260 million gallons of water falling in a small area. Interestingly enough, the rainfall by Newton is equal to that of what Myakka City received from Hurricane Ian.⁸

With both of these events, we were able to know about them ahead of time. I'm not only referring to the fact that we can turn on the Weather Channel or log into our Weather App on our smartphone to see what every satellite is saying and hear the meteorologists' predictions. I'm also referring to the fact that we could just look at the sky and see the storm coming. We often can see clouds in the distant skies moving toward us. Out on the farm, we can look in many directions and see it raining multiple miles away. Not too often are we completely surprised. It will rain when the rain gets heavy enough in the clouds (see Ecclesiastes 11:3).

13. When we fill ourselves with God's blessings, it becomes very natural to dump them onto others. When we fill ourselves with grief and worry, our lives will release a storm around us. Are you filling yourself with God's blessings or sitting in your worry? What are examples of what you are doing?

⁷ Adler, B. (2022, August 3). Illinois gets a foot of rain, the U.S.'s 3rd 1,000-year rain in 1 Week. Yahoo! News. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from <https://news.yahoo.com/illinois-flash-flooding-rain-climate-change-184218523.html>

⁸ Fritz, A., & Miller, B. (2022, September 29). Hurricane Ian's rainfall was a 1-in-1,000 year event for the hardest-hit parts of Florida. CNN. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/29/weather/hurricane-ian-1000-year-rainfall-climate>

Three years ago, on the farm, we had a small tree get hit by lightning. The tree was standing about four feet from our heavy wooded area. When the tree fell, it threw out hundreds of branches and bark and covered a good-sized area that I would mow. As we cleaned up the area and threw the broken branches and material into our burn pile, I decided not to chainsaw the tree that fell down. All it covered was the grass I mowed in the area. The kids never played there, and we still had about two acres of open land to run around.

As I look at the tree today, it is almost as if it has been there for a century. Stuff has grown up around it, and it has basically connected itself to the greater wooded area. The second part of verse three of chapter 11 says, "if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie."⁹

There was "a motto in someone's kitchen that captures exactly what this idiom is saying: "Bloom where you are planted." That is, it is God who controls the fall of the tree out in the forest; whether it falls to the south or the north is within the scope of divine providence to determine, but where it falls, that is where it is to be. This is Solomon's way of saying to us, "Where God has put you, in your present circumstances, that is where you are to give. Meet the needs around you. Supply the needs of those with whom you come in contact." That does not always mean geographically. You may be in touch with someone halfway around the world whose needs you are aware of, but God has brought that to your knowledge so that you can meet that need."¹⁰

14. How are you currently meeting other people's needs?

⁹ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

¹⁰ Stedman, R. (1982, December 12). Message: How, then, should we live? (Ecclesiastes 10:16-11:10). RayStedman.org. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/how-then-should-we-live>

A lot has happened in my house since April 2019. It started off when we welcomed a new son in our home through foster care. Then, I moved positions at Village Bible Church from the Indian Creek Campus to the Sugar Grove Campus. Just after the New Year, I married off my oldest daughter. We then went into a lockdown because of the pandemic. In November 2020, we accepted a call to welcome a sibling group of four sisters (4, 5, 6, and 7) to move in. We then officially adopted Jose in February 2021. We married off a second daughter in December of 2021. Finally, in April 2022, we welcomed the girl's brother into our home. While all of these things were happening, Shari and I became grandparents to two granddaughters, and we are awaiting the arrival of our first grandson right after Christmas of this year.

I'm sure there were dozens of things I didn't list in that paragraph, but you get the point that it can be pretty busy and fast-paced at 15450. So, when I read verses like verse nine of chapter 11, I have to smile a little. "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes."¹¹ Some more seasoned people might remember the quote George Bernard Shaw said, "Youth is such a wonderful thing it is a shame to waste it on young people." The point of this is that God gives the gift of youth, so rejoice in it, enjoy it, use it, the strength of it, the cheerfulness of it, the optimism of it. Young people, for the most part, always believe that everything will turn out all right, so they energetically pursue things. This verse encourages that.

Youth is the time to plan, try new things, and explore new opportunities and adventures. Many people try new things and go after different opportunities, especially in their early to mid-twenties. I believe that this is what this verse is telling us to do. Youth is the time to seize opportunities and follow our desires.

But -- there is always a but, isn't there? Remember that, ultimately, there must be an accounting. This is parallel to Paul's words in Second Corinthians, "For we must all [all believers] appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10).^{12 13}

That's when Solomon closes out this book, reminding these energetic bunnies who take great chances, to put away their anger, resentment, and pain and turn to God's saving grace because He is the only One under and above the sun that has lasting joy.

15. Think back to your youth (or reflect on today if you are in your twenties or younger). Did you heed these words to rejoice every day but to remember that each one is but a blip on the map of eternity? If so, who helped you get that perspective?

¹¹ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Stedman, R. (1982, December 12). Message: How, then, should we live? (Ecclesiastes 10:16-11:10). RayStedman.org. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/how-then-should-we-live>

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