

# LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

BE SENSIBLE!  
ECCLESIASTES 10:1-11



## The Heart of the Matter

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes had completed his search for meaning in the endless halls of humanism. And he found nothing but futility, nothing that satisfies, and nothing of substance. With all that behind him, Solomon calmly and logically began to build a case for living life *wisely* instead of *foolishly*. If we didn't know better, we'd be tempted to think these verses had been lifted from the book of Proverbs. In this section of his journal, Solomon wrote in maxims, one loosely connected to the next, comprising a whole chapter of contrasts . . . wisdom versus folly, the sensible person as opposed to the fool. The writer said, in effect, "Be sensible as you face life in all its diversity and challenge."



## Discovering the Way

### 1. A Review: Where We've Been (Ecclesiastes 1-9)

In the first nine chapters in his journal, Solomon assaulted the incorrect "under-the-sun" perspective on life—a life of self-sufficiency, emptiness, and purposelessness. Nearing the end of his search for meaning apart from God, Solomon realized that only futility could be found there. With the depths of futility now behind him and with a handful of practical principles gleaned from a realistic examination of everyday life under the sun, Solomon began to construct a philosophy of life based on this truth: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Starting in chapter 10, a whole new world of wisdom and hope opens up.



## Tools for Digging Deeper



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## 2. A Contrast: Wisdom and Folly (Ecclesiastes 10:1–11)

As a final warning concerning life under the sun, Ecclesiastes 10 transitions us into the two concluding chapters of the book. As such, Solomon contrasted wisdom and folly, associating folly with the futility of the world “under the sun” and wisdom with the proper “above-the-sun” perspective on earthly life.

- *Advantages versus disadvantages (10:1–3)*: A little folly can cast a dark shadow over a life otherwise characterized by wisdom and honor.
- *Humility and patience versus popularity and partiality (10:4–7)*: If someone in authority loses his or her temper, the wise person should maintain composure.
- *Inevitable risks versus inexcusable stupidity (10:8–11)*: We must take into consideration the potential consequences of our actions as we plan our course.



### GETTING TO THE ROOT

#### *True Biblical Wisdom*

Two Greek adjectives translated “sensible” or “wise,” *phronimos* and *sophron*, describe a wisdom with both thoughtfulness and prudence.<sup>1</sup> The wise and sensible person hears and obeys Christ’s words (Matthew 7:24). Jesus instructed the disciples to be “shrewd [*phronimos*] as serpents and innocent as doves” (10:16) and, in the parable of the ten virgins (25:1–13), to prepare themselves for the bridegroom’s coming. Likewise, leaders of the church and mature believers must display prudence and sensibility in their responsibilities (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2, 5). As we can see from these passages, being wise, prudent, and sensible are not merely Old Testament commandments but New Testament fruits of the life of faith.

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## Starting Your Journey

So how do we get wisdom? It takes more than prayer. According to Proverbs 2:1–11, we must dig into God's Word and live it out in the joyful, tragic, and mundane aspects of life. We must treasure God's Word, maintain a teachable spirit, keep a sensitive heart, pray always, and pursue wisdom with diligence.

**If you are growing in wisdom, how has God been working in your life to cause this growth? How can you continue to foster these responses to God's revelation?**

### ENDNOTE

1. Walter Bauer and others, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 987, 1066.