

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: EPISODE 7

WRESTLING WITH LIFE'S REALITIES
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP
ECCLESIASTES 10:1-20
10/29/2017



MAIN POINT

Few things matter as much as effective leadership.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is a small thing you do even though you know it's wrong because you tell yourself, "No one will notice"?

On the other hand, what can you accomplish by doing "small tasks" over a long period of time?

Many so-called "little things" can have a great impact for good or for ill. For instance, we may label certain false statements "white lies," but they can exact a heavy toll. Telling enough of them will erode trust. On the other side of the coin are the amazing results that can accrue from consistently performing "small tasks." Those of us who are impressed with the big and dramatic need to be reminded that it is the small, obscure activities that make or break people. The truly wise artist, doctor, or athlete knows how those hours of practice and preparation can lead to greatness. Leadership works this way. Effective leadership is found in doing small things right.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 10:1-7.

In Ecclesiastes 10, the writer draws out comparisons between good and poor leadership characteristics. What positive and negative traits do you see in verses 1-7?

Have you ever seen someone without skill get promoted to a position far beyond his or her abilities? Why do these things happen? What would be a godly response in these situations?

In verses 1-7, anger and foolishness are noted as poor traits, while calmness, wisdom, and honor are the contrasting positive traits. Fool and folly in wisdom literature refer to people who have rejected God's wisdom. They do not recognize when something is absurd, they lack understanding, and they do evil because they don't know how to do good. Foolishness is a problem that does not stay in the deep recesses of the heart, because what is imbedded in the heart must come out. The fool will demonstrate by his or her behavior that he or she does not value wisdom. In verses 5-7, Solomon noticed that foolish people often get promoted. We cannot control the world around us, but we can trust God in all of life. He sees your hard work even though others miss it. We work unto the Lord and accomplish His tasks.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 10:8-20.

Again in these verses, several leadership traits are highlighted. What do you learn about the effective leader from verses 8-20?

The effective leader is someone who uses wise speech (v. 12), is resourceful as opposed to wasteful (v. 17), and works hard as opposed to laziness (v. 18). Being an effective leader means using all that God has given you to your advantage. When you do this, you are giving your all to the Lord and using your gifts to further His kingdom.

Verses 16-20 contain wisdom on how to have a safe, pleasant life. How does having a quiet personal life lead to a gracious public life?

Look again at verse 20. Regardless of how you feel about those in leadership over you, how does God expect you to treat them?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you put your gifts to good use and be effective where God has given you the ability to lead?

How can the people in this group be leaders in our church, home, and community?

All of us lead in some way. How can you use your areas of influence to steward the gospel and share Christ with your work ethic and actions, along with your words?

PRAY

Praise God for the ability to pursue Him. Ask that He would help you continue to be faithful in all the tasks He places before you. Pray that through His grace, your faithfulness would yield dividends you haven't even considered before.

COMMENTARY

ECCLESIASTES 10:1-20

10:2-3. Folly is usually self-evident. The word right in the ancient world meant skillful and the word left connoted ineptness and clumsiness. Ancient society made no special provision for left-handers; all soldiers, for example, held their shields in their left hand and their swords in their right hands.

10:4. A person must maintain tact and self-control, showing wisdom, when dealing with the anger of a superior.

10:5-7. Even though folly is usually self-evident (v. 3), sometimes kings and other rulers appoint inept people to high offices but let the competent languish in lowly positions. In this context, slaves refers to people whose skill and wisdom are so limited they ought to be restricted to doing simple manual labor.

10:8-9. These verses contain two pairs of proverbs that are juxtaposed against each other. Verse 8 describes criminal activity: digging a pit refers to setting a trap in order to rob or murder someone, and breaking through a wall refers to breaking into a house to plunder it. Traditional wisdom teaches that people who engage in such criminal action inevitably destroy themselves (Ps 7:15; 9:15; Pr 26:27). On the other hand, Ecc 10:9 teaches that even honest labor, such as quarrying stones or cutting trees, can result in severe injury. That is, criminal activity can destroy you, but so

can honest work. The Teacher did not intend to discourage honesty but to say we have no guarantee of safety in this life. Even wise behavior can end in disaster. Ultimately, we must trust not in wisdom or in ethical behavior but in God for our security.

10:10-11. Wisdom can make success easier to accomplish, but wisdom must be applied in a timely manner or it will do no good.

10:12-15. The primary service of a counselor was giving advice to a king, and the quality of his advice marked the counselor as either a sage or a fool. The mark of a foolish counselor is that he says far more than he knows. Since no one knows what will happen, the wise counselor limits the amount of advice he gives. It is impossible to speak of the future with any certainty. By contrast, the foolish counselor tries to cover for his lack of knowledge by speaking on and on. This is well illustrated by the verbose but confusing directions fools give to someone who does not know the way to a location (v. 15 could be translated, "The effort of fools wearies him who does not know the way to the city").

10:16-17. Ultimately, the success or failure of a political entity (or of a business) depends on the quality of its leaders. These verses conclude the general discussion of 9:13-10:17 on wisdom in the political world with the remark that few things matter so much in this area as leadership.

10:18-20. These verses contain a series of three proverbs on what makes a safe, pleasant life. First, we must do the work needed to insure that we have the basic comforts that all people desire. Second, we must have some money and pleasure in order to enjoy a good life. In isolation from the rest of the book, this seems to recommend pure hedonism and greed, but this misreads the verse. There are things, such as a good meal, that almost all people enjoy. Money helps us to deal with all kinds of problems (money does not literally solve everything, but in fact many of our ordinary problems are financial in nature). Third, we should be careful in dealing with authorities in order to stay out of trouble.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

Ecclesiastes 11:1-10