

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

A FOOL'S PORTRAIT

ECCLESIASTES 10:12-20



The Heart of the Matter

When Scripture paints a life, the Spirit of God never overlooks the blemishes, the scars, or any other imperfection. The Divine Artist does not flatter His subjects. Ecclesiastes 10 is a case in point. Having established indisputable evidence that wisdom is the only way to fly, Solomon placed folly and foolishness alongside wisdom to highlight the contrast. Fools do not listen or learn, and they cannot hide the truth from anyone. Fools are known as such by the public. While on the subject, Solomon went further into detail, supplying additional information about the characteristics of a fool. The painting is anything but enjoyable; nevertheless, it drips with realism. If we laughed at fools before, we see the tragic and dangerous side of them now.



Discovering the Way

1. The Person Inside the Fool

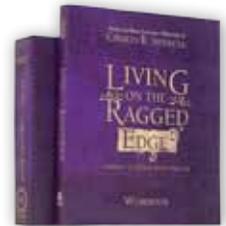
A lot of images come to mind when we think of a fool—a mischievous prankster, a careless blunderer, or a lazy oaf who sits around all day. But Psalm 14:1 projects a different image of a fool: the person who believes there is no God to whom he or she is accountable. As a result, the fool commits sins against God and others.

The book of Proverbs reveals at least four characteristics of fools:

- They treat wickedness like a sport and find pleasure in committing sin (Proverbs 10:23).
- They habitually lie and can't tell the difference between truth and error (14:8).
- They mock sin and make light of wrongdoing (14:9).
- They rage against the Lord and blame Him for self-inflicted wounds (19:3).

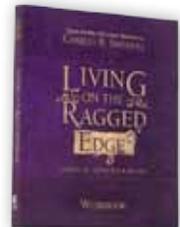


Tools for Digging Deeper



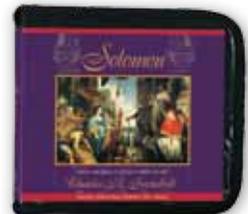
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2. The External Actions of the Fool (Ecclesiastes 10:12–20)

What makes the fool tick is a sinful heart that has not yet been transformed by God's grace. Here are four ways fools manifest the internal folly of their hearts:

- *Destructive speech*: Fools multiply words to their own harm.
- *Unpredictable future*: Fools are ignorant of the fact that the future is not predictable.
- *Confusion and stupidity*: The fool is pictured as wandering around in the wilderness, unwilling to seek the Lord for assistance in finding the way.
- *Procrastination and poor judgment*: Fools lead careless, undisciplined lives and neglect the most important aspects of marriage, children, work, health, and spiritual needs.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

The Spirit of the Fool

The Hebrew word often translated “fool” in Ecclesiastes is *sakhal*, from a verb root that means to be foolish in a “moral or spiritual sense.”¹ In Psalms and Proverbs, the word used to describe the foolish is *nabal*, which means “the man who has no perception of ethical and religious claims.”² Being a fool in the biblical sense doesn't necessarily refer to a stupid, uneducated, or ignorant person, but indicates the lack of sense in spiritual and moral matters (Jeremiah 4:22; 5:21).

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Starting Your Journey

We all know fools. Here are some tips to help us deal with fools:

- If there is continued folly, isolation may be the most effective treatment.
- If there is true repentance and brokenness, restoration is appropriate.
- When there is restoration from folly, let there be proclamation.

Are you living as a fool by failing to submit to God's standard? If so, turn from your ways and ask God for wisdom.

Do you have fools in your life? If so, pray for them earnestly, and take the steps necessary to give God room to work in their lives.

ENDNOTES

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 698.
2. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 614.