

# Walking Blindfold through God's World

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[ 0 : 00 ] What do you think will happen tomorrow? Where do you think your life is headed? Remember, from the start of chapter 9, the teacher is summing up the lessons he's tried to teach us in this book.

We're in his conclusion paragraph. Last time he helped us see that we cannot cross the threshold into the mind of God. This far and no further.

Not only because we're sinful, but because we're creatures of dust. We cannot wrap our heads around the infinite and eternal thoughts of our creator.

And the teacher reached for death, as he has so often, as the ultimate no-go area that we cannot understand how or why death comes to who it does or when.

But now he begins to draw that lesson back into the rest of life. Start from the end, he says, and work backwards and see what you find. Last time the lesson was seize the day.

[ 1 : 17 ] Seize the day. Whatever your hand finds to do, go and do it with all your strength. I hope you've done that this week. But now, he says, don't think that the day won't also seize you.

Things happen that we can't predict. Evil times fall on us that we didn't see coming. We imagine that we're in control of our lives. We count up the different factors at work in our lives.

We treat them like levers that we can pull and push and control our tidy world. But life doesn't work the way we think it does or should.

That is one of the big take-home lessons of this book, isn't it? 11 verse 5, As you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in the mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things.

So much of life is a mystery to us. We walk blindfold through God's worlds. I've got three questions tonight to help us unpack that.

[ 2 : 22 ] The first one brings us up against the brick wall again. The second two help us know what to do with that. First question, then, that the teacher's asking tonight, Who knows what is coming?

Who knows what's coming? It's not a trick question. He's told us. Do you notice verse 10 verse 14? Who knows what's coming?

No one knows what's coming. Who can tell someone else what will happen after them? But we don't live like that, do we? We live as if we can tell.

If we do well at school, we'll get into a good course at uni. Get into a good uni, we'll get a good job.

Get a good job, we'll earn good money. Earn good money. You'll afford a nice house.

Have a nice house. You'll be able to fill it with kids. Fill it with kids. They'll look after you in your old age. Our idea of how life works. The flow chart we use to tell how far along we are.

[ 3 : 28 ] It's so linear, isn't it? So naively simple and straightforward. Complete level one and progress to level two. And level three and level four with bigger and better prizes at the end of each level.

But does life really work like a video game? Do you know for sure that when you get your grades back from school, they're going to unlock the life that you've always dreamed of?

Do you know when you complete your course at uni and get the job you've always wanted, that it will always be the job that you want, that you'll never have to resign from?

How many couples have got the nice house but found that filling it with bundles of joy is harder than they thought? Sadly, for whatever reason, isn't possible.

How do we know that when we complete level one, level two will automatically open up? Or will we get stuck at the end of level one forever or feel like we are? Does life really work like a game?

[ 4 : 31 ] If we get it all right, if we do everything properly, then we will progress step by step through life without a problem. We think we know how life works.

We treat it as if we can control it like that. But who knows what's coming? That's the point of the little poem in 9 verse 11.

You know, no one trains for a race expecting to come last, right? Or not to finish. No one studies for an exam expecting to fail.

No one gets a job expecting to get fired or be made redundant. Nobody buys a house expecting to go bankrupt and lose it. But all those things do happen.

And the teacher reminds us that it happens not just to the layabout student or the slacker at work, but to the brightest and the best.

[ 5 : 30 ] The straight A student. The grafter. The people you think will never fail. The race is not to the swift. Or the battle to the strong. Nor does food come to the wise.

Or wealth to the brilliant. Or favor to the learned. Why not? It makes complete sense, doesn't it?

That the best athlete would win gold. Or that the brainiest person would get the high paying job.

What is it that messes up our neat and tidy expectations? Time and chance. Happen to everyone.

Literally, time and happenings happen to everyone. Things happen. Things happen. What will happen to you tomorrow that you can't see?

That might change the outcome of your life in a way that you wouldn't choose for it to you.

Everyone's heard Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata.

[ 6 : 34 ] If you're not sure, you'd know it if you heard it. Beethoven died in poverty. He's never seen Van Gogh's Sunflowers.

But he didn't know fame until he was dead. Galileo, the famous physicist and engineer, was called a heretic in his day because he was convinced that the earth went round the sun and not the other way around.

These are people we think of as geniuses. We can't imagine our world without them. But whose wisdom or brilliance or learning didn't put food on the table.

Or money in the bank or praise in the mouths of their critics. To bring it up to date, it's not the best product. Or the best business plan that always gets the investment, right?

It's not the best person who always gets the promotion. It's not the greatest thinkers or the hardest workers who earn the biggest paychecks. It's the guys who kick a football around a field twice a week.

[ 7 : 38 ] Sometimes they do that quite well. They're not world changers, are they? What do you think will happen tomorrow? What will be the reward for all your hard work?

Sometimes you'll get the recognition or pay or position or thanks you deserve, but often you won't.

And not necessarily because of anything that you've done or not done. And not necessarily because of anything that anyone else has done or not done.

But simply because of what's happened. Time and happenings, circumstances, situations, seasons happen to everyone.

We reach, don't we, for those open-ended and vague words to describe our lives. Things that we go through that we just can't get to the bottom of. We know that it's not just one simple thing that's happening to us.

It's lots of things that have created this situation, these circumstances, this season we're in. We reach for those hevel words.

[ 8 : 49 ] Breathy words. Words that lack shape or definition. And we need them because that's how life really works, isn't it? We don't ever say, I'm progressing to level three in my life plan.

We say, these are my circumstances. This is my situation. We know we're going through something. We don't know where it came from or where it's going. It's not got a name.

Our own lives teach us, don't they, that life is less like a game we play and more like a breath that vanishes. The teacher is confronting us with what we already know but won't admit to you, which is that we're really not in control of what happens to us or the outcome of our lives.

We can be as sure of what's going to happen to us tomorrow as we can of what the weather is going to be doing. He says, or how babies develop in the womb.

We can predict. We can guess. Some things we can measure. But we can't be sure. Just humor me for a minute. I know you're tired.

[ 10 : 02 ] But just think. Think back to the last thing that happened to you that you didn't expect or plan for. It's something big, something small.

I reckon it wasn't that long ago. And I reckon it wasn't the first time it happened. Or the only time it's happened. Now think, what's coming tomorrow?

How sure can you be? If we knew for certain what the weather was doing, the forecast would never be wrong. If we knew for certain how embryos develop, we wouldn't go for scans.

We can't begin to understand the work of God, the maker of all things. Yet, we make plans that we're unwilling to change. And have goals that we're unwilling to let go of.

And we go for tests that we're unwilling to fail. Friends, we think that we're geniuses playing the game of life. The teacher points out, really, we are more like prey.

[ 11 : 12 ] And our lives are like a breath. As fish are caught in a cruel net. Or birds are taken in a snare. So people are trapped by evil times.

Who fall unexpectedly upon them. Those verses made me think of photos. You've probably seen them as well in the news of amputees in Ukraine.

Some soldiers, some everyday people who got caught up in the fighting or caught up in the war. They all had plans. They had careers.

They had degrees. They had families. They had homes. They had a country. They didn't buy a house or have children thinking they'd have to defend it with their lives against the nequia power.

And we look at those pictures and we think, that couldn't be us. But what's the difference? Only that they were trapped by evil times that fell unexpectedly upon them.

[ 12 : 15 ] And we weren't. We forget that those amputees are just like us. But their country is being invaded and ours isn't. Who knows what's coming?

No one but God. And we cannot understand his work. So what do we do with that? And that leads us to our next two questions. Firstly, whose hand do you hold?

That's what the teacher wants to ask you. Whose hand are you holding? Now the whole of chapter 10, we're not going to dig too far into it, I think is there just to reinforce 9 verse 17.

There's a lot going on. Again, if you come back to it, you won't regret it. But the big point, I think, is that in the confusion and the mystery of life, the quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shout of a ruler of fools.

What's he saying? The only way to walk safely through God's world, blind as we are as to what's really going on, is to hold wisdom's hand and let wisdom lead us.

[ 13 : 22 ] The parable from verse 13 says it all, a small city with only a few people, there's our wives. A powerful king comes against it, surrounds and besieges it.

There is time and chance. And if the war was won or lost on strength alone, the city would crumble, we wouldn't stand. But there lived in that city a man poor but wise who saved the city by his wisdom.

Wisdom saved the day. Wisdom is better than strength. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, even though true wisdom is often ignored, forgotten and disregarded.

Wisdom speaks in quiet words that are easy to miss. But they work. Even when we're completely overpowered, the quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shout of a ruler of fools. So whose hand do we hold? Well, who is wise? The teacher of Ecclesiastes? Other wisdom books in the Bible?

[ 14 : 39 ] Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs? Read them. Grip onto wisdom. Listen, there are some wise people in our church family. I'm not going to name them, but you probably could.

Wisdom shows, doesn't it, in that way of life. You might not want to hold their hand. But ten minutes talking with them might just help you unravel a sticky knot, shine light into a dark place.

But there's someone I want us to see here who we've glanced perhaps only in passing through Ecclesiastes, but he's really at the heart of it. Because if the teacher is teaching us wisdom, then he must be teaching us Christ.

Let me say it again. If the teacher is teaching us wisdom, then he must be teaching us Christ. Why do I say that? Well, here's wisdom speaking in Proverbs chapter 9.

Who does this sound like to you? Let all who are simple come to my house. To those who have no sense, she says, come, eat my food and drink the wine I've mixed.

[ 15 : 47 ] Leave your simple ways that you would live. Walk in the way of insight. Who does it sound like? Here's some well-loved words from Matthew chapter 11.

At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Come to me, all

who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I'm gentle and lowly in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Not the strong, the powerful, the geniuses, but let the simple, the children, the weary, the burdened, come to me and learn from me.

Let them come and find life. Let them come and feast. Let them come and find insight. Let them come and rest. Let them come and rest. It's not the only place that we could see the wisdom of the Old Testament is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ, because he is the God who breathed out this wisdom come in the flesh to live in this world.

[17:05] That's so much so. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, it's because of him, you're in Christ Jesus, who's become for us wisdom from God. The world is full of people, he says, trying to get through life by their own strength or in their own wisdom.

And into that world, into our world, God has sent Jesus, the power and wisdom of God. And his words, his words, they are quiet words, aren't they?

His voice is easy to miss, often ignored, quickly forgotten, drowned out by the shouts of foolish rulers.

Even when he was here, he didn't gain followers, did he, by shouting over people. But in the quiet conversations, in the remote places, but put your hand in his hands, says the teacher, and you will find rest for your soul.

Put your hand into the hand of wisdom, let him lead you. Happenings will still happen to you. A ruler's anger might rise against you, verse 4.

[18:16] The wrong person might be put in charge, verse 6. You might have an accident at work, which wasn't your fault, verses 8 and 9. But here's what holding Christ's hand through those things looks like.

If a ruler's anger rises against you, verse 4, do not leave your post. Rest, calmness, can lay great offenses to rest. Calmness, gentleness, quietness.

Otherwise, you would want to run or rage. It's not fair, right? The boss is taking out his frustration on you. Someone in your family is having a dig at you.

Or you feel like your teacher, your cheater, is singling you out. They have it in for you. Put your hand in Christ's hand and faithfully carry on, he says.

Stay at your post. You're keeping watch for the king. The gentleness of your reaction might make it all go away. It's so countercultural, isn't it?

[19:18] How often have we been told we have to fight for a fair outcome and not lie down and not speak up? We have to speak up for ourselves. There might be a time to talk back, but it shouldn't be our first instinct, says the teacher, when it comes to our suffering.

When you're being singled out by someone for the wrong reasons, wisdom says, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. It will do them good.

Possibly it will do you good too. Calmness can lay great offenses to rest. What else? Here's another saying that turns the world on its head in verse 10.

If the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success. You're trying to play the world's game.

The game is strength, says the teacher, is a blunt instrument. You smashing a blunt axe against the tree is going to look impressive, right? You're going to end up in a sweat. But it will be less effective than a nice sharp axe that you can swing gently and quietly.

[20:31] Better a few wise words that get the job done than a big show of strength that wears you out and doesn't do what's needed. And again, it's so countercultural, isn't it, in a world where it often pays to look busy and important more than actually just get on with what's at hand.

Getting quietly on with it, solving problems with gentle, gracious words. It's not going to get you noticed. Temptation always for us is to go in for the, you know, aren't I strong and powerful?

Look at me. But Christ's way rarely, if ever, looks strong and powerful. It is always quiet wisdom over blunt force.

Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, verse 12. We could go on. Holding Christ's hand gives rest, verse 15. Puts us to work, verse 18.

He helps us enjoy the good things in life, verse 19. He helps us hold our tongues, verse 20. Do come back. Learn this wisdom. How does Christ lead us in all these ways into a way of wisdom?

[ 21 : 41 ] But the point is, it's holding his hand that leads us safely through things that we can't understand, through a world that is incomprehensible to us.

Only he gives rest for our souls in the chaos of our lives. You only have to let go of him for a moment to land in a ditch, verse 1.

So a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. Foolishness outtalks wisdom too, verse 14. Fools multiply words. 9, verse 18 captures our predicament perfectly, Luke.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. How many of me does it take to undo the good that Christ would do me?

If I just let go of my own strength and wisdom and put my hands in his? It only takes one of me to destroy much good.

[ 22 : 48 ] We are our own worst enemy, aren't we? When we work by our own strength, trust in our own wisdom, and don't hold his hand. So whose hand do you hold?

The king's grandfather, George VI, quoted these lines at the start of his Christmas speech in 1939. It was the year the war started. You can only imagine, can't you, how blind people felt to their future. And this was his wise counsel. I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown. He replied, Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.

That will be better than light. His is the only hand we can hold to bring us safely through time and happenings.

So take it. Take it. I'll share this with you. I told you last Sunday about my grandma.

[ 24 : 06 ] Two weeks ago, diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. Earlier last week, I got to visit her. On Thursday, she passed away. Nothing brings Ecclesiastes home like someone close to you dying.

The day before she died, she'd been lying on the same bed for three weeks. In a ward, not eating anything. Just getting pain relief, knowing that she was dying.

And as I got ready to go, I said, Grandma, you know, there's more happiness waiting for you than you could ever possibly imagine. And with a little smile on her face, she said, I'm happy now.

I'm happy now. That is the fruit of a lifetime of holding Christ's hand. To get to the worst point in your life, the point of no return.

And to know not just peace, but happiness. Put your hand in his hand. Let him lead you.

[ 25 : 23 ] Give rest for your soul. Which brings us to our last question tonight. Navigating a world we don't understand. How wisely do you walk?

The teacher said anything could go wrong. Your plans might fail. You might get hurt. But if that stops us from doing or trying things, we've got him wrong. If anything, he says, knowing life doesn't work the way we want it to, do more things.

Try more things. 11 verse 1. Ship your grain across the sea. After many days, you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures. Yes, in eight. You don't know what disaster may come upon the land.

What's he saying? Don't let the unpredictability of life paralyze you. Let it stimulate you. Have more than one iron in the fire. Work while you study.

Do two degrees. Get good at things. Skill up. Network. You don't know what will happen to one of your irons, so have a backup. Some of us worry about all of the variables, don't we?

[ 26 : 26 ] What about this? What if that goes wrong? Whoever watches the wind will not plant, he says. Whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. If we worry about everything, we won't do anything.

There's wise caution, isn't there? But there's foolish inactivity to you. Why is it sometimes foolish not to do things? Sow your seed in the morning.

At evening, let your hands not be idle. For you don't know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. Keep doing and trying things, he says, because we can't be sure that what we're doing now is going to work out.

That's the thing that worry is, miss, isn't it? It could be more risky not to do anything than to try something new.

But how does that mesh with rest for our souls? The teachers just told us, if we walk in wisdom, we'll have a spirit of quietness, calmness, gentleness, and everything we do.

[ 27 : 32 ] Now he's talking about investments and work and opportunities. How can we do both? Again, God's wisdom is not ours. It is so countercultural.

We think we can't do both because we're told we can either be safe or we can be free. We can either hold Christ's hand or we can live our lives.

But wisdom says it's when we're holding Christ's hand most tightly that we discover most freedom in life. You can have a high-flying career, go to parties, splash the cash, look really free, yet in your heart be paralyzed by insecurity.

You might even do those things because you fear what people might think if you don't do them. But people who are insecure, who feel unsafe, they are not really free, are they?

But if Christ gives you safety, security rests in all your circumstances, then no choice or circumstance can paralyze you with fear.

[ 28 : 43 ] If you're holding his hand, nothing will be too big to try. Wisdom says it's those whose hearts are most secure who have the most freedom in life.

Wisdom's counsel is hold Christ's hand and go and do stuff, go and try stuff. It might not work. So go and try something else as well. Get up early and try things and try some more things before you go to bed.

You don't know which will succeed, but you don't have to choose. As Christians, you know, I think we've convinced ourselves we have less opportunity in life than other people.

There are costs to following Jesus, but the teacher says, if you're a Christian, do you know you have most opportunity because you're safer in life?

You're freer to take a chance. Everyone's walking blindfold through God's world, but you have your hand in the hand of his son.

[ 29 : 49 ] There's no better guide. There's no safer place. There's no more liberating relationship than to walk with him through life.

Friends, you don't know what tomorrow holds, and I can't tell you, but tonight, will you take his hand, learn from him, walk with him, let him lead you, and you will never be so safe or so free. free. Let's come to him together as we pray. Let's pray. The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God more powerful than human strength.

Our Father, we thank you for Jesus Christ, your wisdom. Lord, so often he is ignored. So often we ignore him. Lord, forgive us for the times where we see Jesus as someone who exists alongside everything else that goes on in our life rather than the king, the leader, the wisdom who inhabits our lives.

Lord, teach us, we pray, to hold his hand through everything that we do. Lord, humble us, we pray, teach us the limits of our own understanding. Lord, teach us that he is to be trusted in all things.

[ 31 : 39 ] Lord, we pray that you would set our hearts free from insecurity. Lord, free from needless worry. Lord, we live in a worrying world. There are things that we can't control, but he is in charge.

Lord, help us to trust him, we pray. Liberate us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. As we close, we're going to sing a final hymn, Be still, my soul, the Lord is on your side.

It's a wonderful hymn that speaks of the surety, the certainty, the confidence we have in life with the Lord by our side. Let's stand together and sing these words. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.