

# Ecclesiastes 12:11-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-12/ecclesiastes-1211-12/>

*Mastering wisdom brings integrity to life. But Solomon warns of endless writings and how study can be a distraction from fruitful living.*

*Goads* were ancient cattle prods; pricks on sticks used to make an animal move from a place where they are comfortable to a place desired by the livestock manager, perhaps a pasture with better grazing. It is a metaphor of guidance. The *words of wise men* are *like goads* in that they prod us to leave a place of comfort to a better place. They are guiding lights. Given the immediate context, Solomon likely includes his assembly of the book of Proverbs in this description.

Some *wise men*, like Solomon the Preacher, are able to skillfully combine multiple proverbs into helpful instruction. The best of these *collections* become a compelling and reliable basis for successful living. They are *like well-driven nails*. As *well-driven nails* hold together a house, bringing it integrity, so do these *collections* of proverbs do for our lives. They make all the pieces of our lives fit together in unity.

Israel's king was charged with shepherding His chosen nation (2 Samuel 5:2). As a work of wisdom, Ecclesiastes demonstrates Solomon is exceptionally qualified to govern the nation of Israel as its God-appointed shepherd and to provide the insights in this book. But Solomon says here that the *masters of these collections are given by one Shepherd*. God is *one*, and He is consistently described as the *Shepherd* of His people, the *one* who nourishes, guides, and protects (Genesis 48:15; Psalms 23:1; Isa 40:11). God is the ultimate source of all wisdom.

The phrase *masters of these collections* could refer to the best *collections*. In this case, the divinely inspired book of Proverbs might be in mind, as the best of the best. These *words of wisdom* are like *well-driven nails* that make all aspects of our lives fit together properly. The phrase also could refer to those who master the *collections of words of wisdom*. Those who are *masters of words of wisdom* will function like *well-driven nails* in holding communities together with their wise living.

Solomon includes a couple of *warnings* about the dangers that surround the pursuit of wisdom. There are *many books* that claim to be *collections* of wisdom. Everyone sees the value of what wisdom brings and will add a claim to being the director of wisdom. Everyone likes to be in charge of the *goads*, to direct and control others. So the *writing of many books* is *endless*. The second warning, similar to the first, is that *excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body*.

The word translated *excessive devotion* literally means “study.” We can spend our entire lives with our “head in the books,” not practically applying what we learn. *Endless* study bogs us down in theory. We spend our time pondering advice rather than learning practical wisdom by taking action.

The *warning* here is clear: don’t just jump to the next book, endlessly trying to feed our compulsion to understand. It is more important to live what we learn.

There is wisdom in balancing study and action. Study and seeking wise advice is good. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes to that end. But because of “hebel,” there is a tipping point where our exploration abandons the paradox of faith and tries to find answers with our own strength. Solomon’s warning: pursue wisdom but trust in God alone, the *one Shepherd* who is the source of all wisdom. Be intentional about your choices but be wary of your emotions and expectations. Focus on faith.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>11</sup> The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. <sup>12</sup> But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.**