LESSON 11

# Wisdom for Everyday Decisions

*Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. — James 1:5*

*Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts. — Psalm 90:12*

*The Bible rarely tells us which job to take or which house to buy, but God promises wisdom to anyone who asks him for it. Wisdom is skill at living, and that includes how we spend the few days we have.*

## A Verse with Our Name on It

THE OFFER CAME WITH A RAISE AND A MOVE THREE STATES AWAY. The new town has a congregation, but it is small and meets in a rented room, and we wouldn't know a soul there. So, we pray about it, then open the Bible and turn the pages, half hoping a verse will rise off the paper and settle the thing. Some of us have tried the old trick of letting it fall open and putting a finger down. Nothing in Scripture mentions the job.

Most of our decisions are smaller than that one, and there are far more of them. Should we say yes to teaching the children's class? Can the family afford the second car? Our daughter has made the travel team, and half the games are on Sunday morning. Nobody wrote a chapter and verse for any of it, and we still have to choose.

Lesson 10 asked how to rest in the life God has given. This lesson asks how to make the choices that fill it. God rarely answers a question like ours with a verdict. He promises wisdom, and he gives a good deal more of it than we expect.

## A Father Talking to His Son

Proverbs 2 opens with a father talking to his son. *My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,* Proverbs 2:1. Last week's reading asked us to count the times he says *if*. There are three, in verses 1, 3, and 4. *If you accept my words. If you call out to insight. If you seek it like silver and search for it like hidden treasure.*

Silver did not lie on the ground in that world. Job 28 describes men cutting shafts into rock and hanging on ropes far below the daylight, all for a vein of ore. That is the kind of effort the father has in mind: wisdom goes to the one who wants it badly enough to dig.

Then verse 6 names the giver. *For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding,* Proverbs 2:6. The son does the seeking and God does the giving. Lesson 3 found the same pattern in Galatians, where the verbs were ours and the fruit came from the Spirit. The father promises that whoever keeps looking will find it.

The Hebrew word for wisdom is used elsewhere for the skill of craftsmen, the men who worked gold and cut stones for the tabernacle.[62] In Proverbs, wisdom is a practical thing, the skill of knowing how to live. A man can own every chisel in the shop and still not know how to use one. The father says what that skill produces. *Then you will understand righteousness, justice, and integrity—every good path,* Proverbs 2:9. A wise person can see the path, and the father promises a guard along it as well. *Discretion will watch over you, and understanding will guard you,* Proverbs 2:11.

## Just Ask

James wrote to Christians under pressure and told them to count it joy when they *experience various trials,* James 1:2. Testing produces endurance, he says, and endurance makes a person *mature and complete, lacking nothing,* James 1:4. Then he names the place where we come up short. *Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him,* James 1:5. *Lacking* and *lacks* are the same word.[63] We are on our way to lacking nothing, and wisdom is usually the first thing we find missing.

*Ungrudgingly* means God does not scold us for asking. Some of us hesitate because we think a Christian ought to know already. A new believer can feel that the most, sitting in a class beside people who seem to have every answer. James says God gives to all, and he does not make anyone feel foolish for needing it.

James adds one condition: *But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind,* James 1:6. He calls that person *double-minded,* James 1:8, a word that means having two souls.[64] That is the person who asks God for wisdom with the decision already made, or keeps a second plan ready in case God's answer disappoints him. James says that person receives nothing from the Lord, James 1:7.

## Walk Carefully

Paul gives the same counsel to the church at Ephesus and ties it to the clock. *Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is,* Ephesians 5:15–17.

*Walk* is Paul's word for our whole life, and he uses it again and again in the second half of this letter (Ephesians 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8). *Making the most of the time* is a market word. It means to buy something up, the way a shopper buys what is good before someone else gets to it.[65] The *time* Paul has in mind is opportunity, the moment that will not come again. *Because the days are evil,* using them well takes a decision. Left alone, an evening goes wherever the remote or the phone takes it.

Then verse 17 tells us to *understand what the Lord's will is*. Lesson 4 said a renewed mind can discern God's will, and it promised that Lesson 11 would take up our decisions. Lesson 10 found part of that will in a single command: to give thanks in everything. Most of what God wants from us is already written down. He wants us honest at work, faithful to a spouse, present when his people gather, providing for our own households (1 Timothy 5:8). Our decisions get made inside those commands, and they settle more of them than we expect. If one choice would make us break something God has plainly said, we have our answer, no matter how good the raise is. When every option in front of us keeps faith with him, he leaves the choice to us and gives us wisdom to make it.

## Teach Us to Count

Psalm 90 is the only psalm that carries Moses' name: *A prayer of Moses, the man of God*. We do not know when he prayed it, but near the end of the wilderness years, Numbers 20 tells of a hard stretch in his life. His sister Miriam died, and he struck the rock in anger and learned he would never enter the land. Then he climbed Mount Hor with his brother Aaron and came down without him (Numbers 20:1, 12, 28).

It reads like the prayer of a man who has done some burying. *Our lives last seventy years or, if we are strong, eighty years,* Psalm 90:10. Seventy years comes to about twenty-five thousand days, which is not many, and Moses knew it. Then he prays, *Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts,* Psalm 90:12.

Look closely at what he asks for. Anyone can count days, and counting by itself makes nobody wise. Some people reach fifty, do the arithmetic, and panic. They decide they had better get everything in while there is time, and a family gets left behind. Moses asked to be taught, because he wanted God to show him what his few days were for.

Most of our phones will tell us, if we let them, how many hours we spent looking at them this week. Few of us like the number. How we spend our days says what we believe about them, and it does so more honestly than anything we say out loud. Moses closes the psalm by asking twice that God *establish the work of our hands*, Psalm 90:17. He wanted his work to last.

## Making the Call

So what do we do with the job offer, or the travel team? We start with what God has already said, and we let it rule out whatever it rules out. Then we ask him for wisdom about the choice that remains, by name, and we mean it. *Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeed,* Proverbs 15:22. A Christian who has walked with God for thirty years has seen most of our decisions before. Talking it over with someone like that is part of how God answers the prayer.

We also count the days honestly and ask what this choice would do to our families and to our place among God's people. A bigger paycheck looks different if it pulls us away from the church that has been helping us grow.

Then we decide, trusting that God isn't standing behind a curtain waiting for us to guess wrong. He gives wisdom generously, and when we have asked for it and acted on it, we can leave what comes next with him.

Jesus once faced a call like ours. Mark tells about a long day early in his ministry. In Capernaum, after the sun went down, people carried their sick to him until *the whole town was assembled at the door,* Mark 1:33, and he healed many of them.

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying,* Mark 1:35. Simon and the others went looking and found him. *Everyone is looking for you,* they said, Mark 1:37.

A whole town wanted him to stay, and Jesus answered, *Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come,* Mark 1:38. The answer came out of those early hours in prayer. He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons, Mark 1:39.

What decision are you carrying right now, and have you asked God for wisdom about it, or only for a sign?

## Key Concepts

Complete each statement. Answers in endnotes.[66]

1. Proverbs 2:6 says, For the LORD gives _____.
2. James 1:5 says God gives to all generously and _____.
3. Ephesians 5:16 says, making the most of the _____.
4. Ephesians 5:17 says, understand what the Lord's _____ is.
5. Psalm 90:12 says, Teach us to _____ our days carefully.

## Discussion Questions

**Opening**

1. What is the hardest decision you've had to make that the Bible didn't address by name? How did you finally decide?

2. Who is the wisest person you've known? What made you trust their judgment?

**Core**

3. Read Proverbs 2:1–11. What does the son have to do, and what does God do? Why do you think the father puts both in the same chapter?

4. Read James 1:5–8. What does it look like to ask God for wisdom while being *double-minded*?

5. Read Ephesians 5:15–17. Which parts of the Lord's will for your life are already written down, and how do they narrow the choices you face?

**Deeper**

6. Read Psalm 90:10–12. Why isn't counting our days enough to make us wise? What do we need God to teach us?

7. Read Mark 1:32–39. A whole town wanted Jesus to stay. What helped him choose to leave, and what does that say about our own priorities?

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**Journaling Prompts**

*15–20 minutes. Nobody reads these but you.*

1. Write down a decision you're facing right now. Then write down everything God has already said that bears on it.
2. Look back over your last seven days. Where did the hours go? Write about what the list says you believe.
3. Moses prayed that God would establish the work of his hands. What work would you most want to outlast you?

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**Weekly Practice**

**THIS WEEK.** Ask for wisdom by name.

Choose one decision you're facing, large or small. Each morning this week, ask God out loud for wisdom about that specific decision. Before the next class, sit down with an older Christian you trust and talk it over with them.

## Looking Ahead

**Lesson 12 – Faith in Work, School, Family, and Life, Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31**

Lesson 11 asked how to choose well and spend our days wisely. Lesson 12 asks where those days are actually spent: at a desk, in a classroom, around a kitchen table.

Paul leaves nothing out. *Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,* Colossians 3:17, and that includes the dishes.

Read Colossians 3:17–4:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:31 before the next class. In Colossians 3:18–4:1, count how many times Paul mentions the Lord while he gives instructions about home and work.

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[62] *Wisdom* is *ḥokmāh*. Exodus 31:3 and 6 use it for the skill God gave Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other craftsmen who built the tabernacle and its furnishings.

[63] *Lacking* in James 1:4 and *lacks* in 1:5 are both forms of *leipō*. *Ungrudgingly* translates *mē oneidizontos*, literally "without reproaching," which older translations render "upbraideth not."

[64] *Double-minded* is *dipsychos*, "two-souled." It appears in the New Testament only here and in James 4:8, and no earlier use survives in Greek literature.

[65] *Making the most of* is *exagorazomenoi*, from a verb meaning to buy up or buy out. Paul uses the same phrase in Colossians 4:5. *Time* here is *kairos*, the opportune moment, rather than *chronos*, time as duration.

[66] ANSWERS: 1. wisdom · 2. ungrudgingly · 3. time · 4. will · 5. number