

Decision Making and the Will of God, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Do I Actually Want to Do It? Sanctified Desire

Psalm 37:3-7 (with 2 Thessalonians 1:11)

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson takes up the question of desire, and its placement is itself a doctrinal statement. The study deliberately asks "Do I actually want to do it?" only after Scripture, motive, and impact have been weighed, because desire that rules from the first chair will simply bend every other consideration to serve itself. Doctrinally, the lesson teaches a biblical theology of desire: God does not despise the longings of the human heart but aims to sanctify them. Psalm 37 promises that those who delight in the Lord will find Him giving, and reshaping, the desires of their hearts, and 2 Thessalonians 1:11 shows God at work to fulfill every good resolve by His power. The teacher should help students see that sanctified desire is a real and legitimate factor in guidance, in its proper place.

The lesson must guard a balance on both sides. On one side is the error this study has resisted throughout, beginning a decision with "What do I feel like doing?" and treating raw appetite as the voice of God. On the other side is an over-suspicious piety that distrusts all desire and assumes the holy path is always the one we least want. Scripture rejects both. It dethrones unexamined appetite, and it honors the renewed desires of a heart that has learned to love what God loves. The teacher should also distinguish sanctified desire from the sign-seeking the study opposes: a God-shaped longing weighed under wisdom is not the same as treating a passing feeling as a coded message from heaven.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson is deeply formational, because it goes after what we love. The deeper aim is not merely to teach students where desire belongs in a checklist, but to cultivate hearts that delight in the Lord so thoroughly that their very wants begin to be trustworthy. The teacher should help students delight in God, commit their way to Him, and be still before Him, so that over time their desires are increasingly the desires of a heart shaped by grace. Send them home loving God more, and therefore better able to trust the longings that love produces.

Question 1

Student Question:

The psalm opens, "Trust in the LORD, and do good... Delight yourself in the LORD" (vv. 3-4). Why does the psalmist place trusting God and delighting in God before anything is said about the desires of our heart? How does delighting in the Lord change a person's desires over time?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw students' attention first to the order of the psalm, because the order carries the doctrine. Before the psalmist ever mentions the desires of the heart, he lays down a foundation: trust in the Lord, do good, dwell in the land, befriend faithfulness, and delight yourself in the Lord. The desires come fourth in the sequence, not first. The psalmist is teaching that our wants are only safe to consult once our hearts are anchored in trust and delight toward God.

Define what it means to delight in the Lord. To delight in God is to find Him genuinely pleasing, to take joy in Him as our greatest treasure, not merely to use Him as a means to other treasures. It is the difference between loving God and loving God's gifts. A person who delights in the Lord enjoys His presence, His word, His character, and His ways, so that closeness to God is itself a source of joy rather than a duty endured to get something else.

Show how delight reshapes desire over time, which is the heart of the question. We come to want, increasingly, what we love most. A person who delights in money will desire more money; a person who delights in approval will desire more approval. So a person who delights in the Lord will gradually find his desires bending toward the things God loves. Delight is not passive; it is formative. Over months and years, a heart that delights in God develops sanctified longings almost without noticing, until wanting the right thing becomes more natural than it used to be.

Help students see why this makes desire trustworthy only in its place. The reason the study does not begin with desire is that an undelighted heart wants the wrong things. But a heart that has first learned to delight in the Lord becomes, over time, a heart whose wants can increasingly be trusted. The path to trustworthy desires, then, is not to suppress all wanting, but to delight in God so deeply that He reshapes what we want.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The order of Psalm 37: trust and delight before the desires of the heart
- Delighting in the Lord as treasuring God Himself, not merely His gifts
- Delight as formative: we come to want what we most love
- A heart that delights in God developing sanctified longings over time
- Trustworthy desire as the fruit of delight, not the suppression of all wanting

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between loving God and loving God's gifts?
- How have you seen your own desires change as your delight changed?
- Why is it significant that desire comes fourth in the psalm, not first?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about where your heart actually finds its delight. Is it mostly in the Lord Himself, or in getting your own way, in comfort, in success, in being approved? How might your decisions be different if your deepest delight were truly in God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question asks students to locate their actual delight, which is more revealing than asking what they believe. We can say God is our greatest treasure while our hearts are plainly more delighted by comfort, success, or approval. The teacher should invite honesty here, since naming where our delight really rests is the first step toward letting God move it.

Help students diagnose their delight by its evidence. What do we think about in idle moments? What, when we get it, makes us feel that life is good, and what, when we lose it, makes us feel that life is ruined? Where our delight truly rests tends to show up in our daydreams, our anxieties, and our reactions far more than in our stated beliefs. Many discover that their functional delight is some good gift rather than the Giver.

Then turn toward decisions, which is the point of the study. If our deepest delight is in comfort, our decisions will quietly bend toward ease. If it is in approval, they will bend toward what impresses. But if our delight is increasingly in the Lord, our decisions will bend toward Him. Encourage students that the way forward is not mainly to try harder to decide well, but to cultivate delight in God, from which better wants and better decisions flow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating actual delight rather than professed delight
- Diagnosing delight by daydreams, anxieties, and reactions
- Functional delight in a gift rather than the Giver
- Decisions bending toward whatever the heart most delights in

Discussion Prompts

- When you get what you want, what makes you feel life is good? That often reveals your delight.
- Where does your delight actually rest right now, honestly?
- How would your decisions change if your deepest delight were truly in God?

Question 3

Student Question:

The psalm promises, “he will give you the desires of your heart” (v. 4). What does this promise actually mean, and what does it not mean? How is it different from believing that God will simply grant whatever we happen to want?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This verse is frequently misquoted, so handle it with care. Lifted out of its setting, “he will give you the desires of your heart” becomes a blank check: delight in God a little, and He will hand over whatever you crave. That reading turns God into a means to our ends and makes our unexamined wants the goal. But the promise is tethered to its condition, delighting in the Lord, and that condition changes everything.

Explain the two ways the promise rightly works, both flowing from delight. First, when we delight in the Lord, He reshapes our desires, so that the desires He then satisfies are themselves the godly longings He has planted in us. Second, the deepest desire of a heart that truly delights in God is God Himself, and that desire He always grants. So the promise is not that God indulges our every appetite, but that a heart delighting in Him will be given the God-shaped desires of a God-delighting heart, supremely God Himself.

Show why this is better than the blank-check reading. A God who simply granted our every craving would be a disaster for us, since we often want what would harm us. A God who first reshapes our wants and then satisfies them is far kinder. He does not merely give us what we want; He teaches us to want what is good, and then gives us that. The believer is not promised the gratification of an unexamined heart, but the deep satisfaction of a sanctified one.

Apply this to decision making directly. This means a strong desire is not, by itself, a divine endorsement. The promise does not say that whatever we want most is therefore God’s will. It says that as we delight in God, our wants are being reshaped to align with His. So desire becomes a more trustworthy guide precisely to the degree that the heart behind it has learned to delight in the Lord, and not before.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A common misreading of Psalm 37:4 as a blank check for our cravings
- The promise tethered to its condition: delighting in the Lord
- God reshaping our desires, and granting supremely the desire for Himself
- A God who teaches us to want what is good as kinder than one who indulges every appetite
- Strong desire as no automatic divine endorsement of a choice

Discussion Prompts

- How is the real promise of verse 4 different from ‘God gives me whatever I want’?
- Why would it actually be unkind for God to grant our every craving?
- How does delight make a desire more trustworthy as a guide?

Question 4

Student Question:

Have you ever assumed that because you wanted something strongly, it must be God's will for you? Where might you be doing that right now? How could you tell whether that desire has been sanctified or is simply an unexamined appetite?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question targets a very common confusion: equating the strength of a desire with the will of God. Strong wanting feels like conviction, and conviction can feel like guidance, so we slide easily from "I want this badly" to "God must want this for me." The teacher should help students notice this move in themselves, especially around the desires they feel most intensely.

Offer practical tests to distinguish a sanctified desire from an unexamined appetite. Has this desire been submitted to Scripture, or does it strain against it? Has it passed the motive question, or is it driven by pride, fear, or covetousness? Does its fulfillment serve others and glorify God, or chiefly gratify me? Have I delighted in the Lord enough for Him to shape it, or am I simply baptizing a craving I never examined? A desire that survives these tests is very different from one that has never faced them.

Then move toward humility and patience. The honest answer is sometimes that we cannot yet tell, and that is alright; a good desire will bear examination and even waiting. Encourage students to take one strongly felt desire and run it through the earlier questions of this study rather than treating its intensity as proof. Sanctified desire welcomes scrutiny; unexamined appetite resents it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Equating the strength of a desire with the will of God
- Sliding from 'I want this badly' to 'God must want this for me'
- Tests of a sanctified desire: Scripture, motive, impact, and delight in the Lord
- A good desire welcomes examination and even waiting

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to treat a strong desire as proof of God's will?
- Which test of a desire is most clarifying for the longing you feel most intensely?
- How does a sanctified desire respond to scrutiny differently than a raw appetite?

Question 5

Student Question:

The psalmist says, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act" (v. 5). What does it mean to commit your way to the Lord in a decision? How does trusting God to act free us from the pressure of forcing our own desires to come true?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unpack the rich image in “commit your way.” The word pictures rolling a heavy burden off our own shoulders and onto the Lord, entrusting the whole course of our lives, our plans, our desires, our decisions, to Him. To commit our way is consciously to hand a matter over to God: not to stop acting wisely, but to stop carrying the outcome as though it depended on us alone.

Show the promise attached: “and he will act.” The committing is ours; the acting is God’s. This is the same balance the study has taught throughout. We make real, responsible decisions, and we entrust the results to the God who governs them. The believer who has committed his way is freed from the exhausting illusion that he must engineer every outcome by the force of his own effort and desire.

Connect this directly to desire, the theme of the lesson. Unsundered desire is a tyrant; it drives us to seize, manipulate, and force our wants into reality, and it makes us anxious and controlling when they are delayed. A desire committed to the Lord is different. We can hold it sincerely, pursue it wisely, and still leave it open-handed before God, trusting Him to act, to grant it, to deny it, or to reshape it, as He sees best. That is the freedom this verse offers.

Make it concrete. Committing a desire to the Lord might mean a specific prayer of surrender, a deliberate refusal to manipulate circumstances or people to get what we want, and a settled willingness to accept God’s answer. Encourage students that this surrender is not the death of desire but its liberation, releasing them from the white-knuckled grip that turns even good longings into idols.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Committing our way as rolling the burden of life onto the Lord
- The balance: we commit, God acts; responsible decisions, entrusted outcomes
- Unsundered desire as a tyrant that drives us to seize and manipulate
- A committed desire held sincerely yet open-handed before God
- Surrender as the liberation of desire, not its death

Discussion Prompts

- What does it feel like to roll a burden off your shoulders onto the Lord?
- How does an unsundered desire drive us to manipulate and control?
- What desire do you need to commit to God, trusting Him to act?

Question 6

Student Question:

What is one decision or desire you need to genuinely commit and release to the Lord, trusting Him to act rather than seizing it by your own effort? What makes that hard to let go of?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks for a specific act of surrender. It is easy to affirm in general that we should commit our way to the Lord; it is harder to name the one desire we have been gripping too tightly and actually open our hand. The teacher should give students a quiet moment to identify it, because the honest answer often surfaces only when we slow down.

Help students notice what makes surrender hard, since that resistance is revealing. Usually we cannot release a desire because we fear that if we do not control it, we will lose it, or because the desire has quietly become the thing we are trusting in for happiness or security. Naming that fear exposes the place where a good desire may have crept onto the throne, and where trust in God is being tested.

Then call for the concrete step. Committing and releasing a desire is not passive resignation; it is an active entrusting of the matter to a faithful God while continuing to act wisely. Encourage each student to make one such surrender this week, perhaps in a specific prayer, naming the desire, opening the hand, and asking God to act according to His good will rather than ours.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from general agreement to a specific act of surrender
- The resistance to releasing a desire as revealing where our trust rests
- Fear of loss and misplaced security behind our tight grip
- Active entrusting, not passive resignation

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one desire you have been gripping too tightly?
- What makes it so hard to let go of, and what does that reveal?
- What would it look like to commit and release it to God this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The psalm counsels, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him" (v. 7). How does stillness and patient waiting guard us from letting our desires stampede us into hasty decisions? Why is desire safest in a heart that has first learned to be still before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the counsel to be still and wait patiently, which runs against every instinct of a desire-driven heart. Strong desire is restless; it wants its object now, and it experiences waiting as agony. The psalmist prescribes the opposite posture: stillness before the Lord and patient waiting for Him. This is not laziness or passivity but a settled, trusting quiet that refuses to be stampeded.

Show how stillness guards our decisions. Many poor choices are simply hasty ones, desires acted on before they have been examined, committed, or tested by time. A heart that has learned to be still creates space between the impulse and the action, and in that space wisdom can do its work. Waiting often reveals what haste conceals: whether a desire is sanctified or merely strong, whether circumstances confirm or caution, whether the longing endures or fades.

Explain why desire is safest in a still heart. An anxious, restless heart trusts its desires least wisely, because it cannot bear to wait long enough to weigh them. A heart that is still before God, by contrast, holds its desires calmly, neither suppressing them nor being driven by them. Stillness is the soil in which sanctified desire can be discerned, because only a quiet heart can tell the difference between the voice of wisdom and the clamor of appetite.

Apply this pastorally. Encourage students that patient waiting is not God ignoring them or withholding good; it is often the very means by which He purifies and clarifies their desires. The believer who has learned to be still before the Lord can carry even intense longings without being ruled by them, and can wait for God to act in His time rather than seizing his desire in his own.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stillness and patient waiting against the restlessness of strong desire
- Haste as the root of many poor decisions
- Creating space between impulse and action so wisdom can work
- Waiting as a means by which God purifies and clarifies desire
- A still heart able to carry intense longings without being ruled by them

Discussion Prompts

- How has haste led you into a decision you later questioned?
- What does being still before the Lord look like in practice for you?
- Why can a quiet heart weigh its desires more wisely than a restless one?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where does impatience push you to force a desire rather than wait on the Lord? What would patient stillness look like in that specific area of your life right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to find the specific place where impatience rules them. Impatience is desire that refuses to wait, and it usually has a favorite arena: a relationship we are trying to rush, a goal we are forcing, a season we are unwilling to endure, a prayer we are tired of waiting on. Naming that arena is the first step toward bringing stillness to it.

Help students see what forced desire costs. When we will not wait, we tend to manipulate circumstances, pressure people, settle for less than God's best, or run ahead of His timing into trouble. The patriarchs offer sober examples of desires seized impatiently rather than waited for in trust. Impatience rarely produces good fruit, because it acts before wisdom and providence have done their work.

Then call for a concrete practice of stillness. What would patient waiting look like in this exact area this week? Perhaps a decision deliberately delayed, a manipulation refused, a prayer renewed instead of abandoned, a season accepted rather than forced. Encourage students that learning to wait is not wasted time; it is the very discipline through which desire is sanctified and decisions are kept from haste.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Impatience as desire that refuses to wait
- The favorite arenas of impatience: relationships, goals, seasons, unanswered prayers
- The costs of forced desire: manipulation, pressure, settling, running ahead of God
- Concrete practices of stillness in a specific area

Discussion Prompts

- In what area does impatience most push you to force your desire?
- What has forcing a desire cost you in the past?
- What would patient stillness look like there this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Scripture teaches both that God reshapes the desires of those who delight in Him (Ps. 37:4) and that He works in us to fulfill "every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power" (2 Thess. 1:11; see Phil. 2:13). In light of this, what is the proper place of our desires in making a decision? How do we honor genuine, God-shaped desire while refusing to make "What do I feel like doing?" our first and ruling question?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it brings the whole question of desire to its resolution, so teach it with care and balance. Two truths must be held together. Psalm 37:4 promises that those who delight in the Lord will have their desires shaped and granted by Him, and 2 Thessalonians 1:11, with Philippians 2:13, shows God actively at work within His people, fulfilling every good resolve and working in them to will and to do for His good pleasure. Put together, these texts teach that the desires of a believer who delights in God are not merely human appetites; they are, increasingly, the product of God's own work in the heart.

Draw the doctrinal conclusion about the place of desire. Because God reshapes and even authors the longings of those who walk with Him, sanctified desire is a legitimate factor in guidance. The believer who has tested a decision by Scripture, motive, and impact, and who delights in the Lord, may rightly take his own settled, God-shaped desire as part of how he is led. This is not unspiritual. It is one of the gracious ways God moves His maturing children, as He moved Nehemiah to rebuild and Paul to preach. To despise all desire as untrustworthy is to ignore the work God Himself is doing in our wills.

Now guard the crucial balance the question raises. Honoring sanctified desire is not the same as enthroning raw appetite. The reason the study refuses to begin with “What do I feel like doing?” is that desire placed first will simply commandeer every other consideration. Desire is a late and legitimate question, not the first and ruling one. It is safe to consult only after the heart has delighted in God and the choice has passed the earlier tests. The order protects us: delight in God, submit the decision to His Word, examine the motive, weigh the impact, and then, in that settled place, ask honestly what we desire.

Distinguish sanctified desire from the sign-seeking this study opposes, because they can be confused. A God-shaped desire is not a mystical signal to be decoded, a feeling treated as a coded message revealing a hidden blueprint. It is simply the renewed inclination of a heart that loves God, weighed soberly alongside Scripture, wisdom, and counsel. We are not reading our feelings as secret revelations; we are recognizing that a heart delighting in God comes to want good things, and that such wants may rightly help move us.

Bring the balance to rest. The mature believer neither distrusts every desire as carnal nor trusts every desire as divine. He delights in the Lord, lets God reshape his wants, tests his decisions in their proper order, and then welcomes his sanctified longings as a real and gracious help, holding them under the lordship of Christ rather than over it. That is the redeemed place of desire: not on the throne, and not in exile, but seated, sanctified, in honored service to the will of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God reshaping (Ps. 37:4) and authoring (2 Thess. 1:11; Phil. 2:13) the desires of those who delight in Him
- Sanctified desire as a legitimate factor in guidance for a maturing believer
- Examples of God-shaped desire moving His people (Nehemiah, Paul)
- Desire as a late and legitimate question, never the first and ruling one
- The protective order: delight, Scripture, motive, impact, then desire
- Distinguishing sanctified desire from sign-seeking and feeling-as-revelation
- Desire neither enthroned nor exiled, but sanctified and held under Christ’s lordship

Discussion Prompts

- How can a God-shaped desire rightly help guide a mature believer’s decision?

- Why is it dangerous to make ‘What do I feel like doing?’ the first question?
- What is the difference between trusting a sanctified desire and treating a feeling as a coded sign?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Psalm 37:3–7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. The psalmist teaches us to delight, commit, trust, and be still, and promises a God who shapes and fulfills our desires for good. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth here that you most need to carry into your next decision?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the lesson and asks each student to name one concrete way Christ is forming them through it. Resist generalities. “I want to trust God with my desires” is a fine start, but press toward the specific: which desire, surrendered how, beginning when. The psalm’s path of delight, commitment, trust, and stillness is meant to land in a real longing this week.

Walk back through the movement of the passage as a prompt. The psalmist calls us to trust and do good, to delight in the Lord so He may reshape our desires, to commit our way to Him as He acts, and to be still and wait patiently, while 2 Thessalonians assures us that God Himself is at work to fulfill every good resolve. Invite students to ask which of these their heart most needs before the next decision they face.

Close by recentring on transformation. The aim of this lesson is not to give students permission to follow every feeling, nor to make them suspicious of all desire, but to form hearts that delight in God so deeply that their wants become trustworthy. Encourage each one to carry a single truth into the week, returning to it in prayer, so that the Lord may reshape their desires for good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at forming hearts that delight in God, not merely managing desires
- The path of delight, commitment, trust, and stillness applied to a real longing
- God at work to shape and fulfill our desires for good
- Carrying one concrete truth into a specific choice this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from these verses does your heart most need before your next decision?
- Which desire could you bring under the path of delight, commit, trust, and be still this week?

- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one specific step?