

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

Lesson 6: Am I Capable? Gifts, Ability, and Stewardship

Romans 12:3-8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson takes up the question of capability: has God equipped me for this? Doctrinally, what is at stake is a biblical understanding of grace-gifts, the body of Christ, and stewardship. Romans 12:3-8 calls every believer to sober self-judgment according to the measure of faith God has assigned, sets each member within the one body, and describes a diversity of gifts given by grace and meant to be used. The teacher should help students see that an honest assessment of how God has gifted them is a legitimate and important factor in decisions about service and responsibility, and that we are stewards who will give an account for how we use what God has entrusted to us.

Two balances must be guarded. First, Paul frames sober judgment between two errors: thinking too highly of ourselves, which grabs at roles God has not equipped us for, and the false humility that buries a real gift in the ground. Both are forms of pride, and the teacher should expose both. Second, capability is a genuine factor but not the only one, and not always the decisive one; God has often called people who felt utterly incapable, like Moses at the bush, and equipped them as they obeyed. So "I am not able" can be wisdom, and it can be a coward's excuse. The teacher must help students hold the question honestly without turning it into either pride or evasion.

There is also a doctrinal boundary to honor with clarity and grace. The gifts in view for the church today are the abilities and opportunities God supplies for service, teaching, giving, leading, and mercy, exercised within the order He has appointed for His church. The miraculous, revelatory sign-gifts of the first century served to confirm and deliver the now-completed word and are not the pattern for guidance or service today. Beyond the doctrine, the formational aim is to free students from the crushing pressure to be everything and the cowardice that hides real gifts, and to send them home as glad, faithful stewards serving in the place God has actually fitted them to fill.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, "think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" (v. 3). What is "sober judgment" about ourselves, and why does Paul frame it between thinking too highly and the false humility of thinking too little? How does honest self-assessment help us make wise decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the surprising place Paul starts. Before he describes a single gift, he warns against pride: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. The foundation of using our gifts well is an honest, humble estimate of ourselves. "Sober judgment" translates a word picture of clear-mindedness, the opposite of being intoxicated. A sober assessment sees ourselves as we actually are, neither through the flattering haze of pride nor through the distorting fog of false modesty.

Define the two errors Paul stands between, because both masquerade as something else. Thinking too highly of ourselves often hides behind ambition or confidence; it leads us to reach for roles and responsibilities God has not equipped us to carry, and to resent the limits He has given. Thinking too little of ourselves often hides behind humility, but a false humility that buries a real gift is not modesty at all; it is a refusal to steward what God has given. Sober judgment names both honestly and refuses both.

Note the gracious phrase "the measure of faith that God has assigned." Our gifts and capacities are not self-generated; they are assigned by God in differing measures. This guards sober judgment from becoming either boasting or self-loathing. We did not earn our strengths, so we cannot boast in them; God assigned our particular measure, so we need not despise it. Honest self-assessment, then, is simply seeing clearly what God has handed us, and receiving it with gratitude.

Show how this serves wise decisions. A believer who knows himself soberly decides better. He does not say yes to roles his gifting cannot sustain, nor no to service his gifts are made for. He can match his commitments to his actual God-given capacity, rather than over-committing out of pride or under-serving out of fear. Self-knowledge, held humbly before God, is a quiet but powerful tool for deciding well.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sober judgment as clear-eyed honesty about ourselves, free of pride and false modesty
- Two errors: thinking too highly (grabbing) and thinking too little (burying)
- Gifts as assigned by God in differing measures, guarding against both boasting and self-loathing
- Self-knowledge before God as a tool for matching commitments to capacity
- Humility as the foundation for using gifts well (Romans 12:3)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between sober self-judgment and either pride or false humility?
- Why does Paul begin a passage about gifts with a warning against thinking too highly of ourselves?
- How would honest self-assessment change a commitment you are weighing?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about which direction you tend to lean: do you usually overestimate your abilities, or underestimate them and shrink back? Where has that tendency shaped a recent decision, and what would more sober judgment have looked like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question asks students to identify their characteristic tilt. Most of us lean predictably in one direction. Some habitually overestimate, taking on more than they can carry, speaking with confidence beyond their competence, reluctant to admit limits. Others habitually underestimate, shrinking back, assuming they have little to offer, declining to serve where they actually could. Knowing our tilt helps us correct for it.

Help students see how the tilt shapes decisions. The overestimator says yes too quickly and spreads himself thin, sometimes occupying a place better filled by someone gifted for it. The underestimator says no too quickly and leaves gifts unused, depriving the body of what God meant to supply through him. Both miss the sober middle, and both can dress their error in spiritual language, ambition as zeal, timidity as humility.

Then call for honest correction. The overestimator grows by listening to others, accepting limits, and releasing roles he is not fitted for. The underestimator grows by trusting that God has truly gifted him and stepping into service he has avoided. Encourage each student to name a recent decision shaped by their tilt and to consider what sober judgment, corrected in their weak direction, would have counseled.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying our characteristic tilt: overestimating or underestimating
- Overestimation leading to overcommitment and crowding others out
- Underestimation leading to buried gifts and an under-served body
- Both errors dressed in spiritual language
- Correcting toward the sober middle in our weak direction

Discussion Prompts

- Which way do you lean: taking on too much, or shrinking back?
- Where has that tendency shaped a recent decision?
- What would sober judgment, corrected in your weak direction, have counseled?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul reminds us that “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (vv. 4–5). How does seeing ourselves as members of a body, rather than as isolated individuals, change the way we think about our gifts and our decisions to serve?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center students on Paul’s central image: the church as one body with many members. This is not a decorative metaphor but a profound reality about how God has arranged His people. No member is the whole body, and no member is complete in isolation. Each has a particular function, and each needs the others. Our gifts make sense only within this shared life; they were given for the body, not for solitary self-fulfillment.

Show how the body image reframes self-assessment. The question is no longer simply “What can I achieve?” but “What part am I meant to play in this body?” A hand does not resent being a hand because it is not an eye, nor does it try to do the eye’s work. There is deep relief in this. We are not each responsible to be everything; we are responsible to be our part, faithfully, in concert with others who are theirs.

Draw out the implications for decisions to serve. Because we are members of one another, our choices about service are not purely private. When I decline to use my gift, the body lacks something; when I grab a role I am not fitted for, I may crowd out the member God meant to fill it. Wise decisions about service consider the whole body, not just my own preferences, looking to where my gifts genuinely fit and where the body actually needs me.

Anchor this in the high view of the local congregation that runs through the New Testament. The body of Christ takes concrete shape in the local church, where real members with real gifts serve one another under Christ the head. Decisions about how to serve are best made not as lone individuals weighing abstract options, but as members embedded in a particular congregation, in conversation with the others to whom we belong.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as one body with many interdependent members (Romans 12:4–5)
- Gifts given for the body, not for solitary self-fulfillment
- Reframing self-assessment as ‘What part am I meant to play?’
- Decisions to serve as communal, not purely private
- The body taking concrete shape in the local congregation

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing yourself as part of a body change the way you think about your gifts?
- Where might declining to use your gift leave the body lacking?
- How should belonging to a particular congregation shape your decisions to serve?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where are you tempted either to try to be a part of the body you are not, or to refuse to be the part you actually are? What would it look like to embrace your real place in the body this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the body image into specifics. Paul's picture exposes two temptations: envying and imitating a part we are not, and refusing to be the part we are. The first leaves us frustrated, straining after someone else's gifting; the second leaves the body poorer and us disobedient. The teacher should help students find which temptation is theirs.

Help students name it concretely. Trying to be a part we are not might look like envying another's visible gift, chasing a role for its prestige, or feeling like a failure for not having someone else's abilities. Refusing to be the part we are might look like sitting out because our gift seems unimpressive, comparing ourselves unfavorably and withdrawing, or quietly assuming the body does not really need what we have to offer.

Then move toward glad acceptance. Embracing our real place means receiving the part God gave us with contentment and putting it to work, whether it is visible or hidden, celebrated or quiet. The eye and the hand are equally necessary. Encourage each student to take one concrete step this week to serve as the part they actually are, rather than mourning the part they are not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Two temptations: imitating a part we are not, and refusing the part we are
- Envy and prestige-seeking versus withdrawal and false unworthiness
- The equal necessity of visible and hidden gifts
- Glad acceptance of our real place as the path of obedience and peace

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more tempted to envy another's gift or to bury your own?
- What part of the body are you actually fitted to be?
- What is one step to embrace that real place this week?

Question 5**Student Question:**

Paul says we have "gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (v. 6). What does it mean that our gifts are given by grace rather than earned, and how should that truth keep us from both pride in our strengths and shame over our limits?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus students on the word grace standing behind every gift. The Greek term for gifts here is built on the word for grace; they are grace-gifts, charismata, freely given rather than earned. Whatever ability we have to serve, teach, lead, encourage, or show mercy, we received it. We did not generate it, deserve it, or achieve it. This single truth reorders our whole relationship to our strengths and our limits.

Show how grace dismantles pride. If our gifts are given, boasting becomes absurd. Paul asks elsewhere, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). The person who excels at something has simply been handed more in that area by God’s grace; there is no ground for superiority, only for gratitude and responsibility. Pride in a gift forgets that it was a gift.

Show equally how grace heals shame over our limits. If gifts are distributed by grace in differing measures, then lacking a particular ability is not a personal failure or a mark of lesser worth. The member with a quieter or less visible gift has been graced differently, not graced less. This frees people from the corrosive comparison that breeds either envy or self-contempt. We are each exactly as gifted as God, in His wisdom and grace, chose to make us.

Bring it to bear on decisions and service. Because gifts are grace, we serve out of gratitude rather than to prove our worth, and we accept our limits without shame. We can say honestly, “God has gifted me here,” without arrogance, and “God has not gifted me there,” without embarrassment. That clear-eyed, grateful realism is exactly what wise decisions about service require.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gifts as grace-gifts (charismata), received rather than earned (Romans 12:6)
- Grace dismantling pride: nothing to boast in that was given (1 Corinthians 4:7)
- Grace healing shame: different gifting is not lesser worth
- Freedom from comparison, envy, and self-contempt
- Serving from gratitude rather than to prove our worth

Discussion Prompts

- If your gifts are given, what happens to your grounds for boasting?
- How does grace free you from shame over the abilities you lack?
- How does serving from gratitude differ from serving to prove yourself?

Question 6

Student Question:

Name one gift or ability you believe God has genuinely given you. Are you actively using it in His service, or have you been burying it? What is one concrete way you could put it to work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to do something many find surprisingly difficult: name a gift God has given them. False humility often makes people reluctant to claim any gift at all, but Scripture treats our gifts as realities to be recognized and used, not denied. The teacher may need to encourage honest, grateful acknowledgment, reminding students that naming a grace-gift is not pride but stewardship.

Help students move from naming to inventory. Once a gift is named, the next question is honest: am I using this, or burying it? The parable of the talents warns sharply against the servant who hid what he was given out of fear (Matthew 25:24–30). Many believers have real gifts lying dormant, unused not from malice but from neglect, busyness, or timidity. Bringing the buried gift into the light is the first step toward stewarding it.

Then call for one concrete action. Stewardship becomes real only when a gift is put to work. Encourage each student to identify a single, specific way to use their named gift in service this week or this season, whether in the congregation, the home, or the community. The aim is not vague aspiration but an actual deployment of what God has graciously supplied.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming a grace-gift as stewardship, not pride
- Honest inventory: using the gift or burying it
- The warning against hiding what God gave (Matthew 25:24–30)
- Gifts left dormant through neglect, busyness, or timidity
- Concrete deployment of a gift in actual service

Discussion Prompts

- What is one gift you believe God has genuinely given you?
- Are you using it or burying it, honestly?
- What is one concrete way to put it to work this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul lists differing gifts, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, showing mercy (vv. 6–8), and tells each to use the gift he has. How should an honest sense of how God has gifted you factor into your decisions about where to serve? When is “this is not where I am gifted” a wise word, and when might it be an excuse?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk students through Paul’s list, noting its variety. Some gifts are visible and verbal (teaching, exhorting), others quiet and practical (serving, giving, mercy), and others directive (leading).

Paul's repeated instruction is simple: use the gift you have, in proportion to the grace given. He does not tell everyone to do everything; he tells each to lean into his actual gifting. This is a strong biblical warrant for letting real gifting shape our decisions about where to serve.

Affirm that capability is a legitimate factor. It is wise, not unspiritual, to serve where God has gifted you and to direct others toward needs your gifts fit. A person gifted in mercy may rightly pour himself into care for the hurting rather than forcing himself into administration he is poor at; a gifted teacher may rightly give himself to teaching rather than scattering his energy. Matching service to gifting usually produces more fruit and more joy, and it honors the way God designed the body.

Now sharpen the harder edge of the question: when is "this is not my gift" wisdom, and when is it an excuse? It is wisdom when it directs us toward our true place and away from roles we would fill poorly while a better-fitted member is available. It becomes an excuse when it is used to dodge plain duties that belong to every Christian, or to avoid stretching, serving in a pinch, or growing into something God is calling us toward. Not every act of service requires a special gift; some things, like showing up, giving, encouraging, and meeting obvious needs, are simply the work of any disciple.

Help students discern between the two. A telling question is whether "this is not my gift" is moving us toward faithful service in our actual place, or away from obedience and sacrifice altogether. The gifted are still called to love, and love sometimes serves outside its comfort zone. Gifting should guide our decisions about where to invest most, without becoming a wall behind which we hide from the ordinary callings that belong to all.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The variety of gifts: verbal, practical, and directive (Romans 12:6–8)
- Capability as a legitimate factor in deciding where to serve
- Matching service to gifting for greater fruit and joy
- 'Not my gift' as wisdom when it directs us to our true place
- 'Not my gift' as an excuse when it dodges duties common to every disciple
- Love sometimes serving outside its comfort zone

Discussion Prompts

- How should your actual gifting shape where you choose to serve?
- When have you rightly said, 'this is not my gift,' and when have you used it to dodge duty?
- Which callings belong to every disciple, gifted in that area or not?

Question 8

Student Question:

Think of a decision where the question of capability really matters, a role, a ministry, a commitment. Have you assessed honestly whether God has equipped you for it, or have you been deciding on other grounds entirely? What does faithful stewardship of your gifts call for here?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question brings the capability lens to a real, present decision. Many of us decide about roles and commitments on grounds that have little to do with honest gifting, the prestige of a position, the pressure of others' expectations, guilt, flattery, or simply the fact that we were asked. The teacher should invite students to lay a current decision openly before the question of capability.

Help students apply sober judgment to the specific case. Has God given me what this role genuinely requires? If I am gifted for it, am I shrinking back out of fear and need to step forward? If I am not gifted for it, am I reaching for it out of pride or pressure, and should I make room for someone better fitted? The point is to let real gifting, honestly assessed before God, inform the decision rather than leaving capability out of the calculation entirely.

Then connect it to stewardship and balance. Faithful stewardship sometimes means accepting a responsibility our gifts fit, even at personal cost, and sometimes means declining one our gifts do not, even when it flatters us to be asked. And occasionally it means stepping, like Moses, into something that feels beyond us because God is plainly calling, trusting Him to supply what we lack. Encourage students to decide their case as stewards who will answer for how they used what God entrusted to them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Decisions about roles often made on grounds unrelated to honest gifting
- Applying sober judgment to a specific, present decision
- Stewardship that accepts fitting roles at cost and declines unfitting ones despite flattery
- Occasional calling beyond our comfort, with God supplying what we lack
- Deciding as stewards accountable for what God entrusted

Discussion Prompts

- On what grounds have you really been deciding about this role or commitment?
- What would honest assessment of your gifting say about it?
- What does faithful stewardship call for in this specific case?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul roots everything in grace-given gifts exercised within the one body, each member using what God supplies (vv. 6–8). What does it mean to be a faithful steward of the gifts and

opportunities God has entrusted to you, using them within the order and bounds He has appointed for His church? How does coming accountability for our stewardship shape the way we make decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, gathering the threads of grace, the body, and stewardship, so teach it with care. Paul's whole vision is of grace-given gifts, exercised by interdependent members, within the ordered life of the one body. Three truths come together. Our gifts are grace; our place is in the body; and our use of both is a stewardship for which we are accountable. The believer is not an owner free to do as he pleases with his abilities, but a steward entrusted with gifts to be used faithfully for the Master who gave them.

Develop the meaning of stewardship, because it reframes decision making at the deepest level. A steward manages what belongs to another and will give an account. Peter says it plainly: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10). This means our decisions about time, ability, money, and opportunity are not finally about our preferences but about faithfulness with what God has lent us. The coming day of accounting (Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 14:12) is not meant to terrify the faithful but to focus them, lending weight and seriousness to how we invest our lives.

Address the appointed order and bounds with clarity and grace, since Paul situates gifts within God's arrangement of the body, not in a free-for-all. Gifts are to be exercised in their proper place, under the headship of Christ and within the structure He has established for His church, with its elders, its teaching, and its ordered life. Among these bounds, the New Testament assigns distinct roles to men and women in the assembly, so that the public teaching and oversight of the gathered church, where men and women are taught together, are entrusted to qualified men. This is not a statement about the worth or the giftedness of women, which Scripture honors highly, but about the order God has appointed; gifts are stewarded faithfully when they are exercised within, not against, that God-given arrangement.

Address the boundary regarding the nature of these gifts as well, briefly and clearly. The gifts in view for the church's ongoing life are the abilities and opportunities God supplies for service, teaching, generosity, leadership, and mercy. The miraculous, revelatory sign-gifts of the apostolic age served to confirm and deliver the now-complete word of God and are not the present means by which He guides or equips His people. Faithful stewardship today is the diligent, ordinary use of God-given abilities, not the expectation of new revelations or sign-gifts.

Bring it home to the way we decide. To live as a steward is to make decisions with a quiet, steadying awareness that our gifts and opportunities are entrusted, not owned, and that we will answer for them. This does not produce anxiety but seriousness and freedom together: freedom from having to be everything, since we are responsible only for what we were given, and seriousness about using faithfully exactly what we were given, in our place, within God's order, for His glory. That is the steward's way of deciding, and it is the goal of this lesson.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace-given gifts, exercised by interdependent members, within the one ordered body (Romans 12:6–8)
- The believer as steward, not owner, accountable for gifts entrusted (1 Peter 4:10)
- The coming day of accounting focusing rather than terrifying the faithful (Matthew 25:14–30; Romans 14:12)
- Gifts exercised within God’s appointed order for the church, under the headship of Christ
- Distinct, God-appointed roles for men and women in the public teaching and oversight of the assembly
- The miraculous sign-gifts as serving to confirm the now-complete word, not the present means of equipping
- Stewardship producing freedom from having to be everything and seriousness about faithful use

Discussion Prompts

- What changes when you see your gifts and opportunities as entrusted rather than owned?
- How does living within God’s appointed order for the church free us rather than confine us?
- How does a coming day of accounting steady, rather than frighten, the faithful steward?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Romans 12:3–8. Paul calls us to sober self-judgment, a humble place in the body, and faithful use of grace-given gifts. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. 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 serve more” is a fine start, but press toward the specific: serve how, using which gift, beginning when. Paul’s call to sober, faithful stewardship is meant to land in a real decision about service this week.

Walk back through the movement of the passage as a prompt. Paul called us to think with sober judgment, to take our place as members of one body, to receive our gifts as grace, and to use them faithfully in their proper place. Invite students to ask which of these truths their heart most needs, whether the correction of pride or of false humility, the comfort of belonging, or the call to put a buried gift to work.

Close by recentering on transformation. The aim of this lesson is not merely to help students inventory their abilities, but to form humble, glad, faithful stewards who serve where God has

fitted them, within His order, for His glory. Encourage each one to carry a single truth into the week, returning to it in prayer, so the word does its forming work in the way they steward their lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at forming faithful stewards, not merely cataloguing abilities
- The correction of both pride and false humility
- The comfort of belonging and the call to use buried gifts
- Carrying one concrete truth into a specific decision about service

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage does your heart most need before your next decision?
- Where is a decision about service waiting to be shaped by sober judgment and faithful stewardship?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one specific step?