

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

Lesson 8: What Do Godly Counselors Say? Safety in Counsel

Proverbs 15:22 (with Proverbs 11:14)

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson takes up the question of counsel: what do godly counselors say? Doctrinally, it draws on the wisdom literature's strong and repeated insistence that we are made to need one another. Proverbs 15:22 and 11:14 present counsel not as an optional refinement but as the difference between plans that fail and plans that succeed, between a people that falls and a people kept safe. The teacher should help students see that seeking wise counsel is a basic discipline of godly decision making, rooted in the humbling truth that every one of us has blind spots, distorted desires, and a remarkable capacity for self-justification that others can see through when we cannot.

The lesson must also be discerning, because Scripture does not commend counsel indiscriminately. It distinguishes the counsel of the wise from the counsel of the foolish and wicked (Psalm 1:1), and it warns sharply against the human tendency to gather agreeable voices, the counsel-shopping of itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3) and the folly of Rehoboam, who traded seasoned wisdom for flattery (1 Kings 12). The teacher should hold two things together: the safety found in an abundance of godly counselors, and the danger of mistaking a chorus of agreement for genuine wisdom. Godly counsel is sought from those who fear the Lord, know His Word, and love us enough to tell us the truth.

There is also a balance of responsibility to teach. Counsel is God's provision within the body of Christ, and the church, with its elders and mature believers, is a community of wisdom God has given us (Hebrews 13:17). Yet seeking counsel does not transfer the decision, or the responsibility for it, to others. The believer still decides and still answers to God. Beyond the doctrine, the formational aim is to cultivate humble, teachable people who refuse the proud isolation of deciding everything alone and the lazy abdication of letting a committee decide for them, and who instead weave wise counsel into decisions for which they take full, prayerful responsibility.

Question 1

Student Question:

Solomon writes, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" (Prov. 15:22). Why does God design us in such a way that we genuinely need the counsel of others? What does it say about wisdom that even good plans tend to fail without it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the bluntness of the proverb. Solomon does not say counsel is helpful or advisable; he says that without it plans fail. The default trajectory of a plan made in isolation is failure, and the addition of many advisers is what turns failure into success. This is strong language, and it reflects a settled conviction running through the wisdom literature: human beings are not designed to navigate life as self-sufficient islands.

Explain why God made us this way. Our need for counsel is built into our creation as limited, interdependent creatures. No one of us has a complete view of any situation. We each see from one angle, shaped by our own experiences, fears, and desires. God has distributed wisdom across a community precisely so that we would seek it from one another, and our dependence on counsel is not a defect to be overcome but a design to be embraced. It keeps us humble and bound to others.

Show what this reveals about the nature of wisdom itself. Wisdom is not merely individual cleverness; it is, in large part, the humility to draw on wisdom beyond our own. The proverb implies that even a fundamentally good plan is vulnerable when it is shaped by a single mind, because that mind, however capable, has limits and blind spots. To gather counsel is not to confess that we are foolish but to act wisely about the limits every one of us has.

Bring it to the practice of decision making. If even good plans tend to fail without counsel, then seeking counsel ought to be a normal, expected part of how we decide important things, not a rare measure reserved for crises. Encourage students to treat counsel as a built-in step in their decision making, the way Scripture treats it: not as a sign of weakness but as one of the ordinary disciplines of a wise and humble life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bluntness of the proverb: without counsel, plans fail (Proverbs 15:22)
- Our need for counsel rooted in our creation as limited, interdependent creatures
- Wisdom as the humility to draw on wisdom beyond our own
- Even good plans vulnerable when shaped by a single mind
- Counsel as a normal, built-in step in wise decision making

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God design us to need one another's counsel?
- What does it say about wisdom that even good plans fail without it?
- What would it look like to make counsel a normal step rather than a last resort?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about your own pattern: do you naturally seek counsel before deciding, or do you prefer to decide alone? What is really behind that tendency for you, and where has it helped or hurt you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question asks students to face their actual habit. Some instinctively reach for counsel, sometimes to the point of indecision; many more prefer to decide alone and inform others afterward. The teacher should invite honesty about which pattern is theirs and, more searchingly, about what drives it.

Help students uncover the motives behind isolation, since that is the more common danger. Sometimes we decide alone out of pride, confident we know best and reluctant to expose our reasoning to scrutiny. Sometimes out of fear, afraid that counsel will tell us no, or expose a motive we would rather keep hidden. Sometimes out of a desire for control, unwilling to let anyone complicate the choice we have quietly already made. Naming the real driver is more useful than confessing the habit in general.

Then turn toward growth. For the chronic solo-decider, the path forward is the humility to invite trusted voices in before deciding, not after. For the person who leans on counsel to the point of paralysis, the path is to seek wise input and then take responsibility to decide. Encourage each student to recognize where their pattern has cost them, and to take one deliberate step toward the balance Scripture commends.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Facing one's actual habit: seeking counsel or deciding alone
- Motives behind isolation: pride, fear, and the desire for control
- Naming the real driver rather than confessing the habit in general
- Growth toward humble counsel-seeking that still takes responsibility

Discussion Prompts

- Do you naturally seek counsel, or decide alone and tell people after?
- What is really behind that tendency: pride, fear, control, or something else?
- Where has your pattern helped you, and where has it hurt you?

Question 3

Student Question:

The companion proverb says, "in an abundance of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). What kind of safety does counsel provide? How do other people help protect us from the blind spots, rationalizations, and self-deception we cannot see on our own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the word safety. Solomon frames counsel not merely as a way to make better plans but as a form of protection. An abundance of counselors guards us, like a wall around a city or a railing along a cliff. The image suggests danger: decision making is hazardous terrain, and wise counsel is a safeguard against the ways we can hurt ourselves and others when we walk it alone.

Explain the specific dangers counsel protects against, which is the heart of the question. The greatest threats in our own decision making are usually internal and invisible to us. We have blind spots, areas where we simply cannot see ourselves clearly. We rationalize, constructing reasonable-sounding justifications for what we already want. We deceive ourselves, believing our motives are purer than they are. A wise counselor, standing outside our heads, can see what we cannot, name the rationalization, expose the buried motive, and ask the question we have been avoiding.

Develop why outside eyes are so valuable. We cannot see our own faces without a mirror, and we cannot see our own hearts without help. The very desires that make a decision pressing are the desires most likely to distort our judgment about it. Precisely because we are too close to our own situation, the perspective of someone who loves us, knows us, and is not caught in our particular fog is a genuine safeguard. This is not an insult to our intelligence; the wisest people are often the most aware of their need for it.

Apply this to how we use counsel. Because the safety counsel provides is protection from self-deception, the most valuable counselors are not flatterers who confirm us but honest friends who can challenge us. We should invite them specifically to probe our blind spots: Where am I fooling myself here? What motive might I be hiding? What am I not seeing? The safety of counsel is realized only when we let counselors do the protective work of telling us the truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Counsel framed as safety and protection, not merely improvement (Proverbs 11:14)
- The internal, invisible dangers: blind spots, rationalization, self-deception
- Outside eyes seeing what we cannot see in ourselves
- Our strongest desires as the greatest distorters of our judgment
- Valuing honest challenge over flattering confirmation

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of safety does wise counsel actually provide?
- How have other people seen a blind spot or rationalization you had missed?
- Why are honest, challenging counselors more valuable than agreeable ones?

Question 4

Student Question:

Is there a decision you have been working through mostly in your own head, where you can sense you may be missing something? Whose eyes and honest input do you need on it, and what is keeping you from asking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question moves from principle to a present decision. Most students are carrying at least one matter they have been turning over privately, and the very fact that it keeps circling unresolved is often a sign that it needs other eyes. The teacher should help students name the decision and the specific person whose input would help.

Help students identify the right counselor, not just any willing one. The question asks specifically whose eyes and honest input are needed, which presses them to think about who actually has the wisdom, the godliness, and the love to help on this particular matter. Sometimes we avoid the one person most likely to tell us the truth precisely because we suspect what they will say.

Then surface the resistance, because that is usually where the real issue lies. What is keeping you from asking? Often it is the fear of hearing no, the embarrassment of admitting we are unsure, or the quiet preference to keep the decision uncontested. Naming the obstacle is the first step past it. Encourage each student to commit to bringing one privately-held decision to a godly counselor this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A privately-circling decision as a sign it needs other eyes
- Identifying the right counselor, not merely a willing one
- Avoiding the very person most likely to tell us the truth
- Surfacing and moving past the resistance to asking

Discussion Prompts

- What decision have you been carrying mostly alone?
- Whose honest input do you most need on it, and why that person?
- What is keeping you from asking, and how will you get past it this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Scripture distinguishes between the counsel of the wise and the counsel of the foolish or wicked (see Psalm 1:1). What makes counsel genuinely godly rather than merely worldly? Why does the character and faith of our advisers matter as much as their willingness to give advice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Establish that Scripture never commends counsel indiscriminately. The very first Psalm pronounces blessing on the one who does not walk “in the counsel of the wicked.” Bad counsel is worse than no counsel, because it lends the weight of another voice to a foolish or sinful course. So the question is not merely whether we are seeking advice, but whose advice we are seeking. The source matters enormously.

Define what makes counsel godly. Godly counsel comes from those who fear the Lord, who know and submit to His Word, and whose own lives show the fruit of wisdom. It is counsel anchored in Scripture rather than in mere worldly shrewdness, oriented toward what pleases God rather than only toward what is profitable or comfortable. A godly counselor will not simply ask what we want; he will help us discern what God wants, and he will be willing to point us to Scripture even when it is unwelcome.

Explain why the character and faith of advisers matter so much. Advice always carries the values of the one giving it. A counselor who does not fear God will, however sincerely, counsel from a worldly framework, weighing a decision by success, security, or self-interest rather than by the will of God. Two advisers can be equally intelligent and equally willing to help, yet give opposite counsel because they are reasoning from opposite foundations. We need counselors whose foundation is the fear of the Lord.

Make this practical and discerning. This does not mean we may never learn from anyone outside the faith on matters of their expertise; a skilled but unbelieving doctor or accountant may give sound technical advice. But on the deeper questions of how to live and what God would have us do, we need counselors who share our highest loyalty. Encourage students to be intentional about surrounding themselves with godly voices, so that the counsel shaping their lives is anchored where it should be.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture’s distinction between wise and wicked counsel (Psalm 1:1)
- Bad counsel as worse than none, lending weight to folly
- Godly counsel anchored in the fear of the Lord and His Word
- Advice always carrying the values of the one giving it
- Discernment about when worldly expertise helps and when we need godly counselors

Discussion Prompts

- What makes counsel genuinely godly rather than merely clever?
- Why does the faith and character of an adviser matter as much as their willingness to help?
- When is technical expertise enough, and when do you need a counselor who fears the Lord?

Question 6

Student Question:

Look honestly at who actually shapes your decisions, the voices you listen to most. Are they people who fear the Lord and know His Word, or mainly people who reinforce what you already want? What might you need to change about whose counsel you seek?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to audit the actual voices shaping their lives. We all have de facto counselors, the people whose opinions we weigh most, whether or not we ever formally ask them. Some are wise and godly; some are simply convenient, agreeable, or loud. The exercise is to notice honestly who those voices are.

Help students evaluate the quality of their counsel sources. The pointed question is whether the voices we listen to most are those who fear the Lord and will tell us the truth, or those who mainly reinforce what we already want. Many people, often without realizing it, have assembled a circle of advisers selected, however unconsciously, for their agreeableness. The result is a chorus that confirms rather than corrects.

Then call for intentional change where needed. This may mean deliberately seeking out wiser, more godly counselors, drawing closer to mature believers and the leadership of the church, and being willing to listen less exclusively to the voices that only ever agree. Encourage each student to take one step toward enriching the counsel in their life with genuine, godly wisdom rather than mere echoes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Auditing the de facto voices that actually shape our decisions
- Voices chosen for godliness versus convenience and agreeableness
- The unconsciously assembled chorus of confirmation
- Intentionally enriching our counsel with godly wisdom, including the church's leaders

Discussion Prompts

- Whose voices actually shape your decisions most?
- Are they godly and truthful, or mainly agreeable?
- What might you change about whose counsel you seek?

Question 7

Student Question:

King Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the experienced elders and followed the young men who told him what he wanted to hear, with disastrous results (see 1 Kings 12:6–15). How does pride lead us to resist hard counsel, and how does the temptation to surround ourselves with agreeable voices endanger our decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Tell the story, because it is a vivid case study. The newly crowned Rehoboam faces a decision about how to treat the people. He first consults the elders who had served his father Solomon, and they counsel gentleness. Dissatisfied with that answer, he turns to the young men he had grown up with, who tell him to answer harshly, exactly what his pride wanted to hear. He follows the flattering counsel, and the kingdom splits in two. He had counsel available; he chose the counsel that pleased him.

Draw out how pride resists hard counsel. Rehoboam's failure was not a lack of advisers but an unwillingness to accept the advice he did not like. Pride bristles at correction; it experiences hard counsel as an insult rather than a gift. The proud decision maker may go through the motions of seeking input, but he has already decided, and he will keep looking until he finds someone who agrees. Counsel that challenges him is filtered out, and counsel that flatters him is welcomed.

Expose the danger of the agreeable chorus, which is the modern form of Rehoboam's mistake. Paul warned that people would gather teachers to suit their own passions, having itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3). It is frighteningly easy to assemble, deliberately or not, a set of voices that will tell us what we want, and then to congratulate ourselves on having sought counsel. But counsel exists to protect us precisely by telling us things we do not want to hear. A chorus that only agrees provides the feeling of counsel without its safety.

Apply this to the heart and to practice. The antidote to Rehoboam's error is humility, the willingness to receive counsel that crosses us, especially from those who are wiser and more seasoned than we are. Encourage students to value most highly the counselors who are willing to disagree with them, and to be suspicious of their own desire to keep asking until they hear yes. The test of whether we truly want counsel is whether we can receive it when it is hard.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rehoboam's failure: rejecting wise counsel for flattering counsel (1 Kings 12:6–15)
- Pride experiencing hard counsel as insult rather than gift
- Going through the motions of seeking input while having already decided
- The itching-ears danger of assembling an agreeable chorus (2 Timothy 4:3)
- Humility to receive crossing counsel as the antidote

Discussion Prompts

- How does pride lead us to resist counsel we do not like?
- Where are you tempted to keep asking until someone tells you yes?
- Why are counselors willing to disagree with you the most valuable ones?

Question 8

Student Question:

Recall a time you sought counsel mainly hoping to be told what you had already decided. What would it look like to genuinely invite, and actually receive, counsel that challenges you, even when it is not what you want to hear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to admit a very common, very human maneuver: seeking counsel as a formality to ratify a decision already made. We present the matter in a way that nudges toward the answer we want, or we go to the person most likely to give it. The teacher should invite honest recognition of this pattern without harshness, since nearly everyone has done it.

Help students see the difference between consulting and confirming. Genuine counsel-seeking holds the decision open, lays out the situation honestly including the inconvenient parts, and truly wants to know what the counselor thinks, even if it contradicts our leaning. Confirmation-seeking, by contrast, has already closed the decision and merely wants company. The same conversation can be either, depending on the posture of the heart.

Then call for the harder, better practice. To genuinely receive challenging counsel means presenting the matter fairly, asking the counselor to push back, listening without immediately defending, and seriously weighing input that cuts against our preference. Encourage students to take a current decision and deliberately invite someone to challenge it, and to practice receiving that challenge as the very safety Scripture promises rather than as an attack.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking counsel as a formality to ratify a decision already made
- The difference between consulting (open) and confirming (closed)
- Presenting a matter fairly, including the inconvenient parts
- Receiving challenge without immediately defending

Discussion Prompts

- When have you sought counsel mainly to be told what you had already decided?
- What is the difference between truly consulting and merely seeking confirmation?
- What would it look like to invite someone to challenge a current decision?

Question 9

Student Question:

Scripture commends safety in an abundance of godly counselors, and God has given the church, including its elders and mature believers, as a community of wisdom (see Heb. 13:17). How does seeking counsel within the body of Christ help us decide well, and how do we honor godly

counsel without surrendering our own God-given responsibility to make the decision and answer for it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it sets counsel within its proper home and proper limits, so teach it with care. Counsel is not merely a generic life-hack; for the Christian it is part of life in the body of Christ. God has not left us as isolated individuals but has placed us in a community of faith, the local church, rich with mature believers, and has given it shepherds, elders who keep watch over our souls and will give an account for them (Hebrews 13:17). The wisdom we need for our decisions is, in large part, distributed among the people God has joined us to.

Develop the gift of the church as a community of wisdom. Within a healthy congregation are believers who have walked with God for decades, who have faced the very decisions we face, who know Scripture, and who love us. The elders in particular are given by God to provide spiritual oversight and counsel. To seek counsel within the body is to draw on a reservoir of wisdom God has deliberately provided, and it binds our decisions to the fellowship of the saints rather than leaving us to the thin resources of our own minds. This is one of the great practical blessings of belonging to a local church.

Now guard the first error: isolation. Some Christians, prizing their independence, effectively cut themselves off from this provision, deciding everything privately and presenting it to the church only as a finished fact. This forfeits the very safety God offers. The believer who will not seek the counsel of the body, including its leaders, has chosen to walk the hazardous terrain of decision alone, against the plain wisdom of Scripture.

Now guard the opposite error: abdication. Seeking counsel, even from elders, does not transfer the decision or its responsibility to others. Counsel informs and protects; it does not replace our own judgment before God. We are not to surrender our decisions to a committee, nor to treat counsel as a vote that binds us, nor to use the advice of others as a way to escape our own accountability. Each of us will answer to God for our own choices (Romans 14:12). The counselors advise; the believer, having weighed their wisdom prayerfully, still decides and still bears responsibility for the decision.

Bring the balance to rest. The mature believer walks between proud isolation and lazy abdication. He humbly and actively seeks counsel within the body of Christ, especially from godly and seasoned saints and the church's leaders; he weighs that counsel seriously alongside Scripture, prayer, and the other factors this study has raised; and then he makes the decision himself, before God, taking full responsibility for it. That is how to honor the gift of counsel without evading the dignity and duty of personal decision.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Counsel set within the body of Christ, not as a generic technique
- The church as a God-given community of wisdom, with elders who watch over souls (Hebrews 13:17)
- The error of isolation: cutting ourselves off from the body's provision
- The error of abdication: surrendering the decision and its responsibility to others
- Counsel informs and protects but does not replace personal judgment before God (Romans 14:12)
- The balance: humbly seeking counsel, then deciding and answering for it ourselves

Discussion Prompts

- How does the church, including its elders, serve as a community of wisdom for your decisions?
- What does proud isolation cost us, and what does lazy abdication cost us?
- How do we honor counsel while still taking full responsibility for our own decisions?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Proverbs 15:22 and 11:14. God has not left us to decide alone but has surrounded us with the safety of wise counsel. 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 should seek more counsel" is a fine start, but press toward the specific: counsel from whom, about what, beginning when. The wisdom of these proverbs is meant to land in a real decision and a real relationship this week.

Walk back through the movement of the lesson as a prompt. Solomon taught that plans fail without counsel and that safety is found in an abundance of godly counselors; the lesson exposed our blind spots, the danger of agreeable voices, the warning of Rehoboam, and the gift of counsel within the body of Christ, held alongside our own responsibility. Invite students to ask which of these truths their heart most needs.

Close by recentering on transformation. The aim of this lesson is to form humble, teachable believers who refuse to decide everything alone and who weave godly counsel into their decisions while still owning them before God. Encourage each one to carry a single truth into the week, returning to it in prayer, and to take one concrete step toward the safety of wise counsel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at forming humble, teachable, counsel-seeking believers
- Refusing proud isolation while still owning our decisions
- Weaving godly counsel into real decisions and relationships
- Carrying one concrete truth into a specific decision this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from these proverbs does your heart most need before your next decision?
- Who is the godly counselor you most need to bring a current decision to?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one specific step?