

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

Lesson 9: Pray for Wisdom: Asking the God Who Gives

James 1:5-8 (with Philippians 4:6-7)

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson takes up prayer, the indispensable companion to every other question in the study. Doctrinally, what is at stake is what we actually ask God for when we pray about a decision, and what He actually promises to give. James 1:5 is the key text: the God who gives generously and without reproach promises wisdom to those who ask for it. The teacher should help students grasp the significant fact that God promises wisdom, the God-given capacity to discern and decide well, rather than a sign, a secret answer, or a feeling that bypasses the mind. This single observation ties together the whole anti-mysticism thread of the study and reorients how many believers pray about their choices.

Two doctrinal points need careful handling. First, James calls us to ask in faith, not as the double-minded, wave-tossed doubter; the teacher should explain this as steady, trusting prayer, not as a guarantee that perfect certainty will replace the ordinary work of wise discernment. Second, and most importantly, Philippians 4:6-7 must be taught with precision. Paul promises that the peace of God will guard the hearts of those who pray, not that a feeling of peace will reliably signal the correct option. Many sincere believers have turned subjective peace into exactly the kind of inner-sign system this study opposes, deciding by whether they feel peace about a choice. The teacher must affirm the real peace God gives while dismantling its misuse as a decision-making oracle.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson is meant to drive students to their knees in a healthy way. The deeper aim is to form believers who pray genuinely about their decisions, asking the generous God for wisdom and laying their anxieties before Him, while trusting Him to make them wise rather than waiting for Him to whisper the answer. Send students home praying differently: less as people trying to extract a secret, and more as children asking a generous Father to make them wise and to guard their hearts with His peace.

Question 1

Student Question:

James writes, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (v. 5). What does this promise tell us about God's willingness to help us decide? What does it mean that He gives "generously" and "without reproach"?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the sheer generosity of the promise. James assumes that we lack wisdom, all of us, and rather than scolding us for it, he points us to a God who delights to supply it. The promise is breathtakingly open: if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask, and it will be given him. There are no qualifications about being worthy enough or spiritual enough; there is simply a generous God and an invitation to ask.

Unpack the two descriptions of how God gives. He gives “generously,” or single-mindedly, without holding back or calculating what we deserve; He is not a reluctant giver who must be persuaded, but a lavish one who delights to give. And He gives “without reproach,” without scolding, shaming, or holding our need against us. We might expect God to say, “You should know this by now,” or “Why are you asking again?” Instead He gives without a hint of reproach. This is the warm heart of God toward His children who come asking for help to live well.

Help students feel how this reframes prayer about decisions. Many approach God hesitantly, half-expecting to be turned away or chided for not having figured things out themselves. James portrays the opposite: a God so willing to make His children wise that the only real question is whether we will ask. The barrier to receiving wisdom is not God’s reluctance but our prayerlessness.

Anchor the certainty of the promise: “it will be given him.” This is not a maybe. God has bound Himself to give wisdom to those who ask for it. We can pray for wisdom in a decision with complete confidence that this is a prayer God loves to answer, since it asks for exactly what He most wants to give, children who are wise, discerning, and able to walk in His ways.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s assumption that we lack wisdom, met not with scolding but with invitation (James 1:5)
- God giving generously: lavishly, without holding back
- God giving without reproach: no shaming, no holding our need against us
- The barrier to wisdom as our prayerlessness, not God’s reluctance
- The certainty of the promise: wisdom asked for will be given

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell you about God that He gives wisdom generously and without reproach?
- How do you usually expect God to respond when you come needing help to decide?
- If God loves to give wisdom, what keeps us from asking for it more?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest: when you pray about a decision, do you usually ask God for wisdom, or mostly for the outcome you want? What would change if asking for wisdom became your first prayer in every choice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question exposes a gap most of us would rather not notice. We pray about decisions, often fervently, but we tend to pray for outcomes: give me this job, make this work out, arrange these circumstances. There is nothing wrong with bringing our desires to God, but James points to a different and often neglected request, wisdom. Many believers rarely, if ever, actually ask God to make them wise.

Help students see why the shift matters. Praying only for outcomes keeps the focus on getting what we want and can subtly enlist God as a means to our ends. Praying for wisdom invites God to shape how we think and decide, and it humbly admits that we may not yet know what is best to want. The two prayers come from different postures: one seeks to bend circumstances to our will, the other seeks to bring our will into line with God's.

Then call for a concrete reordering. Encourage students to make asking for wisdom their first prayer in every decision, before and beneath the prayers for particular outcomes. This does not mean we stop bringing our desires to God; it means we lead with the request He has promised to grant. Invite each student to take a current decision and begin praying, specifically and first, for wisdom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The common gap: praying for outcomes rather than for wisdom
- Outcome-prayer enlisting God as a means to our ends
- Wisdom-prayer inviting God to shape how we think and decide
- Leading with the request God has promised to grant

Discussion Prompts

- When you pray about decisions, what do you actually ask for?
- What is the difference in posture between praying for an outcome and praying for wisdom?
- What would change if 'make me wise' were your first prayer in every choice?

Question 3

Student Question:

James says we must "ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind" (v. 6). What does it mean to ask in faith rather than in doubt? How is the doubting, double-minded person unstable in the way he makes decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Clarify what James means by asking in faith, because it is easily misread. He is not requiring that we work ourselves into a feeling of certainty before God will answer, nor that any flicker of uncertainty disqualifies our prayer. The doubting he describes is not honest weakness but a deeper instability, a divided heart that is not sure it even wants to trust God or submit to His answer. To ask in faith is to come genuinely believing that God is good, generous, and willing to give, and to be truly willing to receive and act on the wisdom He provides.

Develop the vivid image. The doubter is “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind,” lifted up and dropped down, pushed first one way and then another, never settled. James then calls him “double-minded,” literally a person with two souls, divided within himself. This is a portrait of instability: a heart that asks God for wisdom while not really trusting Him, that wants direction but is unwilling to commit, that is forever swayed by the latest feeling or pressure.

Show how this instability ruins decision making. The double-minded person cannot decide well because he is not anchored. He prays for wisdom but does not trust the God he prays to; he leans toward a choice, then is blown back by a doubt, then forward again by a desire, never able to settle and act. His problem is not a lack of information but a lack of stable trust. Such a person, James says soberly, should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, because he is not truly asking in faith at all.

Apply this pastorally and constructively. The cure for double-mindedness is not to manufacture certainty but to anchor the heart in the trustworthy character of God. When we truly believe that God is generous, that He gives wisdom without reproach, and that He governs our outcomes, we can pray and then decide with stability, even amid normal uncertainty. Asking in faith means trusting the Giver enough to receive His wisdom and act on it, rather than being tossed endlessly by every wind of feeling.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Asking in faith as genuine trust, not manufactured certainty (James 1:6)
- The doubter’s instability: a divided heart not sure it will trust or submit
- The image of the wave and the double-minded, two-souled person
- Double-mindedness ruining decisions through lack of stable trust
- The cure: anchoring the heart in the trustworthy character of God

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to ask in faith, and what does it not mean?
- How does a divided heart make a person unstable in decisions?
- What anchors a wavering heart enough to pray and then act?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where do you see double-mindedness or instability in the way you approach decisions, being tossed back and forth, unable to settle, second-guessing endlessly? What might it look like to ask God in steady faith instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to recognize the wave-tossed pattern in themselves. Many people know the experience well: leaning toward a choice, then away, then back, unable to land, revisiting the same decision a hundred times, second-guessing even after deciding. The teacher should help students name this instability honestly, since it is exhausting and often spiritual at its root.

Help students trace the instability to its source. Endless second-guessing usually grows from a heart that is not anchored, sometimes in fear of choosing wrong, sometimes in a craving for a certainty God has not promised, sometimes in a divided will that has not truly entrusted the matter to God. Naming the root matters, because the cure for instability is not more deliberation but deeper trust.

Then point toward steady faith. To ask God in steady faith is to bring the decision to Him genuinely, seek His wisdom, weigh the matter, and then decide and rest, trusting that the generous God has heard and that He governs the outcome. Encourage students to identify one decision where they have been tossed back and forth, and to practice steadiness: pray for wisdom, do the wise work of discernment, decide, and then refuse to keep relitigating it endlessly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Recognizing the wave-tossed pattern of endless second-guessing
- Instability rooted in fear, in craving unpromised certainty, or in a divided will
- The cure as deeper trust rather than more deliberation
- Steady faith: pray, discern, decide, and rest

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you get tossed back and forth, unable to settle a decision?
- What is really underneath that instability for you?
- What would asking God in steady faith look like in that case?

Question 5

Student Question:

Notice carefully that God promises to give wisdom, not to hand us the answer or a sign. What is the difference between asking God to make us wise enough to decide and asking Him to reveal a secret answer or feeling? Why does it matter which one we are really seeking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw students' attention to precisely what James promises, because the wording is exact and important. God promises wisdom. He does not promise to hand us the decision, to whisper the answer, or to send a sign that settles the matter for us. The gift is the God-given capacity to discern and choose well, not a bypass around the choosing. This is one of the most clarifying observations in the whole study, and it deserves to be stated plainly.

Develop the difference between the two requests. To ask for wisdom is to ask God to make us the kind of person who can weigh a decision rightly, with discernment shaped by His Word and His Spirit. To ask for a secret answer or a confirming feeling is to ask God to make the decision for us so that we do not have to exercise wisdom at all. The first request honors the way God actually works with His maturing children; the second seeks a shortcut He has not promised and tends to leave us straining to read signs that are not there.

Explain why it matters which we are seeking. If we are really asking God to reveal a hidden answer, we will pray and then anxiously scan our feelings and circumstances for the reply, and we will be vulnerable to mistaking our own impressions for the voice of God. If we are asking for wisdom, we will pray and then do the good work this study has described, consulting Scripture, examining motives, weighing impact and counsel, and trusting God to have made us wise enough to decide. The two approaches lead to very different spiritual lives, one anxious and superstitious, the other stable and mature.

Affirm the dignity in God's chosen way. It might seem easier if God simply told us the answer each time, but His way is better. By giving wisdom rather than dictating decisions, God grows His children into discerning, responsible adults rather than keeping them dependent on a stream of private messages. The believer who asks for and receives wisdom is being matured, decision by decision, into the likeness of his wise heavenly Father.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's precise promise: wisdom, not a dictated answer or a sign (James 1:5)
- Wisdom as the capacity to choose well, not a bypass around choosing
- Asking for a secret answer as seeking an unpromised shortcut
- The two approaches leading to anxious superstition or stable maturity
- God's way of giving wisdom as maturing His children rather than keeping them dependent on private messages

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between asking God to make you wise and asking Him to reveal the answer?
- Why does it matter which one you are really seeking?
- How is God's gift of wisdom better than His simply telling us what to do?

Question 6

Student Question:

Have you ever prayed for a sign about a decision when what you really needed was wisdom to weigh it? How might your prayers about decisions change if you trusted God to make you wise rather than waiting for Him to signal the answer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question invites honest reflection on a very common prayer habit: asking God for a sign. Most believers have at some point prayed something like, “Lord, if this is your will, make this happen,” or have asked God to give them a feeling, a confirmation, an unmistakable indication of what to do. The teacher should raise this gently, since the impulse is usually sincere even when the approach is mistaken.

Help students see the difference in their own experience. Praying for a sign tends to produce anxious watching and ambiguous results, since almost anything can be read as a sign if we want it to be, and the same event can point in opposite directions. Praying for wisdom, by contrast, leads us into the steady work of discernment under God’s promise to supply what we need. The shift is from trying to read God’s secret answer to trusting God to make us able to decide.

Then call for a change in practice. Encourage students to notice when they are tempted to ask for a sign and to redirect that prayer toward wisdom: “Lord, make me wise here; help me see clearly, weigh rightly, and choose well.” Invite each student to take a current decision and pray for wisdom rather than a signal, then do the good work of deciding, trusting that God has heard and is making them wise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The common habit of praying for a sign or a confirming feeling
- Signs as ambiguous, readable to point in any direction we wish
- Redirecting from reading God’s secret answer to trusting Him to make us wise
- Praying for wisdom and then doing the work of discernment

Discussion Prompts

- When have you prayed for a sign instead of for wisdom?
- What did praying for a sign actually produce in you?
- How could you redirect that prayer toward wisdom in a current decision?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul writes, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). How is prayer God’s appointed remedy for the anxiety that so often surrounds our decisions? What part does thanksgiving play in calming an anxious, deciding heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Acknowledge first how naturally decisions breed anxiety. The weight of an important choice, the fear of getting it wrong, the pressure of consequences, all of it can fill a believer with worry. Paul speaks directly into this, with a command that sounds impossible until we see the remedy attached: “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer... let your requests be made known to God.” The cure for anxiety is not to try harder to stop worrying but to turn the worry into prayer.

Show how prayer remedies anxiety. Anxiety is, in part, the burden of carrying alone what we were never meant to carry. Prayer transfers that burden to God. “In everything,” Paul says, including every decision, “let your requests be made known to God.” The act of laying a decision and its attendant fears before God is itself relieving, because it places the matter in the hands of the One who is wise, sovereign, and good. Peter says the same: cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

Develop the role of thanksgiving, which Paul deliberately includes. We are to pray “with thanksgiving.” Gratitude reorients the anxious heart by reminding it of who God is and what He has already done. An anxious mind fixates on what might go wrong; a thankful one remembers the God who has been faithful before and can be trusted now. Thanksgiving does not deny the difficulty of the decision; it surrounds the decision with remembered evidence of God’s goodness, and that steadies the heart.

Bring it to the practice of deciding. Encourage students to make their decisions a matter of grateful prayer, not just anxious deliberation. Before turning the choice over for the hundredth time in their minds, they can turn it over to God, with thanks. This is not a technique for producing a feeling but an act of trust that genuinely relieves anxiety, because it puts the decision where it belongs, in the care of a faithful Father.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Decisions as a frequent doorway for anxiety
- Prayer, not harder effort, as God’s appointed remedy for worry (Philippians 4:6)
- Prayer transferring the burden to God (1 Peter 5:7)
- Thanksgiving reorienting the heart toward God’s faithfulness
- Making decisions a matter of grateful prayer, not only anxious deliberation

Discussion Prompts

- How does turning worry into prayer actually relieve anxiety?

- Why does Paul include thanksgiving in the remedy for anxiety?
- What would it look like to bring a decision to God with thanks rather than just turning it over in your mind?

Question 8

Student Question:

What anxiety do you tend to carry into your decisions, the fear of choosing wrong, of missing out, of disappointing someone? What would it look like to actually bring that specific anxiety to God in prayer this week rather than just turning it over in your mind?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to name the particular anxiety that haunts their decisions. The fears differ from person to person: the fear of choosing wrong and ruining things, the fear of missing out on something better, the fear of disappointing people, the fear of the unknown. Naming the specific fear makes it possible to bring it to God concretely rather than carrying a vague, diffuse dread.

Help students notice the difference between ruminating and praying. Turning an anxiety over and over in the mind feels like dealing with it, but it usually only deepens the groove of worry. Bringing the same anxiety to God in prayer changes its location: it moves from the closed loop of our own thoughts into the hands of a God who hears and cares. The fear may not vanish instantly, but it is no longer being carried alone.

Then call for a concrete practice this week. Encourage each student to take their specific decision-anxiety and actually pray it, naming the fear to God, asking for wisdom and peace, and giving thanks for His past faithfulness, rather than merely rehearsing it inwardly. The aim is a real transfer of the burden, and with it the guarding peace Paul promises.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming the specific fear that haunts our decisions
- The difference between ruminating and praying
- Moving an anxiety from the closed loop of thought into God's hands
- A concrete practice of praying the fear rather than rehearsing it

Discussion Prompts

- What specific anxiety do you carry into your decisions?
- What is the difference between turning a worry over in your mind and praying it?
- How will you bring that anxiety to God this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

God promises wisdom to those who ask (James 1:5) and peace to those who pray (Phil. 4:7), yet that peace is the peace of God guarding our hearts, not a feeling sent to confirm which option is correct. How should a Christian rightly pray about a decision? How do we ask for and trust God's wisdom and peace without turning a feeling of "peace about it" into the kind of sign-seeking this study has warned against?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it brings the study's teaching on prayer and guidance to a fine point, so teach it carefully. Two promises must be rightly understood. James promises wisdom to those who ask. Paul promises that the peace of God, surpassing understanding, will guard the hearts and minds of those who pray. Both are precious and real. But neither promise is a mechanism for revealing which option is correct, and treating them that way quietly reintroduces the very mysticism the study has labored to set aside.

Handle the misuse of peace directly, because it is so common and so sincere. Many believers decide by whether they feel peace about a choice: a feeling of peace is taken as God's yes, a lack of peace as His no. But look closely at what Paul actually says. He does not promise that a feeling of peace will identify the right decision; he promises that the peace of God will guard the hearts of those who pray, regardless of which good option they choose. The peace Paul describes is the settled calm of a heart resting in a trustworthy God in the midst of anxiety, not a spiritual compass needle pointing to the correct answer. To turn that guarding peace into a decision-detector is to ask it to do something Scripture never assigns it, and it can mislead us badly, since our feelings of peace or unease are shaped by temperament, mood, fear, and desire as much as by anything else.

Now teach what to do with peace rightly. The peace of God is meant to steady us so that we can think and decide clearly, and to guard us once we have decided, freeing us from anxious second-guessing. It is the calm in which wisdom does its work and the rest in which a made decision can be entrusted to God. So we welcome God's peace, we pray for it, and we let it quiet our hearts, without asking it to make our decisions for us. A believer can have genuine peace and still need to do the hard work of weighing a choice wisely, and can rightly decide a matter even while feeling the normal unease that hard decisions carry.

Then describe how to pray rightly about a decision, pulling the lesson together. We come to the generous God and ask, first and foremost, for wisdom, trusting His promise to give it. We lay out our requests and our anxieties with thanksgiving, asking for His guarding peace. We do not demand a sign, scan our feelings for a coded answer, or treat a wave of peace or unease as the voice of God. Then we go and do the wise work, Scripture, motive, impact, capability, opportunity, counsel, and we decide, resting in the peace of a God who has heard us and governs the outcome. That is praying about a decision the way Scripture teaches.

Bring the balance to rest, and connect it to where the study is heading. Prayer is essential, and God truly gives wisdom and peace, but prayer is not a substitute for wise discernment or a channel for private revelation. The praying believer is not waiting passively for heaven to announce the answer; he is asking to be made wise and kept at peace, and then he is moving forward to decide. This sets up the next lesson, where, having prayed and weighed everything, the mature believer must actually make the decision rather than waiting indefinitely for a certainty God never promised to give.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Two real promises: wisdom (James 1:5) and the guarding peace of God (Philippians 4:7)
- Neither promise as a mechanism for revealing the correct option
- The common misuse: deciding by whether we feel peace about a choice
- Paul's peace as the heart's calm in anxiety, not a compass to the right answer
- Feelings of peace and unease shaped by temperament, mood, fear, and desire
- Peace welcomed to steady and guard us, not to make our decisions
- Praying rightly: ask for wisdom and peace, refuse signs, then do the wise work and decide

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul actually promise about peace in Philippians 4:7, and what does he not promise?
- Why is deciding by whether you 'feel peace about it' a subtle form of sign-seeking?
- How do we welcome God's peace without asking it to make our decisions for us?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across James 1:5–8 and Philippians 4:6–7. God gives wisdom generously and guards praying hearts with His peace. 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 pray more" is a fine start, but press toward the specific: pray for what, about which decision, beginning when. The promises of wisdom and peace are meant to reshape how the student prays about a real choice this week.

Walk back through the movement of the passages as a prompt. James points us to a generous God who gives wisdom without reproach and calls us to ask in steady faith; Paul tells us to turn our anxieties into grateful prayer and promises the guarding peace of God. Invite students to ask which of these truths their heart most needs, whether to start praying for wisdom, to ask in steadier faith, or to bring a specific anxiety to God.

Close by recentring on transformation. The aim of this lesson is to form genuinely praying believers who ask God for wisdom rather than signs and who let His peace guard their hearts rather than dictate their choices. Encourage each one to carry a single truth into the week, returning to it in prayer, so that the way they pray about decisions is itself reshaped.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at forming genuinely praying believers
- Asking God for wisdom rather than signs
- Letting God's peace guard the heart rather than dictate the choice
- Carrying one concrete truth into a specific decision this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from these verses does your heart most need before your next decision?
- How will you pray differently about a decision you are facing this week?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one specific step?