

Decision Making and the Will of God

Lesson 9: Pray for Wisdom: Asking the God Who Gives -- James 1:5-8 (with Philippians 4:6-7)

When Solomon stood at the beginning of his reign and God said, in effect, "Ask for whatever you want," he could have asked for long life, riches, or the death of his enemies. Instead he asked for wisdom, an understanding heart to discern good and evil and to lead God's people well. And God was so pleased with the request that He gave Solomon not only the wisdom but the riches and honor besides. There is a lesson tucked into that ancient scene that lands right in the middle of our own decision making: when we come to God about a choice, what exactly should we be asking Him for?

Most of us, if we are honest, pray for outcomes. We ask God to give us the job, to make the relationship work, to open the door, to arrange the circumstances the way we want them. And there is nothing wrong with bringing our desires to God. But notice what James tells us to ask for when we face a decision: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Not a sign. Not a secret answer whispered in the dark. Wisdom. God's promise to the praying believer is that He will supply the very thing decision making requires: the God-given ability to discern and choose well.

This matters enormously, because it quietly corrects the way many of us pray about decisions. We treat prayer as a way of getting God to reveal the hidden answer, and then we strain to detect His reply in a feeling, a coincidence, a verse, a flutter in the chest. But James does not promise that God will bypass our minds and hand us the answer; he promises that God will generously give wisdom to the mind that asks. The God who gives without reproach, never scolding us for needing to ask, delights to make His children wise. So we pray, not to extract a secret, but to be made wise enough to decide.

And here is the rest of the gift. Paul tells the anxious Philippians, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Decisions are a frequent doorway for anxiety, and prayer is God's appointed cure for it. Notice, though, what Paul promises: not that the right choice will announce itself with a feeling of peace, but that the peace of God will guard the hearts of those who pray. We will need to handle that carefully later in this lesson. For now, hear the invitation. The God who gives wisdom generously and guards anxious hearts with peace is waiting to be asked. Why would we carry our decisions alone?

Group Discussion: When you pray about a decision, what do you usually ask God for, the outcome you want, a sign to show you the answer, or wisdom to choose well? As a group, talk

about how James 1:5 might reshape the way we pray about our choices. Why is it significant that God promises to give wisdom rather than to hand us the answer directly?

Personal Reflection: Be honest about your prayer life around decisions. Do you actually pray about your choices at all, and if so, are you mostly asking God to arrange the outcome or to make you wise? Take one decision you are facing and ask God specifically for wisdom this week. What might change in how you carry it?

Read James 1:5–8 and Philippians 4:6–7

Study Questions

1. 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”?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Kings 3:5–14, Solomon asking God for a wise and discerning heart rather than riches; Proverbs 2:1–6, the Lord giving wisdom to those who seek it like silver; Colossians 1:9–10, praying to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom; Matthew 7:7–11, the Father who gives good things to those who ask; Psalm 25:4–5, the prayer that God would make His ways known and lead us in His truth

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