

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

Lesson 10: Make the Decision: Beyond Signs and Fleece

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson presses the duty of decisiveness, and it is in many ways the climax of the study's practical argument. Having taught students to weigh a decision carefully through nine preceding lessons, the study now insists that the weighing must end in a decision. Doctrinally and pastorally, what is at stake is the difference between wise deliberation and a paralyzing demand for certainty that Scripture never promises. Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 teaches that precisely because we cannot know the future or the outcomes of our choices, we must act with diligent faith rather than freeze. The teacher should help students see that decisiveness is not impulsiveness but the mature fruit of having done the work and then trusting God enough to choose.

This lesson must confront directly the sign-seeking the whole study has resisted, now at its most practical point: the craving for a fleece, an inner voice, or a guaranteed feeling before one will act. The teacher should handle Gideon's fleece (Judges 6:36-40) with care. It is narrated in Scripture as an instance of a weak and fearful man asking God to confirm what God had already plainly told him, and God graciously condescending to his weakness; it is not presented as a model method for discerning God's will, and it should not be turned into one. Christians today are not to put out fleeces, demand inner confirmations, or wait for a certainty God has not promised. Having sought wisdom and prayed, the believer is to decide and act in faith, trusting God with the outcomes that belong to Him alone.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims to set captives free, the many sincere believers paralyzed by indecision, perfectionism, and the fear of choosing wrong. The deeper formational goal is to cultivate a courageous, trusting decisiveness that flows from confidence in God's providence: since a faithful believer walking in wisdom cannot wreck God's plan, he is free to decide and act without the crushing fear of missing some secret blueprint. Send students home not reckless, but freed to sow the seed, make the call, and leave the harvest in the hands of the God who governs it.

Question 1

Student Question:

The Preacher urges, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, or even to eight" (vv. 1-2). What do these images teach about acting in the face of an uncertain future? Why does the uncertainty of outcomes call for action rather than paralysis?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open up the two images, which together form a single counsel. “Cast your bread upon the waters” pictures bold, even seemingly risky action, sending something out without being able to see how it will return, in confidence that it will. “Give a portion to seven, or even to eight” pictures spreading our efforts wisely across several ventures, since we cannot know which will succeed. Both images assume a future we cannot control, and both respond not with paralysis but with sensible, courageous action.

Draw out the logic that runs against our instincts. We tend to think that uncertainty is a reason to wait: until I can see more clearly, I will hold back. The Preacher reasons the opposite way. Because the future is uncertain, and because disaster or blessing may come in ways we cannot predict, the wise response is to act, to diversify, to sow widely, and to trust the outcome to God. Waiting for certainty that will never come is not caution; it is a failure to live and act faithfully in the world as it actually is.

Connect this to the heart of the study. The believer who has done the careful work of weighing a decision must not let the impossibility of seeing the outcome stop him from acting. We will never have a guarantee of how a choice will turn out, because outcomes belong to God. The Preacher’s counsel is to act anyway, wisely and in faith, casting our bread on the waters and trusting the God who governs the tides.

Guard against misreading this as recklessness. Casting bread on the waters is not gambling or acting without thought; the same passage commends spreading our portions wisely, which is prudent. The point is not that we abandon wisdom, but that, having been wise, we do not let the inevitable uncertainty of results freeze us. Wise action under uncertainty, not anxious inaction waiting for certainty, is the path the Preacher commends.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Casting bread on the waters: bold action without seeing the return (Ecclesiastes 11:1)
- Giving to seven or eight: wisely diversifying because we cannot predict outcomes
- Uncertainty as a call to action, not a reason for paralysis
- Outcomes belonging to God, never guaranteed to us in advance
- Wise action under uncertainty as distinct from recklessness

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the Preacher treat an uncertain future as a reason to act rather than to wait?
- What is the difference between casting bread on the waters and reckless gambling?
- Where are you waiting for a certainty about outcomes that God has not promised?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where has the fear of an uncertain outcome kept you from acting on something you sensed you should do? What did that hesitation cost you, and what might trusting God have looked like instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question asks students to locate the fear that has stalled them. Most people can recall a moment when they knew, or strongly sensed, the wise and good thing to do, and yet held back because they could not be sure how it would turn out. The fear of an uncertain outcome is one of the most common reasons good decisions go unmade.

Help students count the cost of hesitation honestly. Inaction is itself a choice, and it has consequences. The ministry never begun, the apology never offered, the opportunity never taken, the generosity never extended, all of these are seeds left in the bag. Often the hesitation we excuse as prudence has quietly cost us the very harvest we hoped for. Naming a specific cost makes the lesson concrete and motivating.

Then turn toward what trust would have looked like. Trusting God in the face of an uncertain outcome does not mean we are guaranteed success; it means we do the wise and right thing and entrust the result to Him. Encourage students to imagine how a past hesitation might have gone differently if they had acted in faith, and to carry that lesson into a present decision where fear of the outcome is holding them back.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating the fear of uncertain outcomes as a cause of stalled decisions
- Inaction as itself a choice with real consequences
- Counting the cost of seeds left in the bag
- Trust as doing the right thing and entrusting the result to God

Discussion Prompts

- When has fear of the outcome kept you from doing something you sensed you should?
- What did that hesitation actually cost you?
- What might trusting God have looked like in that moment?

Question 3

Student Question:

"He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap" (v. 4). What does this proverb say about the person who waits for perfect conditions before acting? How can a desire for certainty quietly become an excuse never to decide?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center students on the vivid picture. A farmer who will only sow when the wind is perfectly still, and only reap when the sky is perfectly clear, will do neither, because such perfect conditions rarely come and never last. The proverb gently mocks the paralysis of the over-cautious. There is always another cloud to worry about, another gust to wait out. The person fixated on perfect conditions forfeits the whole enterprise of sowing and reaping.

Apply this to decision making, where the same paralysis operates. Many believers are forever observing the wind: waiting for more information, a clearer feeling, a more convenient time, an absence of all risk, before they will act. There is always a reason to wait a little longer. But certainty of this kind is a mirage, and the one who waits for it will, like the wind-watching farmer, never sow. The desire for perfect conditions is one of the most respectable ways to avoid ever deciding.

Expose how the desire for certainty disguises itself as virtue. Endless waiting can look like prudence, humility, or even spirituality (“I just want to be sure it is God’s will”). But underneath, it is often fear, perfectionism, or an unwillingness to bear the responsibility of a choice. Naming this is important, because the paralyzed person usually does not see his indecision as a problem; he sees it as carefulness. The proverb names it plainly: the wind-watcher does not sow.

Move toward the cure. The remedy is not to abandon wisdom but to recognize that the conditions will never be perfect and to act anyway, at the right time, having done the necessary discernment. Encourage students to ask, of a decision they keep deferring, whether they are genuinely lacking some needed wisdom or simply waiting for a certainty that will never arrive. If it is the latter, the proverb’s counsel is clear: stop watching the wind, and sow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The paralysis of waiting for perfect conditions (Ecclesiastes 11:4)
- Certainty of this kind as a mirage that never arrives
- Endless waiting disguised as prudence, humility, or spirituality
- Fear, perfectionism, and avoidance of responsibility beneath the delay
- The cure: recognizing conditions are never perfect and acting anyway

Discussion Prompts

- How does waiting for perfect conditions guarantee we never sow?
- How can the desire for certainty disguise itself as virtue?
- Is a decision you keep deferring really lacking wisdom, or just lacking certainty?

Question 4

Student Question:

Is there a decision you have delayed and delayed, telling yourself you are waiting for the right time or more clarity, when you have really been refusing to act? What would it look like to stop watching the wind and sow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to name a specific delayed decision and to be honest about the reason. The phrasing matters: telling ourselves we are waiting for the right time or more clarity can be true, or it can be a cover story for fear and avoidance. The teacher should gently invite students to test their own stated reasons.

Help students distinguish legitimate waiting from wind-watching. Sometimes there genuinely is more wisdom to gather, a needed conversation, a real obstacle to clear, and waiting is right. But often the work has already been done, and what remains is not more clarity but more courage. A useful test: if I am honest, am I waiting because I still lack something I need to decide wisely, or because I am afraid to commit and bear the responsibility?

Then call for the concrete act. “Stopping to watch the wind and sowing” means actually making the decision, taking the step, sending out the seed. Encourage each student to identify one long-delayed decision where the deliberating is finished and only the deciding remains, and to commit to making it this week, trusting God with what follows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming a specific delayed decision and its real reason
- Distinguishing legitimate waiting from fearful wind-watching
- The honest test: lacking needed wisdom, or lacking courage?
- Committing to actually decide where deliberation is finished

Discussion Prompts

- What decision have you delayed while telling yourself you need more clarity?
- Are you truly lacking wisdom, or lacking the courage to commit?
- What would it look like to stop watching the wind and sow this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

The Preacher says, “As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything” (v. 5). What does it mean to humbly accept that we cannot know God’s hidden workings or the outcomes of our choices? How is that humility actually freeing for a decision maker?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Slow down on this profound verse. The Preacher chooses one of the most ordinary yet mysterious realities, the formation of a child in the womb, to make his point: there are workings of God we simply cannot trace. Just as we cannot map how life comes together in the hidden place, so we cannot comprehend the full work of God who makes everything. Some things are genuinely beyond our knowing, and that is by God's design.

Connect this to the study's foundational distinction between God's revealed and secret will. The outcomes of our decisions, the future, the hidden workings of providence, belong to the secret things that belong to the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29). We are not given to know in advance how a choice will turn out, because that knowledge is God's, not ours. Accepting this is not defeatism; it is simply telling the truth about our creaturely limits before an infinite God.

Show why this humble acceptance is actually freeing, which is the heart of the question. If we believed we had to know the outcome before deciding, every decision would be unbearable, since such knowledge is impossible. But once we accept that the outcomes belong to God and were never ours to see, an enormous weight lifts. We are not responsible to predict the future or to guarantee results; we are responsible only to act wisely and faithfully with what we can know, and to trust God with what we cannot. That is a far lighter and more livable burden.

Apply it directly to the paralyzed decider. Much indecision is really a refusal to accept our limits, a demand to be God-like in foreseeing outcomes before we will commit. The verse invites us to lay that demand down. We do not know the work of God, and we are not asked to. Freed from the impossible task of certainty about outcomes, we can do the possible task of wise, faithful action, and leave the rest to the One who makes everything.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The genuine limits of human knowledge by God's design (Ecclesiastes 11:5)
- Outcomes and the future as part of God's secret will (Deuteronomy 29:29)
- Humble acceptance of our creaturely limits as truth-telling, not defeatism
- Freedom in being released from the impossible task of foreseeing outcomes
- Indecision as a refusal to accept our limits and a demand to be God-like

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the outcomes of our choices belong to God's secret will?
- How is accepting that we cannot know the future actually freeing?
- Where are you demanding a God-like certainty before you will act?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where do you find yourself demanding to know the outcome before you will act, as if you were entitled to a certainty God has not promised? How might accepting that the outcomes belong to God change the way you decide?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the truth of verse 5 inward. The demand to know the outcome before acting is often unspoken but powerful; it hides behind phrases like “I just need to be sure” or “I can’t move until I know it will work.” The teacher should help students recognize this demand operating in their own decisions.

Help students see the demand for what it is. To insist on knowing the outcome before deciding is, in effect, to insist on a certainty that belongs to God alone. It is a quiet refusal of our place as creatures, and it makes us our own providence, trying to secure the future before we will trust God with it. Recognizing this can be humbling and clarifying at once.

Then point to the change that humility brings. When we accept that outcomes belong to God, decision making becomes lighter and braver. We ask not “Can I be sure this will work?” but “Is this the wise and faithful thing to do?” and then we act, entrusting the results to God. Encourage each student to identify a decision where they have been demanding to know the outcome, and to release that demand, deciding on the basis of wisdom and faith rather than guaranteed results.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unspoken demand to know the outcome before acting
- Such a demand as insisting on a certainty that belongs to God alone
- Trying to be our own providence rather than trusting God
- Deciding by wisdom and faithfulness rather than guaranteed results

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you demand to know the outcome before you will act?
- How is that demand a refusal of your place as a creature?
- How would accepting that outcomes belong to God change your next decision?

Question 7

Student Question:

“In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (v. 6). What does this teach about diligent, decisive action when we cannot predict results? How is sowing faithfully different from anxiously trying to guarantee the harvest?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw out the rhythm of the verse: sow in the morning, and do not withhold your hand in the evening. It is a picture of steady, full-hearted diligence from dawn to dusk. The reason given is striking: precisely because you do not know which effort will prosper, sow generously and keep working. Our ignorance of outcomes is turned, once again, not into a reason to hold back but into a reason to act diligently and broadly.

Distinguish faithful sowing from anxious guaranteeing, which is the heart of the question. The anxious decider tries to control the harvest: he wants to know in advance which seed will grow, to act only where success is assured, to manage the results. The faithful sower does what is his to do, sows the seed diligently and well, and leaves the harvest to God, who alone gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7). One posture is exhausting and impossible; the other is diligent and restful at the same time.

Apply this to the believer's decisions and labors. Our task is faithfulness, not guaranteed success. We make the wise decision, do the good work, sow the seed in the morning and the evening, and entrust the prospering of it to God. This frees us from the paralysis of trying to act only where outcomes are certain, and from the anxiety of trying to force results we cannot control. We are sowers, not sovereigns; we sow faithfully and trust the Lord of the harvest.

Encourage diligence as the companion of decisiveness. Note that this verse does not counsel a single brave decision followed by passivity, but ongoing, diligent action, morning and evening. Decisiveness is not just making one choice; it is the steady willingness to keep acting faithfully without a guaranteed return. Help students embrace this active, hopeful diligence as the proper posture of those who trust a sovereign God with their results.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Steady, full-hearted diligence from morning to evening (Ecclesiastes 11:6)
- Ignorance of outcomes turned into a reason for diligent, broad action
- Faithful sowing versus anxious guaranteeing of the harvest
- God alone gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7)
- Decisiveness as ongoing diligent faithfulness, not a single act followed by passivity

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between sowing faithfully and trying to guarantee the harvest?
- Why does not knowing which will prosper call for sowing more, not less?
- Where do you need to keep sowing diligently and leave the growth to God?

Question 8

Student Question:

What is one decision where you simply need to stop waiting and act, sowing the seed and leaving the harvest to God? What practical step would “making the decision” involve for you this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses for a concrete commitment. The whole lesson aims at this point: not merely agreeing that we should be decisive, but actually deciding something. The teacher should help students move from principle to a specific, namable decision and a specific next step.

Help students choose well. The decision in view should be one that has already been weighed, prayed over, and is biblically clear, where what remains is not more discernment but the courage to act. This is not a license for impulsiveness; it is a call to finish what careful deliberation has begun. Encourage students to pick a decision where they know, in their honest moments, that they have been stalling rather than discerning.

Then make the step concrete. “Making the decision” should translate into an actual action: sending the email, having the conversation, accepting or declining the offer, beginning the ministry, making the commitment. A decision not yet acted upon is not yet truly made. Encourage each student to name the practical step and a time to take it this week, sowing the seed and leaving the harvest to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from agreeing to be decisive to actually deciding something
- Choosing a decision already weighed and biblically clear, awaiting only courage
- Decisiveness as finishing what deliberation began, not impulsiveness
- Translating the decision into a concrete action and time

Discussion Prompts

- What decision do you simply need to stop waiting on and make?
- Is the deliberating truly finished, so that only the deciding remains?
- What practical step and what time will ‘making the decision’ involve this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Having sought wisdom and prayed, the mature believer must decide and act rather than waiting indefinitely for a sign. How should a Christian think about the craving for a fleece, an inner voice, or a guaranteed certainty before deciding? Considering how Gideon’s fleece (Judges 6:36–40) is described in Scripture, why is it unwise to make sign-seeking our method, and what does faithful decisiveness look like instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it confronts head-on the sign-seeking the whole study has resisted, so teach it with clarity and pastoral care. The setting is the moment of decision itself. A believer has done the work, weighed the choice, sought counsel, and prayed for wisdom, and now stands at the point of acting. The temptation, deeply ingrained in much popular Christianity, is to refuse to act until God provides something more: a fleece that confirms, an inner voice that directs, an unmistakable feeling, a guaranteed certainty. Scripture calls us instead to decide and act in faith.

Handle Gideon's fleece carefully, because it is the passage most often misused to justify sign-seeking. Recall the story honestly. God had already told Gideon plainly that He would save Israel through him. Gideon, fearful and unsure, asked God to confirm it by making a wool fleece wet while the ground stayed dry, and then, still not satisfied, asked Him to reverse the sign. God graciously condescended to Gideon's weakness. But notice three things. First, Gideon was not seeking guidance he lacked; he was demanding confirmation of a clear word God had already spoken. Second, the narrative presents this as the act of a weak and fearful faith, not as a commendable model. Third, nowhere does Scripture instruct believers to make decisions by putting out fleeces. To turn Gideon's episode into a method is to mistake a story of God's patience with weakness for a pattern He intends us to copy.

Explain why making sign-seeking our method is unwise and even spiritually dangerous. Fleeces and inner voices are notoriously ambiguous; we read into them what we already want, and we can manufacture or misinterpret almost any sign. They bypass the wisdom God has actually promised to give, leaving us dependent on impressions rather than on His Word and sound judgment. They can become a way of avoiding responsibility, letting a coincidence or a feeling carry a decision we should own before God. And they quietly reintroduce the expectation of private revelation that the completed Scriptures have made unnecessary. The whole drift of biblical wisdom is away from this, toward trusting God and acting.

Then describe faithful decisiveness positively, so students are not left with only a prohibition. The mature believer, having submitted the decision to Scripture, examined his motives, weighed the impact, considered his gifts and opportunities, sought godly counsel, and prayed earnestly for wisdom, now makes the decision and acts, trusting God with the outcome. He does not demand a sign, because he has the better gift of wisdom; he does not wait for an inner voice, because he is led by the sufficient Word; he does not require guaranteed certainty, because he trusts the providence of God. This is not less spiritual than sign-seeking; it is far more so, because it rests on faith in God's character rather than on the reading of omens.

Anchor the believer's courage in providence, which is where the next lesson will go. The deepest reason we can decide bravely without signs is that a faithful believer walking in wisdom need not fear having ruined God's plan. The God who governs all outcomes is able to weave even our imperfect decisions into His good purposes. So we are free, having sought wisdom and prayed,

to make the call and act, resting not in the certainty of our foresight but in the faithfulness of our God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The moment of decision and the temptation to wait for a sign, voice, or certainty
- Gideon's fleece as weak faith demanding confirmation of an already-clear word (Judges 6:36–40)
- Scripture narrating the fleece, not prescribing it as a method
- The dangers of sign-seeking: ambiguity, bypassing promised wisdom, avoiding responsibility, expecting private revelation
- Faithful decisiveness: having weighed and prayed, deciding and acting in faith
- Courage to decide grounded in God's providence over outcomes

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it a mistake to treat Gideon's fleece as a model for our decisions?
- What are the dangers of making signs, fleeces, or inner voices our method?
- What does faithful decisiveness look like once you have weighed a choice and prayed?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Ecclesiastes 11:1–6. The Preacher calls us to sow faithfully and decide bravely in a world whose outcomes we cannot see, trusting the God who can. 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 be more decisive" is a fine start, but press toward the specific: decisive about what, acted on how, beginning when. The Preacher's call to sow and act is meant to break a real paralysis this week.

Walk back through the movement of the passage as a prompt. The Preacher urged bold and diversified action, warned against the wind-watcher who never sows, humbled us before the unknowable work of God, and called us to diligent sowing morning and evening because we cannot predict the harvest. Invite students to ask which of these truths their heart most needs, and which delayed decision it is calling them to finally make.

Close by recentring on transformation and freedom. The aim of this lesson is to free students from the paralysis of sign-seeking and perfectionism and to form in them a brave, faithful decisiveness rooted in trust. Encourage each one to carry a single truth into the week, returning

to it in prayer, and to actually make a decision they have been deferring, leaving the harvest to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at forming brave, faithful decisiveness rooted in trust
- Freedom from the paralysis of sign-seeking and perfectionism
- Sowing faithfully while leaving outcomes to God
- Carrying one concrete truth into a real, deferred decision this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage does your heart most need before your next decision?
- Which deferred decision is this lesson calling you to finally make?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one specific step?