

Making Biblical Decisions

Lesson 10

The Existential Perspective:
Choosing Good

Lesson Guide



thirdmill

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

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ABOUT THIRDMILL

Founded in 1997, Thirdmill is a non-profit Evangelical Christian ministry dedicated to providing:

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

Our goal is to offer free Christian education to hundreds of thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish. Our curriculum is also being translated into more than a dozen other languages through our partner ministries. The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources. It is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in learning communities.

Over the years, we have developed a highly cost-effective method of producing award-winning multimedia lessons of the finest content and quality. Our writers and editors are theologically trained educators, our translators are theologically astute native speakers of their target languages, and our lessons contain the insights of hundreds of respected seminary professors and pastors from around the world. In addition, our graphic designers, illustrators, and producers adhere to the highest production standards using state-of-the-art equipment and techniques.

In order to accomplish our distribution goals, Thirdmill has forged strategic partnerships with churches, seminaries, Bible schools, missionaries, Christian broadcasters and satellite television providers, and other organizations. These relationships have already resulted in the distribution of countless video lessons to indigenous leaders, pastors, and seminary students. Our websites also serve as avenues of distribution and provide additional materials to supplement our lessons, including materials on how to start your own learning community.

Thirdmill is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) corporation. We depend on the generous, tax-deductible contributions of churches, foundations, businesses, and individuals. For more information about our ministry, and to learn how you can get involved, please visit www.thirdmill.org.

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE	1
NOTES	2
I. INTRODUCTION (0:20).....	2
II. ACQUIRING (4:12)	2
A. Experience (4:54).....	2
1. Physical (7:19)	2
2. Mental (13:03)	3
B. Imagination (15:36)	4
1. Creativity (17:08).....	4
2. Time (22:33)	5
3. Distance (23:44).....	5
III. ASSESSING (26:43)	5
A. Reason (26:55).....	5
B. Conscience (33:27)	7
C. Emotions (38:59)	8
IV. APPLYING (48:08).....	9
A. Heart (49:17).....	9
1. Commitments (50:25).....	9
2. Desires (54:56).....	10
B. Will (1:00:33).....	11
V. CONCLUSION (1:08:20).....	13
REVIEW QUESTIONS	14
APPLICATION QUESTIONS	19
GLOSSARY	20

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

Ethical judgment involves the application of God's Word to a situation by a person.

II. Acquiring (4:12)

A. Experience (4:54)

“Experience” – awareness of or interaction with persons, things and events

Each experience produces knowledge, which helps us discern good from evil.

1. Physical (7:19)

Our physical interaction with the world takes place through our sensory perception — sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

Our senses are limited in their ability to give us knowledge about the future of our salvation (2 Corinthians 5:7).

As God given tools for gaining knowledge, our senses tend to be reliable, teaching us about God, the creation, and ourselves.

John spoke of hearing, sight, and touch as reliable senses that gave him and others true knowledge about Jesus (1 John 1:1-3).

The fact that we have food to eat is proof that God is good, and it teaches us that he loves us and provides for us (Psalm 34:8).

We learn about God's norms through our senses as they are revealed through special and general revelation.

We need to use the Scriptures and our other faculties to confirm the knowledge we gain through our senses.

2. Mental (13:03)

The information we learn from physical senses does not result in knowledge until that information enters our internal thought processes.

All of our mental experiences are vital to gaining knowledge.

Our mental experience is affected by sin.

But the Holy Spirit uses our mental experiences to teach us true knowledge.

B. Imagination (15:36)

“Imagination” – our ability to form mental images of things that are beyond our experience

1. Creativity (17:08)

Imagination is involved in *everything* we make or create.

Nathan created an imaginary ethical situation when he confronted David — he relied on his and David’s ability to imagine creatively (2 Samuel 12:1-7).

Imagination enables us to form and to recognize moral patterns and analogies.

Sin corrupted our imaginations; we must make sure that the conclusions of our imagination agree with God’s Word.

2. Time (22:33)

We must rely on imagination for creativity to help us think about things that are separated from us by time.

Without our ability to imagine the past and the future, we would not be able to apply God's Word to our lives.

3. Distance (23:44)

Imagination helps us to think about things that are separated from us by physical distance.

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to help us evaluate our imagination according to God's Word.

The Philippian church used their imagination to set the goal of changing Paul's circumstances in his distant prison (Philippians 2:25, 4:18).

III. Assessing (26:43)**A. Reason (26:55)**

Human "reason" – the capacity to make logical inferences and to judge logical consistency

Right reasoning is the ability to think in coherent and orderly ways and to make judgments that accord with biblical patterns of thought.

Reason helps us to understand the facts and to compare these facts to the norms revealed in God's Word.

Reason permits us to compare different facts to each other to determine their logical relations.

Reason also helps us relate statements of fact to statements of duty.

Jesus used reason to argue from the lesser to the greater (Matthew 6).

Scripture uses reason all the time, and it regularly calls on us to do the same.

Sin affected our ability to reason — we should always confirm our conclusions with our other faculties, with other people, and especially with God's Word.

B. Conscience (33:27)

“Conscience” – God-given ability to discern good and evil

Paul and Timothy were convinced that they had behaved in ways that God approved; their conscience approved their actions (2 Corinthians 1:12).

David’s “heart” (*lev*) — or conscience — condemned his actions and moved him to repent when he sinfully took the census of his fighting men (2 Samuel 24:10).

Conscience enables us to assess the knowledge we have acquired, and to judge it against the standard of God’s Word.

Our conscience has been corrupted by sin.

Paul taught that it was acceptable for believers with strong consciences to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols but sinful if they had weak consciences (1 Corinthians 8:8-11).

Paul knew that having a clear or good conscience was not enough, because our consciences can make mistakes (1 Corinthians 4:4).

C. Emotions (38:59)

“Emotions” – inner feelings; the affective aspects of our ethical sensitivity

Emotions enable us to assess knowledge in many different ways.

Emotion is our first reaction to an experience — our thoughtful consideration of the event comes later.

When Daniel encountered an angel, he felt his emotions intensely before he was able to think rationally about the vision (Daniel 10:8-17).

Emotions also aid us in assessing knowledge by helping us see the facts of our situations more clearly.

When Nathan confronted David, he was able to see his sin clearly only when he used his emotions to measure the facts against God’s standard (2 Samuel 12).

Our emotions can be very useful tools for determining how God’s Word applies to our modern lives.

Our emotions are corrupted by sin and are subject to error — not every feeling we have is righteous, or even accurate.

IV. Applying (48:08)

A. Heart (49:17)

Our heart is the center of our entire being — the depth of our inner person and the seat of our motives, and the sum of all of our inward dispositions.

The “heart” – the seat of moral knowledge and moral will

The heart is our whole inner person considered from the perspective of what we know, and what we do with our knowledge.

1. Commitments (50:25)

We have many commitments in life.

For Christians, one commitment should always stand above all others — our commitment to God (1 Kings 8:61, NIV; 2 Chronicles 16:9, NIV).

Commitments are important in ethics because there's a sense in which they govern all of our choices.

Jesus referred to our commitments as the things that are stored up in our hearts (Luke 6:45).

We have to be very aware of our commitments, and conform all of our commitments to God's character.

2. **Desires (54:56)**

Scripture indicates that we have good and bad desires in our hearts.

We are to purify our hearts by getting rid of our evil desires, our longings that are motivated by indwelling sin (2 Timothy 2:21-22).

Only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we purify our hearts.

We have spiritual desires that are pleasing to God and sinful desires that come from our fallen natures (Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:15-18).

Every good decision is made according to desires from the Holy Spirit, and every evil decision is made according to sinful desires.

Our greatest desire always should be to please God, to do his will.

We choose to sin because we desire to sin (James 1:14-15).

B. Will (1:00:33)

Human “will” – our capacity for making decisions

Our wills involve the entire decision-making process from the perspective of the choices we make, and especially from the perspective of the final outcome.

Our will is affected by our fallen nature.

We must recognize that our will may be either active or passive.

Every ethical matter that we recognize as a problem or quandary requires us to use our will in an active manner.

Our will also functions in a passive, unconscious way when we respond by reflex.

Our will is involved in each and every thing we choose to think, say or do.

We must will what God's Word commands, and allow the Holy Spirit working within us to influence our will in positive ways (Philippians 2:13).

God has given us many existential faculties that play important roles in choosing good.

Jesus exercised all of these existential capacities and abilities to make an ethical decision (Matthew 12:9-13):

- He acquired knowledge:
 - used experience to see and to recognize that the man before him had a shriveled hand
 - used his imagination to set the goal of healing the man's hand

- He assessed his knowledge:
 - reason – drew an analogy between rescuing a sheep on the Sabbath and t healing a man on the Sabbath
 - conscience – concluded that healing this man would be a good thing to do
 - emotion – pitied the man

- He applied his knowledge – determined in his heart to do good:
 - his strongest commitment was to God
 - his greatest desire was to act in a way that honored and glorified God, particularly by healing the man

- He used his will to make and to carry out his decision to heal the man

V. Conclusion (1:08:20)

Review Questions

1. What is experience? How does it contribute to acquiring knowledge?
2. What is imagination? How are our imaginative abilities vital to learning and thinking about God, the world, and ourselves?

3. Why is acquiring knowledge important to the process of making ethical decisions?

4. What is reason? Why and how should we use reason in ethics?

9. What is the will? What role does it play in the decision-making process?

10. Why is applying knowledge important to the process of making ethical decisions?

Application Questions

1. How have you tended to make ethical decisions in the past? What inward dispositions and faculties have you relied on most? What inward dispositions and faculties have you tended to ignore?
2. Why is it important to utilize imagination when studying the Scriptures?
3. How does a correct understanding of the role of reason lead to good ethical decisions?
4. Discuss a time when your conscience was wrong. How can we distinguish when our conscience is right from when it is wrong?
5. If we feel emotionally indifferent or detached from our sin, how might we be brought to repentance?
6. In Luke 6:45, Jesus referred to our commitments as the things that are stored up in our hearts and that express themselves in our works. What do your works and your speech suggest about the commitments of your own heart?
7. Practically speaking, our inward dispositions, capacities and faculties are often in tension with each other. Under these conditions, what are some things we can do to ensure that we make the most biblical, responsible decisions possible?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this lesson?
9. What is the most significant insight you have learned from the series *Making Biblical Decisions*?

Glossary

Christian ethics – Theology viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not

conscience – God-given ability to discern good and evil

emotions – A disproportionate and often excessive focus on the emotions

ethical judgment – The application of God’s Word to a situation by a person

ethics – The study of moral right and wrong; the study of what is good and what is evil

existential faculties – Capacities and abilities to make ethical decisions, including experience, imagination, reason, conscience, emotions, heart and will

existential perspective – Ethical perspective that considers the person, the motives, and the inner leading of the Holy Spirit; one of the three perspectives on human knowledge used by theologian John Frame in his Tri-Perspectivalism; concerned with the response of the believing heart through emotion and feeling

experience – God’s revelation through human persons

heart – In biblical use, the sum of all inward dispositions; the seat of moral knowledge and moral will

human will – A person’s faculty for deciding, choosing, desiring, hoping, intending and making decisions

imagination – The ability to form mental images of things that are beyond our *lev* – Hebrew term (transliteration) meaning “heart”; commonly used in the bible to refer to all aspects of the inner person, including emotion, will, mind, and conscience

lev – Hebrew term (transliteration) meaning “heart”; commonly used in the bible to refer to all aspects of the inner person, including emotion, will, mind, and conscience

normative perspective – Ethical perspective that looks to God’s Word as the norm or standard for making ethical decisions

reason – The capacity to make logical inferences and to judge logical consistency

situational perspective – Approach to ethics with an emphasis on the situation and how the details of our circumstances relate to our ethical decisions