

Lesson 11 | November 12, 2023

Discerning the Messages of Media

Study Text: 1 Kings 12:1–19

Central Truth: In a world that is constantly shouting at us, we must be careful to heed God's voice.

Key Verse: Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom (KJV).

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will acknowledge the need for wise counsel.
- Students will evaluate the messages they receive and discern whether they are wise or unwise.
- Students will choose to seek wise counsel when going through a struggle.

Introducing the Study

Say: Whether on the nightly news or a social media feed, everyone is trying to give their opinion. With the prevalence of smart devices and the easy access they provide, those messages seem louder than ever before. It is as though everyone has an answer to offer and is avidly pushing it. Learning which voices to listen to—and which to ignore—will help Christians stick to God's path.

Opening Activity—Unavoidable News

Ask: Have you ever felt like you could not get away from a news story? How did that feeling impact how you viewed the story? Ask students to provide brief answers to allow everyone the opportunity to speak.

Say: Christians are constantly bombarded with messages from all angles. Who's safe to listen to? The best way for God's people to take in the right messages is by carefully evaluating the counsel they receive and prayerfully discerning whether it is wise or unwise. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The reign of Rehoboam provides a stark example of how listening to the right or wrong voices can have a profound effect. He found himself in a complicated situation after he became the fourth king of Israel shortly after Solomon's death. Though he had the benefit of being the son of the wisest king in Israelite history, he could no longer lean on his father's counsel for the problems he was about to face. Not long after he was crowned, a group of people approached him to give their opinions about how he should rule and to submit a request. Like we often do, Rehoboam asked for the advice of his peers and mentors. He soon discovered not all input is of equal value or produces the same outcome.

Part 1—Everyone Has an Opinion

Take Your Time

1 Kings 12:1–5

Say: It's easy to be confused by so-called experts who have opinions about everything. As Rehoboam discovered, some people will even seek you out to share their expertise and beliefs. When faced with these unsolicited opinions, Rehoboam wisely said, "Give me three days to think this over. Then come back for my answer" (1 Kings 12:5, NLT). It's always a good idea to pause and evaluate the thoughts and opinions coming your way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In this age of social media, everyone has a voice—whether or not they have the expertise to back it up. The moment a person mentions a struggle they're going through, self-proclaimed experts rush to solve the problem. Whether it comes from a person with a home remedy for every ailment or a conspiracy theorist who always finds someone else to blame, unsolicited advice can be unreliable—even when it's offered confidently and enthusiastically. But then again, not all suggestions are incorrect. It can be challenging to sort through conflicting thoughts and answers that seem to come all at once.

When Solomon's son Rehoboam became king of Israel, he was approached by Jeroboam and "all the congregation of Israel" (1 Kings 12:3, KJV) with the request that he lighten the labor demands and taxation Solomon had imposed on them. As the leader of the group making this request, Jeroboam created an interesting dynamic. He had fled to Egypt from Jerusalem to keep Solomon from killing him after the prophet Ahijah foretold the kingdom would be divided and Jeroboam would be king over ten of the twelve tribes. Perhaps now that Rehoboam was king, Jeroboam was giving him a chance to do the right thing and keep the kingdom from being divided.

Rehoboam took three days to consider the people's request rather than reacting immediately. He showed wisdom by setting aside time to think and seek counsel. We also would do well to slowly and carefully think before making quick responses and snap judgments.

Resource Packet Item 1: The Awkward Request

Distribute the information sheet and summarize it for the class. Understanding the historical and biblical context will enable students to grasp the situation Rehoboam was in.

Discuss

- ? Share about a difficult time in your life when you were overwhelmed with advice from people around you.
- ? How can we wisely handle advice received from unreliable sources? What can you do if the sources are your friends or family?

Seek Wise Counsel

1 Kings 12:6–7

Say: Making highly impactful decisions can be challenging. Rehoboam was confronted with just such a decision as the newly crowned king of Israel. The consequences of his choices would affect many more people beyond himself; in fact, they would shape the kingdom's future. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

For especially significant and seemingly life-changing choices, trusted and experienced men and women of God can offer direction based on godly knowledge and wisdom. While it may feel like admitting a lack of knowledge, recognizing that you need outside help is inherently wise, particularly when making decisions that impact other people.

Rehoboam first requested the opinion of the men who had counseled his father. The advisors were not only tested in making decisions of this magnitude, but they had benefited from working alongside Solomon, who was renowned for his extraordinary God-given wisdom. They advised Rehoboam to show humility by serving the people so he could gain their trust. This group of older counselors likely understood the people well, having observed their behavior during Solomon's reign. They attempted to guide Rehoboam as they had his father. The new king would have been wise to listen to them.

In our day, it seems everyone with a platform claims to be an expert. It is critical for Christians to know how to discern whose voice to trust—especially when talk show hosts act as relationship counselors, radio DJs report pop culture gossip as news, and social media influencers do whatever it takes to get more views and likes. The size of a person's following—and even their résumé and qualifications—do not guarantee their advice will have the intended consequences.

Instead of listening to the voices talking the loudest, Christians should listen to experienced believers who offer wise, godly counsel, as well as the confirming voice of the Holy Spirit.

Discuss

- ? Where should a Christian start when seeking wise counsel for a challenging decision?
- ? Share a positive or negative experience you had when asking for advice. What did you learn as a result?

Part 2—Be Careful to Whom You Listen

Seeking Counsel in a Bubble

1 Kings 12:8–9

Say: From Illuminati conspiracy theorists to practitioners of the absurd religion of Pastafarianism, you can find a community of people online who will agree with whatever you choose to believe. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rehoboam decided to ignore the wisdom of his father's counselors and asked for his friends' advice instead. The great danger in seeking counsel only from people who agree with you is that no matter how wrong the idea may be, they will defend it—if only for the sake of being right themselves. It's impossible to get wise and impartial advice in an echo chamber. Unfortunately, Rehoboam chose this kind of counsel. He allowed popularity and camaraderie to cloud his judgment, as many people do the same today. Often, ratings and upvotes are the standards people use to discern credibility rather than wisdom, education, or experience.

Rehoboam appears to have been guided by a desire for approval from his friends, so he gave their advice more weight than the advice of the counselors who had experience in the exact issue he was facing. The decision point can be similar for us. A person who is going through a hard time sometimes ignores good advice that calls out their wrongdoing or sinful behavior, choosing instead to listen to the affirming words of their so-called friends. The prevalence of relative truth and political correctness in our culture can influence us to heed advice that runs counter to the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit. However, Christians must not turn away from godly correction, "for the LORD disciplines those he loves" (Hebrews 12:6, NLT).

Resource Packet Item 2: The Wise vs. the Unwise

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into small groups to look up the passages and answer the questions. Then discuss the two questions at the bottom of the page in light of the Scriptures the students have read.

Discuss

? Have you ever tried to avoid godly counsel during a difficult season because you knew it would cause discomfort or conviction? What were the results?

? Describe a time in your life when you chose to listen to the advice of friends instead of wise counsel.

Social Injustice

1 Kings 12:10–11

Say: Some define *social justice* as the fair treatment of all people in society, while for others it means punishing certain people for their perceived social crimes. Due to the fluid nature of what constitutes a social crime, it is all too easy for people in power to wield absolute authority on such matters. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rehoboam's acceptance of unwise counsel led him down the wrong path. His friends recommended that he place heavier restrictions on the people, presumably to bring them under his subjection. Like many in our culture who would sooner cancel or publicly shame someone than help them, Rehoboam chose a policy of harsh judgment that would have lasting consequences.

Cancel culture has sprung from a legitimate outcry for social justice. There is a genuine need for evil people to be punished and wicked systems to be reformed, but the

opportunity has been seized by others who misuse their power, attempting to elevate their own opinions as the only right ones and to monopolize every conversation. Following the counsel of his friends, Rehoboam decided to assert his authority by a show of strength instead of compassion. This unfair oppression would push the people away from him instead of uniting them.

Nearly all of us will have the responsibility to lead others at some point in our lives. Your leadership may be as apparent as a mentoring relationship or as obscure as unknowingly modeling patience or kindness to a coworker. Christians should avoid the folly of Rehoboam and instead decide to lead like Jesus—through compassion and grace. Such leadership can have eternal results.

Discuss

- ? How can Christians avoid the temptation to abuse their power?
- ? What are some ways a Christian can show godly compassion when placed in a position of authority?

Part 3—Heeding Unwise Advice Has Consequences

Public Display of Stupidity

1 Kings 12:12–15

Say: People made many of the same mistakes in the Iron Age as they do in the Internet Age—although now thousands of people can watch failures online within minutes! Unfortunately for Rehoboam, his epic fail was on display for all the kingdom to see. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Certain segments of the media have made a living by curating lists of people’s failures. Some are viewed so many times they become viral sensations. Because of his visibility, Rehoboam didn’t have to wait for the news of his failure to spread. After three days of deliberation, “Jeroboam and all the people returned to hear Rehoboam’s decision” (1 Kings 12:12, NLT). The entire kingdom could see what was happening when “Rehoboam spoke harshly to the people” (verse 13, NLT), promising to lay heavier burdens on them and show more cruelty than his father had. By following the unwise advice of his friends instead of the counsel of experienced elders, Rehoboam “paid no attention to the people” (verse 15, NLT), alienating ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. His foolish mistake cost him a majority of the kingdom and fulfilled the words of the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29–32).

Decisions as pivotal as Rehoboam’s may not seem likely to come up in the lives of Christians today. Most of us do not hold the power to divide countries or cause kingdoms to rise or fall. However, we will make many impactful decisions throughout our lives, often with eternal consequences for ourselves and the people we influence. We must understand how to discern between right and wrong voices in the media. There are dramatic consequences when we do not.

Discuss

? Have you ever made a mistake that embarrassed you publicly? How did you deal with the fallout?

? What should a Christian do after making a mistake with dire consequences?

The Court of Public Opinion

1 Kings 12:16–19

Say: The court of public opinion—defined as the beliefs and judgment of the majority—seems to be social media’s rule of law. If enough people push hard enough for a particular outcome, it tends to happen. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rehoboam may have been the king of all Israel, but his disrespect of the people caused every tribe except Benjamin and Judah to decide to no long-er follow him or acknowledge his rule. The court of public opinion decided Rehoboam was not fit to be king and Israel was split in two. Regardless of a person’s intention when they choose a certain course of action, other people’s perception cannot be controlled. There will be inevitable consequences.

Listening to the wrong voices made Rehoboam an adversary to most of his kingdom. Though his intention may have been to earn the respect of his people through fear, the consequence of his actions proved quite different. His irresponsibility tarnished the legacy of his forefathers, tore apart his kingdom, and diminished the inheritance of his descendants for generations. Listening to the wrong media or counsel in our day and age can also have serious unintended consequences.

Christians are commanded to abandon the ways of the world and discern God’s will by letting Him work in their lives. “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2, NLT). Public opinion is often diametrically opposed to the will of God. His opinion is the only one that truly matters. The closer our relationship with Him, the more wisdom we have in making decisions.

God has also established elders and overseers to guide others according to Scripture. Their role includes correcting those who oppose the teaching of God’s Word (Titus 1:9). Elders should be sought out for advice, because there is great benefit in the gifts and experience God has given them. As Rehoboam found out, ignoring wise counsel and following unwise counsel can have severe consequences—both in the court of public opinion and in one’s standing with God.

Resource Packet Item 3: The Loudest Voice

Distribute the worksheet, and suggest that your students take it home and evaluate the way they spend their time and the voices they are listening to. Encourage them to pray for wisdom to correctly discern the messages of media.

Discuss

? Discuss a time you did something with good intentions, but it was negatively received. How can a Christian silence the voices vying for their attention and focus on hearing from God?

? Whom has God placed in your life to offer wise counsel and guidance?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Christians are flooded with innumerable opinions and biased information every time we turn on the TV or pick up our phones. From 24-hour news cycles and incessant push notifications to social media influencers desperate for likes and political talking heads disguising opinion as fact, the media is constantly telling us how to live. However, God's people aren't left to sort all this out alone. His Word and His Spirit are like a compass pointing us toward the truth. When we listen to Him and the trusted people He sends our way, we will be able to discern wisely between good and evil and stay on the path that leads to life (Matthew 7:14).

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate the voices that are allowed to speak into your life, whether wise or unwise.
- Seek God's counsel before making significant decisions.
- Be open to correction and guidance from trusted, godly elders.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Words in Your Mouth.

Exodus 4:10–17

Tuesday:

Trust in God's Wisdom.

Proverbs 3:1–8

Wednesday:

Words of Wisdom.

Proverbs 18:1–7

Thursday:

Renew Your Mind.

Romans 12:1–3

Friday:

Discern What Is Best.

Philippians 1:9–11

Saturday:

Distinguish Good from Evil.

Hebrews 5:11–14