

Sell What You Have

Genesis 12:1-4 · Mark 10:17-31 · Philippians 3:4-11

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Jesus's call to leave everything is not contempt for creation but the clearing of a heart for treasure, and hears St. John of the Cross's *nada* as a Gospel word, not a grim one.

Catholic Touchstone. Poverty of heart and detachment (CCC 2544-2547): Jesus enjoins his disciples to prefer him to everything and everyone, and abandonment to providence frees us from anxiety about tomorrow.

What You Need to Know

Tonight the group meets the most misunderstood word in St. John of the Cross: *nada*, nothing. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* he sketched a mountain path marked "nada, nada, nada," and gave beginners a set of counsels built on a paradox: the way to possess everything is to desire to possess nothing (Ascent I.13). Out of context this sounds like world-hatred. In context it is pure Gospel: it is Mark 10 spoken to the interior life.

Be precise about what John means, because the steelman tonight turns on it. John does not teach that created things are bad; he teaches that disordered attachment to them is what cripples the soul. His famous image, summarized: it makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a heavy chain or a slender thread; either way it cannot fly until the line is broken. The problem is never the goodness of the thing; it is the grip of the appetite.

St. Teresa says the same thing in her homelier register: by her own account in her *Life*, she spent years trying to hold God with one hand and the world's attachments with the other, and found it made her miserable in both directions. Her counsel to beginners is uncompromising on detachment precisely because she remembers the cost of compromise.

Pastorally: someone in the room is hearing "sell what you have" as an accusation about their possessions or their vocation. Keep the focus where Jesus keeps it: on the heart's grip, examined honestly before a loving gaze. Mark says Jesus looked at the man and loved him before he asked for everything (10:21). The look comes first. Keep it first tonight.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The pattern begins with Abram: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). The blessing is promised in the same breath as the going (12:2-3), but it lies on the far side of it; Abram leaves country, kindred, and father's house, the concentric circles of belonging, and takes his household toward a future he cannot yet see. He goes (12:4), and the whole history of salvation moves through that departure.

Israel repeats the pattern in the Exodus: out of Egypt, the known and gripping place, into a wilderness where God alone provides (we will live in that wilderness in Session 5). The Psalms distill it: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25).

Jesus fulfills the pattern in his own flesh: though he was rich, for our sake he became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9), and Philippians 2:6-8 traces his self-emptying to the cross. When he says "sell what you have... and come, follow me," he is inviting the rich man into the shape of his own life. Paul, in tonight's third text, is a man who accepted that invitation: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John of the Cross

In his counsels for beginners, St. John teaches, in substance: to come to possess all, desire to possess nothing; to come to be all, desire to be nothing; to come to the knowledge of all, desire to know nothing. And he explains the stakes with his image of the tethered bird: whether the cord is a chain or a thread, the bird is equally unable to fly until it is cut. He is not despising the world. He is refusing to let anything smaller than God own a heart made for God.

The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book I, ch. 13, summarized; the bird image is from Ascent I, ch. 11.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Avila

Teresa devotes early chapters of *The Way of Perfection* to detachment, and teaches, in substance, that detachment from created things, embraced for God, carries its own reward: the soul that stops grasping finds a freedom and dominion it never had while it clung. She is blunt that half-measures fail; her *Life* tells the cost of her own years of trying them. But she is equally clear about the direction of the exchange: we let go of lesser goods not to have less, but because God intends to give more.

Summarized from The Way of Perfection, chs. 8-10, on detachment; the personal testimony is from her Life.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

As a small child, offered a basket of ribbons and pretty materials for dressing dolls by her sister and told to choose, Thérèse answered, "I choose all," and took the whole basket. Looking back, she saw her spiritual life in that moment: she would refuse God nothing, and so refuse herself the game of half-gifts. Detachment and "I choose all" are the same movement seen from two sides: empty hands are how you carry everything God wants to give.

Story of a Soul, Manuscript A.

Catechism Connection

CCC 2544 states the claim of tonight's Gospel without softening: Jesus enjoins his disciples to prefer him to everything and everyone, and to renounce all they have for his sake and the Gospel's. The paragraph points to the widow's two coins as the standard: giving out of one's very livelihood.

CCC 2545 extends it to all the faithful (not just religious): all Christ's faithful are to direct their affections rightly, lest the use of worldly things and attachment to riches hinder the pursuit of perfect love. That phrase, "direct their affections rightly," is John's entire doctrine of the appetites in one clause.

CCC 2547 gives the positive horizon: abandonment to the providence of the Father frees us from anxiety about tomorrow, and trust in God prepares the blessedness of the poor, who will see God. Read that beatitude trajectory aloud; it is where Session 12 ends.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Thread A ("The Tailor's Apprentice"): one sentence only tonight, placed after the steelman if it lands well: the Krakow tailor we mentioned last week took the road of detachment as a layman with a job, a rented room, and no title. Nothing more yet.

Sealed guess: remind the group to keep bringing Take-Home 1, folded. Do not discuss its question.

Vocabulary discipline: tonight establishes that *nada* means the freeing of desire, not the hatred of things. Sessions 5 and 6 depend on the group having this straight; if it wobbles, fix it now.

Session Goals

1. Read Mark 10:17-31 closely enough to see the look of love (v. 21) before the demand, and the sadness that refuses (v. 22).
2. Discover the Abraham pattern behind Jesus's call: leaving precedes receiving.
3. Understand St. John's nada accurately, as ordered love rather than contempt for creation, and answer the Gnosticism objection.
4. Have each person name (privately, in writing) one thread that tethers them.

Time note (75-90 min). Win 10 min; Build 50 min; Send and Live It 15 min. If short on time, cut Q5 and compress the Genesis discovery to a read-and-note; keep the steelman whole.

Sell What You Have

Genesis 12:1-4 · Mark 10:17-31 · Philippians 3:4-11

Opening Prayer

Father, you gave your Son everything, and he held nothing back from you. Teach us tonight what our hands are gripping. Loosen them gently, and fill them with what you have wanted to give us all along. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN

W1. What is something harmless in itself that you know has too strong a grip on you (your phone, a routine, a comfort)? How do you know it grips you?

W2. Have you ever given something up and been surprised to find you were freer, not poorer? What happened?

BUILD

Q1. Read Mark 10:17-22. Before Jesus asks the man for anything, what does verse 21 say Jesus did? Why does the order matter?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"And Jesus looking upon him loved him" (10:21). The look of love precedes the call to renounce. Jesus is not setting a trap or exposing a fraud; he is loving a good man toward a greater good ("You lack one thing"). Every hard word in this study stands under that gaze. Detachment demanded without love breeds either pride or despair; detachment invited by love is a proposal.

Q2. The man has kept the commandments from his youth, and Jesus does not dispute it. So what is actually wrong? Look at verse 22 for the diagnosis.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Nothing in his conduct is condemned; the diagnosis appears only when Jesus touches his possessions: "his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (10:22). Mark's wording almost reverses ownership: his possessions had him. This is exactly St. John's thread and chain: the man is moral, sincere, drawn to Jesus, and tethered. The one thing he lacks is the freedom to receive the everything Jesus offers.

DISCOVERY MOMENT · Q3

Jesus's "go... and come, follow me" has a deep Old Testament root: another man told by God to leave everything familiar with only a promise to walk toward. Have the group find the passage (hint if needed: the first chapters of the story of Israel, a man called out of his father's house). Read what he was asked to leave and what he was promised.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 12:1-4. Abram is told to leave country, kindred, and father's house, the three concentric circles of ancient belonging, for "the land that I will show you," a future entirely in God's hands. The promise

(blessing, great name, blessing for all families of earth) is attached to the command; the blessing lies on the far side of the going. Abram "went, as the LORD had told him." The rich man of Mark 10 is offered the Abraham road, and goes home instead. Leaving precedes receiving; it is the oldest pattern in the covenant.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IS DETACHMENT JUST BAPTIZED GNOSTICISM?

Give this objection its full weight. A friend who knows church history says: "This Carmelite nada business is not biblical faith; it is Greek dualism wearing a habit. Scripture says God saw everything he made and it was very good (Genesis 1:31), and Paul explicitly warns against ascetics who forbid what God created, because everything created by God is good and to be received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:3-4). A spirituality of nothing, nothing, nothing slanders the goodness of creation and the God who called it good. The Bible celebrates wine, feasts, marriage, harvests. St. John of the Cross would apparently have us want none of it."

Let the group sit with it; several of them half-believe it.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Concede the guard-rail: yes, creation is very good, and any spirituality that despises matter is condemned by Genesis 1, by 1 Timothy 4, and ultimately by the Incarnation itself. If John taught contempt for creation, he would be wrong. But read him carefully: his target is never the thing, always the disordered appetite that grips it. The bird image gives it away: nothing is wrong with the thread; the problem is that it prevents flight. Jesus himself, who came eating and drinking (Matthew 11:19) and made wine at a wedding, is the same Jesus who says "sell what you have" to a man whose goods owned him, and "any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). The Gospel holds both: creation is good, and the heart must be free. John's nada serves the second truth without denying the first. In fact John held that the soul freed from grasping finally enjoys creatures rightly, in God. Detachment is not the opposite of enjoying the world; grasping is.

DIG DEEPER: SKYBALA, PAUL'S STRONG WORD

In Philippians 3:8 Paul says he counts his old advantages as "refuse" for the sake of Christ. The Greek *skybala* is coarse: rubbish, dung, what you scrape off. Paul is not measured about this. Ask the group: Paul lists real goods in 3:4-6 (heritage, zeal, observance). What does it do to your picture of Christ that a man could weigh all of that against "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" and call it loss?

Q4. Read Philippians 3:7-11. Paul is Mark 10's scene with the opposite ending. What did Paul "sell," and what does he say he gained? Is his tone deprived or thrilled?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Paul surrendered his entire resume (3:4-6): pedigree, status, righteousness under the law, the identity he had built for decades. And his tone is unmistakably that of a man who won the exchange: "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (3:8-9). This is the answer to the sorrow of Mark 10:22 and a living illustration of Mark 10:29-30: no one leaves anything for Jesus's sake without receiving back a hundredfold, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. Detachment in the saints always has this grammar: loss freely taken for a greater having.

Q5. Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom (10:25), and the disciples ask, "Then who can be saved?" How does Jesus's answer in 10:27 change the whole conversation?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (10:27). Jesus does not soften the demand; he relocates the power. Detachment at the depth God asks is not a human achievement; it is a grace we consent to, usually slowly, often painfully. This protects tonight from moralism: the point of naming your thread is not to snap it by willpower this week but to hand it over and let God begin. That is also precisely how St. John understands the "nights" we will meet in Sessions 5 and 6: God doing in us what we cannot do in ourselves.

SEND

S1. What is one "thread" you could name before God tonight, not to break it by force, but to stop pretending it is not there?

S2. Mark 10:21 says Jesus looked at the man and loved him. If you let that gaze rest on you and your grip this week, what do you think he would say you lack?

Live It This Week

- Keep the five minutes of daily prayer. This week, begin each time by opening your hands, palms up, for a slow breath: a bodily word for "I am not grasping."
- Choose one small, real detachment for the week (one comfort, one purchase, one scroll session) and give it up quietly, telling no one but God. Attach it to a prayer for one person.
- Reread Philippians 3:7-11 once mid-week and mark the verbs Paul uses for what he gained.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you looked at the rich young man and loved him, and you look at us the same way. We do not want to walk away sorrowful. Show us our threads and chains, give us courage to let you cut them, and be yourself our treasure. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE · PHILIPPIANS 3:8

"Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

SESSION 2 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Sell What You Have

Every passage used, in order

Passage	Where it is used
Mark 10:17-31	Core text: the rich man, the look of love, the impossible made possible
Gen 12:1-4	Discovery moment: the Abraham pattern, leaving precedes receiving
Phil 3:4-11	Q4: Paul as the opposite ending; skybala Dig Deeper
Gen 1:31; 1 Tim 4:3-4	Steelman: goodness of creation at full strength
Matt 11:19; Luke 14:33	Steelman answer: Jesus feasting and Jesus demanding renunciation
John 2:1-11	Steelman answer: Jesus made wine at a wedding
2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:6-8	OT Roots section: Christ's self-emptying
Ps 73:25	OT Roots: nothing on earth I desire besides you
Mark 10:29-30	Q4 answer: the hundredfold promise, with persecutions