

What Do You Seek?

Deep-Dive: The Door That Stayed Shut (The Rich Young Man)

A standalone session: any group, any order

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group discovers the Gospel's most sobering scene: a sincere, morally serious man receives a direct personal call from Jesus, is loved as he hears it, and walks away; and that the no is real, respected, and answered not with a chase but with the sentence that keeps the story open: all things are possible with God.

Catholic Touchstone: Jesus' answer to the rich young man draws the whole moral life toward its center: keeping the commandments, and then the invitation, addressed to freedom: come, follow me (CCC 2052-2053).

The Knock in This Encounter (leader only)

This is the study's shadow session: the encounter where the door stays shut. The man initiates by running and kneeling, but the decisive move is still Christ's: the look of love and the personal call (Mk 10:21). The freedom is so real that it can refuse, and Jesus lets it: no chase, no renegotiated offer, no withdrawal of the love. **Spoiler discipline:** if your group has not finished the six core sessions, keep this framing leader-only; if they have, this session is the frame's proof of honesty, and someone will likely say so.

What You Need to Know

Take the man's resume seriously, because Mark does. He runs to Jesus and kneels: eagerness plus reverence. His question is the right question: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17). His claim stands unchallenged: the commandments, "all these I have observed from my youth" (10:20), and Jesus does not dispute it. This is not a hypocrite being exposed; it is the best version of the moral achiever, and every high-performing seeker in your room will recognize the type from the inside.

Handle verse 18 honestly, because a sharp seeker will raise it: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Jesus is not denying His divinity; He is auditing the man's premise. The man may have used "good" as little more than a polite address; Jesus makes him look at the word's actual weight: either stop using it casually, or follow its logic to where it leads. The verse is a raised stake, not a disclaimer, and it fits the pattern of a teacher who answers questions with better questions.

Then the verse the whole session must protect: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him" (10:21). Mark says this of no other individual in his Gospel. The hard call that follows, sell, give, come, follow, is spoken inside the love, not instead of it, and the man's refusal does not revoke it. When he goes away sorrowful, "for he had great possessions" (10:22), Jesus does not run after him, sweeten the terms, or condemn him. He lets a loved man walk, because a yes that cannot be a no is not a yes.

The call itself was diagnostic, not a universal tariff. "You lack one thing": the one thing was *his* one thing. Zacchaeus gave half and was saved; Joseph of Arimathea stayed rich and buried the Lord. But do not use that fact to defang the scene: Jesus really does say how hard it is for those with riches to enter

the kingdom, hard enough to astonish the disciples twice, and His resolution is not a loophole but a miracle: “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God” (10:27). Salvation was never purchasable, not even by renunciation; it is a gift that makes possible what men cannot do. That sentence is why the story, and every story like it, stays open.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 20:1-17. The live discovery: the group compares Jesus' commandment list in Mark 10:19 against the Decalogue and finds what is missing: the commandment against coveting (with “do not defraud” standing in the gap). The omission is striking, and many interpreters take it as deliberate: the one commandment the man could not honestly claim is the one Jesus leaves off the list, so that “you lack one thing” lands precisely on the wound.

Ecclesiastes 5:10. “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.” Israel's own wisdom already knew the diagnosis. Leader background.

Voices of the Church

St. Anthony of the Desert *as recorded by St. Athanasius, Life of Antony (summary)*

Around the year 270, a wealthy young Egyptian walked into church as the Gospel of the rich young man was being read in Matthew's account, heard “go, sell what you have” (Mt 19:21), took it as addressed to himself, and did it. The great flowering of desert monasticism traces to one man declining to walk away from this passage; the Church calls Antony its father, though Christian ascetics lived before him. A faithful summary of Athanasius's account.

St. Francis of Assisi *early biographical tradition (summary)*

A millennium later, a merchant's son stripped himself of his inheritance before the bishop of Assisi and embraced total poverty; and when Francis and his first companion opened the Gospel book to learn their way of life, the first text they found was this very command, “go, sell what you have” (Mt 19:21), which the earliest Franciscan Rule quotes in its opening lines. The passage the rich young man refused has been accepted, and lived, more than once, and the results are on the record. A faithful summary of the early biographical tradition, including the Legend of the Three Companions.

Pope St. John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor (summary)*

John Paul II opened his great encyclical on the moral life with an extended meditation on this same encounter as Matthew tells it (Mt 19:16-21): the young man's question is every person's question, the commandments are the first answer, and the call to follow Christ is addressed to human freedom, which God's grace assists but never replaces. A faithful summary of sections 6-22.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2052-2053:** this very dialogue: the commandments as the first answer, and the call to follow Christ as the invitation beyond them.
- **CCC 1723:** true beatitude is not found in riches, fame, or power, but in God alone.
- **CCC 2002:** God's free initiative demands man's free response; this session shows the response withheld, and the initiative undiminished.

Hosting Your Seeker Friend

This Week's Coaching

For a seeker who has felt the whole study circling toward a decision, this is the most reassuring session on the shelf, and you should let it be: the no is real, it is spoken to a man Jesus loves, and nobody chases him down the road. Say that plainly if your friend needs it. Two cautions. First, the money conversation: do not let the group audit the rich from a comfortable distance; the “one thing” is not always money, and every person at the table has one. Second, resist tidy endings: the text does not tell us what became of the man, and neither should we. What we can say is what verse 27 says: the door he could not open is not therefore locked; all things are possible with God.

Standalone Notes

- No dependencies: run before, during, or after the core, or alone.
- Pairs with the Zacchaeus deep-dive as a deliberate diptych: two rich men, two endings to an encounter with the same Lord; either order works.
- If run after the core, expect the group to contrast this scene with the good thief unprompted: the man with everything refuses; the man with nothing asks. Confirm from the texts and add nothing.

Session Goals

1. Establish the man's genuine moral seriousness; this is not a hypocrite story.
2. Handle verse 18 honestly as a raised stake, not a denial.
3. Land the live discovery: the missing commandment in Jesus' list, and where “you lack one thing” strikes.
4. Protect verse 21: the call is spoken inside love, and the refusal does not revoke it.
5. Close on verse 27: impossible with men, possible with God; the story stays open.

Time Note

75 minutes of content in a 90-minute evening. If long: cut the Dig Deeper first, then merge Build questions 1 and 2. Never cut the live discovery or the verse 21 question; they are the session's hinges.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening

Leader prays alone, briefly. State the two rules if new faces are present: nobody gets called on; nobody's answer gets graded.

"God, tonight's story does not end the way we want it to. Give us the honesty to sit with it anyway. Amen."

Win

1. Think of something you could not put down even if you became convinced you should: a habit, a role, a possession, a grudge, an image of yourself. You do not have to name it. What makes some things impossible to release?
2. Is there a difference between admiring a way of life and being willing to live it? Where have you felt that gap?

Build

Read Mark 10:17-20 aloud.

1. Build the man's resume from these verses: how he approaches, what he asks, what his record is. Is there anything insincere here? What kind of person is this?
2. "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Is Jesus deflecting a compliment, or doing something else with it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The resume goes unchallenged and the manner is earnest: he runs, he kneels, he asks the biggest question there is, and his commandment-keeping goes unchallenged. This is the moral achiever at his best, the person who has done everything right and can feel that it has not been enough; many seekers know him from the mirror. And verse 18 is not a deflection but an audit: the man has perhaps used "good" as a pleasantry, and Jesus makes him weigh the word: only God is good, so either retract it, or follow its logic all the way to its conclusion. The stake is raised, not lowered.

3. Look carefully at the commandments Jesus lists in verse 19 and compare them with the Ten Commandments. Let's find Exodus 20 and check the list against the original. What is missing?

Live discovery: *have the group find Exodus 20:1-17, compare it with Mark 10:19, and name what Jesus left off. Give them time; this one rewards patience.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus lists the commandments toward neighbor, but the commandment against coveting is missing, with "do not defraud" standing near its place. Many readers see the omission as a scalpel: the one commandment this man could not honestly claim is the one Jesus declines to let him claim. So when Jesus says "you lack one thing," the sentence lands exactly on the gap in the list. The man's possessions did not appear in his moral inventory because they were the lens he was taking the inventory through.

Read Mark 10:21-27 aloud.

4. Before the hard sentence comes a short one: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him." Mark says this about no other individual in his Gospel. Why does it matter that the call arrives inside that look?

5. He goes away sorrowful, and Jesus lets him. No chase, no better offer, no condemnation. What does Jesus' restraint tell you about how God treats human freedom, and what does verse 27 do to the story's ending?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The love comes first and is never revoked: the call is not a trap set for a hypocrite but a door opened for a beloved man, and the sorrow of verse 22 is the sorrow of a man who was loved as he heard the call. Then the restraint: a yes that cannot be a no is not a yes, and Jesus honors the refusal at the cost of watching a loved man walk. But verse 27 forbids us to close the file: what is impossible with men, including this man releasing his one thing, is possible with God. Mark never tells us the ending, and the Church has never presumed to. The door stayed shut that afternoon; the text refuses to say it stayed shut forever.

Where the Skeptic Is Strongest (steelman)

Two objections deserve full strength. First: "So Christianity demands poverty; this is hostility to human flourishing dressed as holiness." Answer from the record: the call was diagnostic, aimed at this man's one thing; Zacchaeus gave half and heard "salvation has come to this house," and Joseph of Arimathea stayed wealthy and used it to bury the Lord. The Gospel is not a flat tax on possessions; it is a demand for the throne, and it identifies whatever currently occupies it. Second, from the opposite side: "Then nobody really has to do anything; the bar was rhetorical." Answer honestly: tell that to Anthony and Francis, who took the words at face value and remade the world; and sit with the fact that Jesus let the astonishment stand: it is hard, camel-through-a-needle hard, for the rich to enter. The resolution is neither a loophole nor an achievable price. It is verse 27: salvation cannot be purchased at any price, including total renunciation; it is a gift that makes the impossible possible. Both objections assume the door is opened by payment. The whole scene exists to deny it.

Dig Deeper (optional)

Peter's reaction in 10:28 is wonderfully human: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you," in other words, we did the thing he would not; what do we get? And Jesus, instead of rebuking the accounting, answers it extravagantly: a hundredfold now, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, "with persecutions," and eternal life (10:29-30). The honesty of "with persecutions" in the middle of the promise is its own credential: this recruiter reads out the costs.

Send

3. If Jesus' "one thing you lack" were aimed at you with the same precision it was aimed at him, where would it land? You do not have to say it aloud.
4. The man walked away and the love did not. What does it change to know that a no is heard, respected, and not the end of the file?

Live It This Week

1. Name your one thing to yourself, privately, in writing if you can bear it. Diagnosis is not surrender; it is honesty.
2. Do one small act this week that loosens its grip: give something away, skip one indulgence of it, say one true sentence about it to someone safe.
3. Read Mark 10:17-31 once more, alone, and let verse 21 be about you.

Closing

Leader alone, briefly: “Lord, you looked at him and loved him, and you let him walk, and you never said it was over. Look at each of us that way, and keep our files open. Amen.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.” Mark 10:27

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every Passage in This Session

Primary Text

- Mark 10:17-31, the question, the audit of “good,” the look of love, the one thing, the sorrowful exit, the astonished disciples, the open ending

Live Discovery Text

- Exodus 20:1-17, the Decalogue compared with Mark 10:19: the missing commandment

Supporting Texts

- Ecclesiastes 5:10, he who loves money will not be satisfied with money (leader background)
- Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus: the diptych partner (steelman)
- Mark 10:28-31, Peter's accounting and the hundredfold (Dig Deeper)

Catechism

- CCC 2052-2053, 1723, 2002

Memory Verse

- Mark 10:27