

Semicontinuous
Job 23:1–9, 16–17
Ps. 22:1–15

Complementary
Amos 5:6–7, 10–15
Ps. 90:12–17

Heb. 4:12–16
Mark 10:17–31

What Must I Do?

Goal for the Session *As Jesus confronts the rich man with his weakness in Mark 10, adults will name what they can do to inherit eternal life.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 10:17–31

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” C. Clifton Black

Answers Jesus: Wealth is a greater obstacle into the kingdom than a camel’s bulk through a needle’s eye (10:25; see also 4:18–19). The comment’s sheer absurdity is in alignment with Jesus’ parabolic speech, as suggested by the Twelve’s flabbergasted query: “Then who can be saved?” (v. 26). Repeating the action directed toward his first questioner, Jesus’ response drives home this passage’s main point: What is humanly impossible remains divinely achievable (v. 27). This way of putting things returns the reader to the form in which the man originally framed his question: “What must *I* do?” Ultimately, salvation cannot lie in mortal hands. It resides only with God, without whose support the human will cannot achieve its deepest desires.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James J. Thompson

As we accumulate riches, we are tempted to trust in our possessions and our powers of acquiring them, rather than in God, for our ultimate security and comfort. Even honestly acquired and generously shared wealth can thus lead to pride. This is why it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. It is hard to let go of the immediate basis of our security and comfort—and the more we have, the harder it gets.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” David B. Howell

When the disciples exclaimed, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus responded with hope: “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible” (v. 27). Those thick-skulled disciples had finally understood something: just how hard it is to change and to live out kingdom ethics. For them and for us, Jesus holds out the hope that, with God, change and first steps are not only possible but are already happening (“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age . . . and in the age to come eternal life” [vv. 29–30]).

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Charles L. Campbell

Jesus’ approach to the rich man is helpful. Jesus loves the rich man; he does not view the man as intentionally evil. Indeed, the man appears to be faithful in many ways, having kept the commandments from his youth. Rather than condemning the “sin” of the rich man, Jesus confronts the man with his *weakness*, his captivity to possessions that prevents him from living into the full life of the kingdom. Jesus here names the “power” that holds the man captive and invites the man to step into freedom. As Jacques Ellul said, “To give away money is to win a victory over the spiritual power that oppresses us.”

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 10:17–31

Focus on Your Teaching

North American culture in the twenty-first century is rife with consumerism. Adults encounter messages to buy more to live better. They are coaxed by campaigns to attain the biggest, the best, and the most in order to be happy. Today's text allows participants to explore the gospel's difficult teachings about wealth and possessions. For some participants, wealth (or lack of it) is a sensitive topic. Be aware that you may have participants who are experiencing financial difficulties. Jesus' emphasis on a dependence on God, in whom all things are possible, can be a word of good news.

*Gracious God, I place my preparation and my leading in your hands.
Grant me wisdom and insight as I seek to present your text for today.
Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint or board
- marker
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 17, 2021

For Responding

- option 1: Bibles, paper, pens
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
- option 3: Bibles, paper, pens

This story is also found in Matthew 19:16–30 and Luke 18:18–30. In Matthew's version, the man is young. Luke shows him as a ruler. All three Gospels call him rich.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make three columns on a board or newsprint for Exploring. Title the columns "Demands," "Judgment," and "Promises." If you choose option 3 in Responding, talk with the group leader(s) of youth and other adult groups who use this curriculum to see if you might do the activity separately and meet together to exchange and discuss responses.

Welcome participants as they arrive. Form conversation groups of three or four and have the groups discuss:

✠ What must Christians do to inherit eternal life?

Following brief discussion, gather the groups and invite responses from the conversations. Tell participants that this session explores Jesus' answer to the question of what to do to inherit eternal life.

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

Great God, we gather this day seeking you and your good news. Help us to learn from one another as we study your Word together. Amen.

EXPLORING

Explain to the group that today's focus scripture consists of three sections. Invite three volunteers to read the three sections aloud to the whole group. The sections are Mark 10:17–22, 23–27, and 28–31. After the reading, form three groups and have the volunteer who read the passage read it again just to her or his small group. Have them discuss this question:

✠ What does your assigned passage say about entering the kingdom of God?

Gather participants and have them give insights from their group discussion. After hearing the group reports, ask:

- ✧ What does the whole passage say about entering the kingdom of God?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 10:17–31) and have participants read the “What?” excerpt silently. Ask:

- ✧ Why does the rich man need to do anything about his wealth?

Remind people that last week’s discussion about divorce also made the point that despite human failures all things are possible with God.

Have participants return to their three small groups or have them work individually to identify the demands, judgments, and promises mentioned in the focus scripture. Gather the groups and record examples from their group work to fill the three columns on the prepared board or newsprint. Invite participants to compare and contrast the demands and judgments with the promises found in the text.

Read the “Where?” excerpt from the resource sheet and have people put themselves in the place of the rich man. Acknowledge we do not know how he responded to Jesus’ advice. We only know that he was shocked and went away grieving. Ask:

- ✧ What do you think the man thought about the risk of depending totally on following Jesus?
- ✧ What do you think the rich man did after he left?

Read the “So What?” excerpt from the resource sheet and have people put themselves in the place of the disciples. Ask:

- ✧ What are the lessons learned from this encounter?
- ✧ What must one do to inherit eternal life?

Transition to Responding by reading the “Now What?” excerpt. Discuss:

- ✧ How does your church name the powers that prevent people from living into the full life of the kingdom?
- ✧ How does your church invite people to step into freedom?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. What Must I Do?** With this activity, participants take time to contemplate a personal response to the question raised by the rich man in the focus scripture. Distribute paper and pens. Have participants write “What Must I Do?” at the top of their paper. Invite participants to reflect on Mark 10:17–31 and group discussions from this session. Give time for individuals to write their personal responses to this question. Encourage them to consider how their reflections may affect the way they live their faith. Assure them that their writings will remain private.

**EASY
PREP**

Responding options 1 and 2 are done individually so that participants may feel freer to be honest with themselves. However, if there is a high degree of trust in your group, a few volunteers might read their responses to the group.

Have people take home their personal writings and commit to reading what they wrote at least twice in the coming week.

- 2. A Wealthy, Consumer Culture** This activity engages participants in a self-assessment to look at the prominence of wealth and possessions in their lives. It encourages them to commit to action toward lessening the power of wealth and possessions. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (A Wealthy, Consumer Culture) and pens. Invite participants to read and respond to the instructions on the resource sheet. Encourage self-reflection and assure participants that their responses will be private.

For Closing, some participants may choose to name one step they identify to help them live in ways in which wealth and possessions do not control them.

- 3. Responses of the Young and the Old** This activity helps participants consider how responses to Jesus might vary according to age differences. Have the participants and the visiting group introduce themselves. Give each group a piece of paper and pen, and have them assign a secretary to write what they say. Ask them to place themselves in the role of the rich ruler as if this story happened today and tell how they would respond to Jesus' answer to their inquiry.

- ✪ What are the things they would need to give away?
- ✪ What would inheriting eternal life be like in their daily life?

After a few minutes, gather everyone and have each group report its answers. Discuss:

- ✪ How are the responses from different ages of people similar or different?
- ✪ Why might there be such variations?

Challenge participants to consider what they might need to do to meet Jesus' challenge.

CLOSING

Have participants identify one action they engage in to follow Jesus. This can be an ongoing action or a step that can lessen the power of wealth or possessions in their lives.

Gather participants in a circle and invite volunteers to name the one thing that is their way of following Jesus, either aloud or in silence.

Close the session with this prayer or one like it:

All-knowing God, you know what holds us back from fully following you. We admit that it's not easy to release our livelihood and security into your hands. Receive what we are able to give. Help us to draw closer to you as we rely on you for our security and our salvation. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 17, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Mark 10:17–31

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” C. Clifton Black

Answers Jesus: Wealth is a greater obstacle into the kingdom than a camel’s bulk through a needle’s eye (10:25; see also 4:18–19). The comment’s sheer absurdity is in alignment with Jesus’ parabolic speech, as suggested by the Twelve’s flabbergasted query: “Then who can be saved?” (v. 26). Repeating the action directed toward his first questioner, Jesus’ response drives home this passage’s main point: What is humanly impossible remains divinely achievable (v. 27). This way of putting things returns the reader to the form in which the man originally framed his question: “What must *I* do?” Ultimately, salvation cannot lie in mortal hands. It resides only with God, without whose support the human will cannot achieve its deepest desires.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” James J. Thompson

As we accumulate riches, we are tempted to trust in our possessions and our powers of acquiring them, rather than in God, for our ultimate security and comfort. Even honestly acquired and generously shared wealth can thus lead to pride. This is why it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. It is hard to let go of the immediate basis of our security and comfort—and the more we have, the harder it gets.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,” David B. Howell

When the disciples exclaimed, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus responded with hope: “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible” (v. 27). Those thick-skulled disciples had finally understood something: just how hard it is to change and to live out kingdom ethics. For them and for us, Jesus holds out the hope that, with God, change and first steps are not only possible but are already happening (“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age . . . and in the age to come eternal life” [vv. 29–30]).

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”

Charles L. Campbell

Jesus’ approach to the rich man is helpful. Jesus loves the rich man; he does not view the man as intentionally evil. Indeed, the man appears to be faithful in many ways, having kept the commandments from his youth. Rather than condemning the “sin” of the rich man, Jesus confronts the man with his *weakness*, his captivity to possessions that prevents him from living into the full life of the kingdom. Jesus here names the “power” that holds the man captive and invites the man to step into freedom. As Jacques Ellul said, “To give away money is to win a victory over the spiritual power that oppresses us.”

A Wealthy, Consumer Culture



In our consumer culture, we are endlessly presented with any number of possessions and ways to use our finances, to the point where we can be controlled by them. Mark the boxes next to the activities that you engage in.

- Use a landline phone
- Use a smartphone
- Use an iPad or other tablet device
- Use a desktop computer
- Send handwritten letters
- Upgrade or repair your computer within past 6 months
- Own three or more cars/vehicles
- Take a walk where you live
- Updated your wardrobe within past 6 months
- Wear clothing from last season
- Have more than one clothes closet
- Travel for vacation
- Travel for work
- Travel to visit family
- Take a cruise
- Enjoy a stay-cation
- Have neighbors to your home for a meal
- Eat in a restaurant more than two times weekly
- Help a neighbor with yard or house work
- Read to a child at home or at school
- Borrow books from the library
- Donate books to a library or community center
- Pay for a fitness club or country club membership
- Volunteer in your community
- Own a home
- Rent a home
- Live with extended family
- Own rental property

Look over the boxes you checked and make a self-assessment: How much are you controlled by possessions or wealth? In the space below, create a list of steps for releasing possessions, seeking "treasure in heaven," and following Jesus (paraphrase Mark 10:21).

Select one step from your list that allows you to commit to live in a way that wealth and possessions do not control you. You have the option of naming this step during Closing.