

## SESSION 3

# SELL EVERYTHING YOU OWN

### ▶ ***The Point***

Choose Jesus or worldly wealth, because you can't live for both.

### ▶ ***The Passage***

Matthew 19:16-26

### ▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

One of my favorite TV shows has an episode where the main character's uncle dies. The uncle wanted to be buried with all his favorite things: baseball cards, old trophies, the helmet he wore in battle—well, you get the idea. He has so much stuff in his casket they spend most of the 22-minute episode trying to figure out how to close the casket without breaking anything.

I enjoy this episode because it is just so silly. We know these things won't be with us when we die, nor will they matter; yet, some people in the world have been buried—or plan to be buried—with their possessions. No, it's true, we "can't take it with us," but it can still be easy to get wrapped up in all our stuff. The things we own are not what bring us closer to God, but in some cases, like with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, those possessions can tear us away from Him.

### ▶ ***The Setting***

As Jesus departed from Galilee and entered Judea on His way to Jerusalem to suffer crucifixion, the Pharisees approached Him to test Him concerning divorce. (See Matt. 19:1-12.) In spite of all that, Jesus made time for those who sought Him, even the little children (see vv. 13-15) and an individual inquiring how to attain eternal life. (See vv. 16-22.)

## *What does the Bible say?*

### ***Matthew 19:16-26***

**<sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”**

**<sup>17</sup> And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”**

**<sup>18</sup> He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,**

**<sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

**<sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”**

**<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”**

**<sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**

**<sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, 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.”**

**<sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”**

**<sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

# GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, gather some items you might normally put into a garage sale. Display them on a table in front of the group. Explain each one briefly. Ask group members to share what kinds of items they have sold in a garage or yard sale. Follow up by asking about the most unusual thing you've sold in a garage or yard sale. After a few responses, ask **Question 1**.

*Notes*

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 85 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **"What's one thing you'd have trouble living without?"** Allow time for each person to respond.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to **"The Bible Meets Life"** on page 86 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of choosing Jesus over wealth by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **"The Point"** on page 86 of the PSG: **"Choose Jesus or worldly wealth, because you can't live for both."**

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God to help us break away from the material things that hold a grip on us. Ask Him for the wisdom to always put Jesus first.

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# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### Matthew 19:16-20

*<sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." <sup>18</sup> He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, <sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?"*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 19:16-20 on page 87 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS: Question #2** on page 87 of the PSG: **"What do you appreciate about this young man who approached Jesus?"**

**RECAP:** We know three things about the man who came to Jesus: He was young (v. 20). He was rich (v. 22). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He may have been a leader in the synagogue. Many religious leaders questioned Jesus with the intent of trapping Him somehow, but we have no hint of that with this young man. He even called Jesus "Teacher," and he seemed willing to learn from Him.

Jesus gave the young man the checklist he was looking for. Jesus used these six commandments because they would have been familiar to this Jewish man. Most of these six commandments come directly from the Ten Commandments and involve other people. When it came to behavior, the man had done well. But he knew this was not enough. He was still missing something.

The young man may have outwardly obeyed these commandments but his obedience seems to have been out of obligation. Simply obeying the commandments was not enough. God doesn't just want our outward acts.

**TRANSITION:** Outward obedience is not enough. In the next verses, we see that external obedience grows out of our internal obedience to Christ.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How would people in our culture respond to the young man's question?

## Matthew 19:16-20 Commentary

**[Verse 16]** Jesus' encounter with the inquiring rich, young ruler demonstrates that outward obedience to God is not enough. Luke's Gospel described this individual as a "ruler" (see Luke 18:18), probably meaning that he was a leader of a local synagogue or perhaps a member of the Sanhedrin. Matthew later identified him as a "young man" (see Matt. 19:20,22), which suggests someone in the age range from early twenties to late thirties, someone in the prime of his life. The Synoptic Gospels note that he was wealthy, having many possessions. (See Matt. 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23.) The man was a person of high standing in his community—a young, respected leader and a man of great wealth.

This young man came up to Jesus with a question. Addressing Jesus as Teacher, a term equivalent to the Hebrew "Rabbi," he asked, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" This was not an unusual question to ask a religious teacher in first-century Israel. Many Jews believed that at some time in the future God would reward the faithful Jews by resurrecting them from the dead (see John 11:24) and inviting them into His eternal banquet hall. (See Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:29.) This image of a future, never-ending inheritance was most likely this man's understanding of eternal life. This young man was asking Jesus how he could earn eternal life.

**[Verse 17]** Jesus responded to the young man's question by asking him a question: "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus wanted this man to think about what he meant by the term good. With the second part of His response, Jesus sought to redirect the young man's focus off himself and his standard of goodness to where it truly belonged—on God: "There is only one who is good." Only God is truly good, that is perfectly righteous and holy. He alone sets the standard for goodness, which is revealed in His Law.

Jesus directed the young man's attention to God's standard: the Ten Commandments. "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." Since the young man was asking about what he needed to do to obtain eternal life, Jesus challenged him to affirm how well he had kept the commandments of God.

**[Verses 18-19]** The young man responded with a logical question: "Which ones?" In His response, Jesus listed commandments from the second table of the Decalogue (see Ex. 20:12-17; Deut. 5:16-21), those having to do with an individual's relations with other people. He also added the general command to love one's neighbor as yourself. (See Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:35-40.)

**[Verse 20]** The young man responded that he had kept all these commands. Jesus did not challenge his affirmation. Jesus seemed to know that the man was genuine and sincere, that he truly believed he had been faithful in these areas of his life. However, the young man must have sensed that something in his life was still not right or that Jesus expected something more than keeping the Law, so he asked, "What do I still lack?"



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### Matthew 19:21-22

**21** Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”  
**22** When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 19:21-22 on page 88 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 88 of the PSG: “What’s your initial reaction to Jesus’ answer in verse 21?”

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the meaning of “perfect” in this passage.

**RECAP:** Jesus was asking the young man to make an enormous sacrifice. He wasn’t just to sell his possessions; he was to give away the money from the sale! All of it. Gone. But let’s not get stuck on the possessions.

Giving up our possessions is not the point of this story. The Gospels record no other time Jesus called anybody to do that. In following Jesus, Zaccheus gave away half of all he owned and paid others four times what he owed them (Luke 19:1-10). In His parable of the minas (or talents), Jesus called us to use what we have wisely for His kingdom (vv. 11-27). So why did Jesus make such a radical demand of this young man? Jesus knew the man loved his worldly possessions more than he loved Jesus.

**DISCUSS: Question #4** on page 89 of the PSG: “How does Jesus’ instruction to this young man apply to us all?”

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we learn that a relationship with God matters, not possessions.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

When have you seen Jesus challenge someone’s faith by asking them to sacrifice?

## Matthew 19:21-22 Commentary

**[Verse 21]** In His response to this young man, Jesus called for a kind of external obedience to God that grows out of internal obedience grounded in a personal relationship with Him. Jesus affirmed the young man's sense of needing something more: **"If you would be perfect."** The Greek word translated **perfect** means to be "complete" or "mature." Jesus used this word to describe the moral character of God the Father (Matt. 5:48). Both Jesus and Paul used it to point to the goal of the Christian life ("be perfect," Matt. 5:48; "mature," Eph. 4:13). The young man was aiming too low by merely trying to keep the commandments. That was only an external sign. What he needed was the will and ability (see Phil. 2:12-14) to serve God and others that could come in only one way—through a relationship with Jesus.

Then Jesus gave the young man what he had asked for—the way to be perfect, to be fulfilled, to be guaranteed of eternal life. Jesus' prescription included two steps. First, Jesus told him **"Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor."** Jesus quickly added that He was offering something even more valuable—**"treasure in heaven."**

The reason for Jesus' instruction that the young man should sell all his possessions is found in Jesus' second command to this man: **"Come, follow me."** Giving away all his wealth was not the answer in and of itself. It was the first and necessary step in order to make way for the second step of following Jesus.

Jesus' command to the young man to sell all he possessed and give to the poor revealed the primary heart issue in this young man's life—His wealth and possessions held the place in his heart that only God should occupy (Matt. 6:24). Jesus told the man to give away all his possessions because Jesus knew that this young man could never take the next step of placing God (Jesus) at the center of his life until he took this first step and got rid of his possessions which held that place in his heart.

Jesus invited the young man to give up his wealth and join Him as one of His disciples. Jesus had already made it clear that He expected from His disciples a complete surrender to Him and His teachings. (See 16:24.) He also warned His disciples of the foolishness of trying to hang onto their old ways of life, while at the same time He promised those who followed Him would find true life. (See vv. 25-26.) This was His call to this wealthy young man.

**[Verse 22]** The young man had come to Jesus searching for eternal life. However, when he heard Jesus' command and invitation, **he went away sorrowful.** In his heart, the young man apparently knew Jesus was right; that's why he was grieved at Jesus' words. Why would he give up such a priceless invitation? **For he had great possessions.** Jesus had called the man to follow Him in order for him to truly experience eternal life. Yet the young man refused to act on Jesus' words that would have brought him the eternal life he sought. Apparently the young man considered the price Jesus asked to be too high.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

## Matthew 19:23-26

**23** And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** Again I tell you, 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." **25** When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" **26** But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 19:23-26 on page 90 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the "camel through the eye of a needle" metaphor.

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 90 of the PSG: "In what ways can wealth and possessions get in the way of following Jesus?"

**DO:** Direct group members to complete the activity, "Inventory Time," on page 91 of the PSG to help them understand the importance of putting God first in our lives.

*Take an inventory of your possessions and priorities by answering the questions below. Then write a prayer to God honestly bearing your soul to Him regarding your possessions. [PSG has space to list the five most difficult things for one to give up.]*

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 90 of the PSG. When we find our identity in Jesus and not in the things of this world, we experience:

- ▶ **Freedom.**
- ▶ **Peace.**
- ▶ **Joy.**

**GUIDE:** Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "Choose Jesus or worldly wealth, because you can't live for both."

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

How have you found following Jesus to be hard? How has it been easy?





## Matthew 19:23-26 Commentary

[Verses 23-24] As Jesus often did, He recognized a teachable moment and used it to stress to His disciples that a relationship with God, not possessions, is what matters. Prefacing His statement with “**Truly, I say to you**” for emphasis, Jesus said: “**Only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.**” Jesus’ words **enter the kingdom of heaven** have the same meaning as “enter life” in verse 17. To further emphasize His point, Jesus restated His message using an extreme example: “**Again I tell you, 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.**” The camel was the largest animal in first-century Israel and so probably the largest animal Jesus’ disciples had ever seen. They would also have known the size of the tailor’s needle, the smallest opening they likely knew. It would be impossible for a camel to pass through the eye of such a needle. Jesus often used exaggerated examples (hyperbole) to make His point. (For example, see Matt. 5:29-30.)

[Verse 25] Jesus’ disciples were **greatly astonished** by His words. The disciples’ astonishment may have come from the general tendency in first-century Jewish culture to view wealth and success as signs of God’s blessing and approval of His faithful followers. If gaining God’s approval to enter into the kingdom of heaven/kingdom of God was so difficult for a wealthy person, “**Who then can be saved?**” If the wealthy, those viewed as being most blessed by God, could not make it into the kingdom of God, then who could hope to be saved?

[Verse 26] Notice how Jesus first responded to His disciples’ utter astonishment: He **looked at them**. The Greek word for *looked at* has the meaning of an attentive, earnest, significant gaze. After this, Jesus responded to His disciples’ question by stating the limitless power of God: “**With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**”

Yes, wealth can tempt and pull people away from giving themselves fully to God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Yet God in His power and grace can enable those who are wealthy, even those who are addicted to their money and status, to see the two types of treasures before them and choose the one that can never rust or be stolen. (See 6:19-20.) In fact, the New Testament provides several examples of people of wealth who chose to follow Jesus. When Zacchaeus met Jesus, he was so changed that he pledged to repay four times over what he had stolen from people and give half of his possessions to the poor. (See Luke 19:1-10.) When Jesus died, a wealthy and influential man named Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, obtained the release of Jesus’ body from the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, prepared the body for burial, and buried Jesus in his own new tomb. (See Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46.)

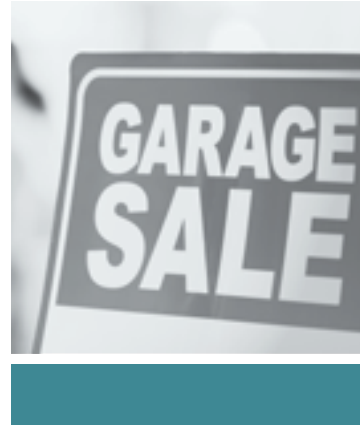
Most people will never have to wrestle with the temptation of great wealth. However, anything can become an idol if we are not careful. God calls all of us to choose the eternal treasures over the things we cannot keep, and that begins with making the choice to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 92 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Trust.** If you've been trying to be good and moral in order to gain a good standing with God, acknowledge the futility of it. Trust Christ and be obedient to His Word as a response to His grace in your life. See the inside cover of this book for help.
- ▶ **Audit.** Walk through your home and look at the things you own. Review each line of your financial statement. What do these possessions and purchases say about what's important to you? Consider ways you can use these things for God.
- ▶ **Sell.** Sell what you don't need or give it away. If you have possessions that consume your time in an unhealthy way or tempt you to focus on anything but Christ, sell it. Don't let anything come between you and following Christ.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 92 of the PSG:

God may not call all of us to give everything away, but He does desire that He be at the center of our lives. Let's make sure that's the case in our lives!

**PRAY:** Conclude by thanking the Lord for loving us and providing for us. Ask Him for the wisdom and strength to place Him first in our lives.

**GROUPS  
MATTER.**

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