



Fuel Week 2008
Optional Mid-Week Lesson

Students Should

Learn:

1. Many situations in life tempt us to compromise our relationship with God.
2. God desires our undivided loyalty.

Scripture Focus:

- Matthew 19:16–30
- Revelation 3:14–16
- Philippians 3:4b–11

What You'll Need for this Lesson:

- Walk-able fence rail
- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens or Pencils

Choosing Sides

Lesson Background:

The college football season recently ended, and in Colorado the “game of the year” just happened to be the season opener: University of Colorado vs. Colorado State. Like any good college rivalry, the loyalties run deep; everyone *must* choose a side. To sit on the fence is to ask for ridicule from those fans who are more zealous.

All the rivalry got me thinking about loyalties in general. With something like college football, choosing a side is easy. Loyalty for a non-fanatic like me is based solely on geography. Other loyalties are based on the way the wind blows. A junior high student might change loyalties from a particular clique once a better group comes along: loyalty based on attraction. Or perhaps we are loyal to a particular product until that product stops performing as we expect it to. So we switch: loyalty based on what you do for me.

When it comes to Christ-loyalty, it is often easy to ride the fence. I call myself a Christian, attend a weekly worship service, and call it a day. I get uncomfortable when you start asking for my money, time, and service. This is exactly what we will look at in this lesson: Christ desires our entire loyalty, not just what is convenient.

The main scripture focus in this lesson is Matthew 19:16–30—the story about the rich young man. I will be honest: If I were ever a higher-up in the Bible publishing business, I might “accidentally” leave this particular passage out of the canon. It’s just hard; I see myself in the young man’s shoes more often than not. I would just as soon ignore the fact that Jesus told the guy to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. Or perhaps more often, I justify my own actions by misinterpreting the scripture: “Surely Jesus didn’t *really* mean for us to sell everything—He obviously wasn’t talking about 20th-century America here.” But the fact remains

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that this passage is indeed a part of the canon (much to my chagrin), and we therefore *must* wrestle with these words. I do not claim to have this passage figured out. And I do not think the average American teenager is any closer to understanding it, either. But my hope is that through this lesson, we might begin to honestly wrestle with Jesus' instructions to the young man—and what Jesus might be asking of *us* and our loyalties.

Another main scripture focus in this lesson is Paul's words in Philippians regarding gain and loss. Paul made it clear that he chose Christ over any other loyalties. I find this passage particularly challenging because it forms a sort of mirror. I ask myself if I could speak with Paul's conviction: Do I truly count everything a loss compared to knowing Jesus Christ? It seems that every time I revisit this passage, I am reminded of all the ways in which I *do* find gain in things other than Christ, and I am once again humbled in light of what I am called to be: a Christ-follower striving for holiness with an undivided heart.

My prayer is that as you prepare this lesson and present it to your students, you will be challenged to take a closer look at your own heart. May we all cry out with the Psalmist:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24).

The Lesson

Introduction

Option 1: Choose sides

Invite your students to stand in the middle of the room. Explain that you will call out a pair of things, and they should choose one or the other by walking to the respective side of the room. Also explain that students *must* choose; no one may stay in the middle between the two choices. Use the following suggestions, or feel free to come up with your own pairs that better reflect the interests of your group:

- **Coke or Pepsi**
- **Blockbuster or Netflix**
- **Skittles or M&M's**
- **Starbucks or independent coffee**
- **Pizza Hut or Domino's**
- **Goodwill or brand name**
- **Nintendo or PlayStation**

After the activity, discuss the following:

- **Was it easy for you to choose sides? Why or why not?**
- **Did you find that your choice was ever influenced by something or someone other than yourself? If so, by**

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what?

- (If applicable) **What was it like to choose something different than the majority of the group?**
- **In life, what are some of the things or people that influence the choices you make—both in small daily decisions and in more major decisions?**
- **Is there anything you would say you are *entirely* loyal to? If so, what is it? Why would you say you have such loyalty?**

Explain that today you will be looking at loyalties and will learn what God desires for us.

Option 2: Walk the fence

If possible, find an outdoor fence rail. Invite each member of your group to attempt to balance while walking across the rail. Then discuss the following:

- **Did you ever feel as if you were going to fall? What was that like?**
- **How do you think walking a fence rail might be a metaphor for life?** Help your students see that we often attempt a balancing act when we walk the line between two choices.
- **What are some silly things in which we might walk the line?** Answers might include choosing a favorite sports team, deciding on a favorite band/music group, and so forth.
- **What are some more significant ways in which we might walk the line?** Answers might include choosing a group of friends (good or bad influence), being sold out for Christ, and so forth.
- **What is hard about riding the fence in important situations?**

Explain that today you will take a look at riding the fence and how God desires our full loyalty.

Dig In

Read the Word

Invite your students to turn to Matthew 19:16–30, and ask a student to read the passage aloud. Then discuss the following questions:

- **What was the young man looking for?** He wanted to know how to attain eternal life.
- **How did Jesus answer him at first?** He listed off several Old Testament commandments.
- **What was the young man's response?** He said that he had been faithful to keep all of these, and he wanted to know what he was still lacking. It is interesting to note that the young man knew something was still missing, even in the midst of his law-keeping. Challenge your students to consider whether we also instinctively know that simply abiding by the rules is not the full life God intends for us.
- **How did Jesus reply to the man's second question?** He

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told the young man to sell his possessions and give his money to the poor. Then he was to go and follow Jesus.

- **What did the young man do? Why?** He went away sad because he was very rich and could not bear to part with his earthly possessions.
- **How did Jesus sum up the exchange?** He said it was very hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Explain that a camel going through the eye of a needle gives us a good picture of just how hard it is for anyone to enter God's Kingdom if he or she is holding on to other loyalties.
- **Who did Jesus say could be saved?** He said that it is impossible for a person to save himself or herself, but that with God all things are possible.
- **What do you think was the main issue for the young man?** He was asked to choose between his money and his desire for eternal life. In the end, it was too difficult for him to choose.
- **Why do you think this man was holding on to his money?** We do not know for sure. Perhaps the man found his identity in his wealth. Or maybe he leaned on the so-called security he found in his possessions. Explain that this man was essentially holding on to his wealth as a false god—something or someone other than Yahweh that we turn to and depend upon. The young man found his security in his possessions, so when he was asked to turn away from those things he was not able to do so.
- **What are some things that you and I might depend upon—some common “false gods”?** Physical appearance, smarts, money, connections, family, reputation, substances, sports/music prowess, Bible/spiritual knowledge, leadership ability, and so forth.

Explain that Jesus identified the young man's true desire. This guy truly wanted to serve God, but he could not give up his attachment to wealth. He was riding the fence, and in the end he did not choose anything; he only walked away sad. In verse 21 Jesus instructed the young man how to be “perfect,” and in verse 26 Jesus told him that all things are possible with God. Help your students understand that holiness is more than just looking good on the outside. The young man had it all together on the outside, keeping the commandments. Jesus took it inward and invited the man to look at his heart. Holiness is about Christian perfection—something that *is* possible with God. But we cannot ride the fence; we must choose. Jesus essentially told the young man that in a life of holiness he could not serve both wealth and God—he must have only one loyalty.

Invite a student to read Revelation 3:14–16 aloud. Then discuss the following questions:

- **What is the main point of these verses?** God desires that we choose something. By not choosing, we are even more detestable than if we choose poorly. Loyalties do matter—

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we cannot go through life walking the fence.

- **How is it similar to not choose and to choose *no*?** Help your students understand that when we choose nothing we are indeed choosing *no* simply because we are not choosing *yes*. God desires our complete *yes* toward Him, not just our wavering indecision.

Share the following excerpt from Jim Hampton's *Everyday Saint*:

“Like the rich young man, you and I must also renounce those things which keep us from depending on anything other than God. The invitation of Jesus to holiness, that is perfection . . . is an invitation to give up everything—and anything—to follow Him. In a very real sense, what the story of the rich young man tells us is that holiness is a form of nakedness. In other words, absolutely nothing is to stand between us and God. This type of dependence demonstrates where our ultimate loyalties lie. Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, once remarked that ‘where your heart is, and where your security is, that has become your God’” (pg. 33).

Discuss the following questions (you may choose to incorporate a time of silent reflection rather than encouraging students to answer aloud):

- **What are some of the things that you personally depend on other than God?**
- **Similarly, what are some of the things that stand between you and God?**
- **Why do you think you continue to give your loyalty to things other than God?**
- **What do you think about the concept of holiness as nakedness before God? Do you think it is a good description of holiness? What might you add?**

Invite your students to turn to Philippians 3:4b–11. Ask a student to read the passage aloud. Then discuss the following questions:

- **What did Paul describe in verses 4b–6?** He gave reasons why he should be on top—he was a model Jew in every sense of the word.
- **What was Paul's point in verses 7–11?** Paul wrote that all his worldly gain was nothing compared to knowing Jesus and being known by Him.
- **What excites you when you hear these words from Paul? What do you find difficult when you hear these words? Do you think you could ever say these words and mean them? Why or why not?**

When you are ready to move on, say, **For Paul there was no fence-walking; his relationship with Christ meant everything to him.**

Wrap Up

Explain that often, by reading a scripture passage from different

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translations, we can get a unique take on the words that make the whole passage more meaningful. Read aloud Philippians 3:7–9 from the *New Living Translation*. Next, read the same passage from *The Message* paraphrase.

Then, pass out paper and pens or pencils and invite your students to come up with their own wording for the same section of scripture. Encourage them to make it as personal as they can, i.e., specifically listing the things they tend to rely upon as credentials. Then if they feel comfortable doing so, invite a few students to share what they have written with the rest of the group.

Closing

Ask the following question, giving your students time for silent reflection: **Have you given Christ your undivided loyalty?** After a time, close with the following prayer from *Everyday Saint* (pg. 37). You may choose to read a phrase aloud and allow time for the students to pray the prayer silently:

“Father, I want to serve You but there are so many things that vie for my attention. Give me blinders so I can focus exclusively on You. Instill in me a deep desire to want You more than anything else in this world. And help me learn that nothing else can compare with Your Holy Love for me. Amen.”