

THE RICH, YOUNG RULER

by Randall Schlabach and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

When Jesus heard this, he said to him: "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me."

Luke 18:22

FAITH STORY:

Luke 18:18-30

FAITH FOCUS:

There are obstacles that stand in the way of truly following Jesus. For the man in our story, it was his possessions. Jesus said to him, "Sell everything you have and give it to the poor." The man walked away, unable to do this. The disciples asked Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answered that what is impossible for mortals is possible for God. Peter responds that he and the other disciples have left everything behind, and Jesus affirms them for that decision and says they will be blessed as a result.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students consider what it means to follow Jesus and the obstacles that may stand in their way.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Know the obstacle between the rich young ruler and his ability to follow Jesus.
- Identify obstacles that may trip them up in their relationship with Jesus.
- Have the opportunity to commit or re-commit their life to Jesus or ask Jesus for help in certain aspects of their life.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1** Set up an obstacle course for students to go through—preferably outside. If you can't do it outside, find a space in your church in which to build it.

Materials to use could include boxes, old tires, sturdy furniture, ropes.

You will also need blindfolds for each student.

- 2** Slips of paper and pens
- 3** Set up a small worship center with a candle and wooden cross. The cross should be large enough for students to hammer their slips of paper onto it.
- 4** Hammer and small nails (one per student)
- 5** Dry erase board, chalkboard or newsprint and marker
- 6** Background music for the worship time

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10 minutes)

Welcome students to class and then take them to the obstacle course. Blindfold them and lead them through the course. After going through the course with blindfolds, take the students back to the beginning and lead them through it again without blindfolds.

CONNECT: (7–10 minutes)

Say: *We are going to go through the course one more time, except this time we will stop at each obstacle and name one thing that could be an obstacle in our efforts to follow Jesus.*

Go through the course, stopping at each obstacle as students name something that can come in the way of following Jesus. After you are through the course, say, "Let's check out a Bible story about a man who wanted to follow Jesus and the obstacle that tripped him up."

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (7–10 minutes)

Ask for volunteers to read the following parts of the Bible passage, Luke 18:18-30:

- narrator
- rich young ruler
- Jesus
- the listeners
- Peter

After reading the passage, ask students to identify the things that could potentially trip up a person in following Jesus (found in verses 20 and 22.)

Make a list of those problems on the chalkboard.

Ask: *Which things weren't a problem for this rich young ruler? Which things were a problem?*

Share a mini-lecture with students based on the Insights from Scripture.

APPLY: (10 minutes)

Invite the students to look at the list you made of potential obstacles to following Jesus and ask them to expand that list to include aspects that relate to their lives. Write the expanded list on the chalk board as well. Your list might look something like this:

Adultery—includes sexual immorality, premarital sex, pornography.

Murder—could include "killing" people with words.

Steal—could include cheating because that is a form of stealing.

Bear false witness—includes saying bad things about others, backstabbing

Honor parents—could include respecting adult authority figures as well as parents.

Hand out the slips of paper and pens. Ask students to look at the list and identify which elements are obstacles that trip them up in their efforts to follow Jesus. Invite them to write those things on their slips of paper and fold them up. Assure students that these will not be shared with the group.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Turn off the lights, light the candle, play the music, and invite students to the worship center. Begin with a prayer. Then invite those who wish to nail their slips of paper to the cross to do so. Nailing them to the cross can symbolize whatever the student chooses it to mean—perhaps a new or renewed commitment to following Jesus, or perhaps a prayer for help in that area of their life. Let students know that it's okay whatever they do—you would like for them to be thoughtful about this, but they don't have to respond in a certain way.

Invite students to repeat the following prayer after you:

God be in my head and in my understanding.

(Repeat)

God be in my ears and in my hearing.

(Repeat)

God be in my eyes and in my seeing.

(Repeat)

God be in my mouth and my speaking.

(Repeat)

God be in my hands and in my holding.

(Repeat)

God be in my soul and my believing.

(Repeat.)

And all God's children said Amen!

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

The man that interviews Jesus in this story is referred to as the "rich young ruler." This name comes from three different accounts in the Bible. All three call him rich. Matthew described him as young, but Mark doesn't say anything about his age. And Luke calls him a ruler—someone that is a member of the governing body of the synagogue. The use of the adjective "good" in Pharisaic Judaism means that he kept the laws in a manner that was prescribed in the traditions. When Jesus said that God alone is good, he is saying there is no place for religious pride. Jesus points the ruler to the commandments. Jesus starts with the last five commandments because he knew that the ruler would have known these since becoming a son of the Torah at the age of 12. Jesus knew what his answer would be. He also knew that his answer to the first five commandments would be the same, so he made one more request: "sell all you have, distribute it to the poor and follow me." The ruler didn't like these words because it would be difficult for him to become penniless and with no financial security.

Jesus saw his response and stated that it is very difficult for a person to enter the kingdom of God—that in fact it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom. There has been some speculation by some Bible interpreters that the needles' eye was a small gate in the wall that surrounded Jerusalem that a camel could be pushed through; or that "camel" is a mistake in the Greek text for a word that means "rope" or "cable." Neither of these suggestions is very convincing. Jesus delighted in dramatic metaphors. He wasn't afraid of extravagant exaggerations. Jesus meant what he said—that riches or any other temptation represent an obstacle too strong for mere human power.

Those who are listening ask, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus replies that with God all things are possible. This verse can be seen as the crux of our salvation—it states that even though we are sinners and it is impossible for us to please God on our own, God reaches out to us with love and grace and makes that relationship possible.

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