

YOU TEACH VOL.2 STUDY GUIDE

RICH YOUNG RULER

YOU TEACH: THE MAIN POINT

Jesus has an uncanny way of meeting people where they are in life and quickly moving the conversation between individuals and himself to crucial areas of importance. A case in point is the meeting between Jesus and a rich young ruler with an impeccable record of keeping religious laws.

Jesus knew the ruler's wealth had a grip on him and that the young ruler needed to get more of a grip on his wealth. Jesus pointed this out to the young man. Just as when he met this young ruler, Jesus today can be clear with us about what things hold us back from following him.

YOU TEACH: THE BIG PICTURE

Every day conversations take place between patients and doctors, individuals and counselors—people with questions and experts with answers. The one with the solutions usually asks the one with the issue to explain or describe the problem. Perhaps the expert asks a few initial questions and then sits back and lets the other simply talk about symptoms or feelings. Experts often have the issue pinpointed quickly and the solution ready for the seeker within the first few moments together.

Jesus is the ultimate doctor, counselor, and expert. When he lived on earth, time after time Jesus had encounters with people who had questions, issues, and needs that he quickly zeroed in on to get to the crux of the matter at hand. We see this in these examples:

- Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in John 4. Jesus diagnoses her as a thirsty soul trying to quench her thirst relationally with multiple men.
- Jesus' encounter with his would-be disciple, Nathanael. Philip, Andrew, and Peter tell this skeptical Israelite they have found the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus pegs Nathanael's doubts that "anything good could come out of Nazareth." Jesus recognizes Nathanael's attitude within the first two sentences of their dialogue in John 1:47-49.

- Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-30, the focal passage of this study. A rich young ruler comes to Jesus, wanting to know how he can ensure eternal life by adding to his ever-growing portfolio of religious good works. In less time than it would take this religious star to genuflect, Jesus tags the grip that riches have on his life.

The primary point of the rich young ruler story is not that riches are bad or that all riches should be given to the poor by all followers of Jesus. If that were the case, then Jesus would have taken up this issue with Zacchaeus, whom we read about in the very next chapter of Luke. Zacchaeus was “a chief tax collector and was wealthy.” (Luke 19:2). Moreover, the Scriptures record Zacchaeus as making the following declaration after his encounter with Jesus:

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

(LUKE 19:8)

Jesus responds not by telling Zacchaeus that he's on the right track or that all he needs to do is fork over the rest of his riches to gain salvation. Instead, we see that Jesus is pleased with Zacchaeus and his response to following Jesus with his whole heart and life.

Jesus is always concerned with those things in our lives that grip our hearts and hold us back from being fully devoted to him. It just so happens that in Luke 18:18-30 the wealth of this young, religious up-and-comer was what was keeping him from moving forward on the path toward eternal life. The right perspective on wealth has always been a challenge for those who desire to follow Jesus. If it were not true, he would not have said, “*How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God*” (Luke 18:24).

Jesus tells those of us who wish to follow him more closely to detoxify from what poisons our hearts and hinders our lives. When riches grip our attention, Jesus calls us to give them away. If it's another hindrance, Jesus will appropriately diagnose it and prescribe a cure.

YOU TEACH: THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’ “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “What is impossible with human beings is possible with God.” Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”
(LUKE 18:18-30)

All three of the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—contain a version of this story with slightly different details while maintaining the overall emphasis of the story (Matthew 19:16-22, Mark 10:17-22, and Luke 18:18-30). The account of this conversation between Jesus and this young man has commonly been referred to throughout history as the story of the “rich young ruler” because all three authors describe the man in one or more of these terms. Matthew 19:22, Mark 10:22, and Luke 18:23 verify that this person was “rich” or “wealthy.” Matthew 19:20 lets the reader know he was “young.” Luke 18:18 designates the young man as a “ruler.”

Scholars indicate the man’s status as a “ruler” meant he had official responsibilities at the local synagogue and was probably between the ages of 24 and 40 years old. Since Jesus was in his early 30s at the time of this scene, it’s very likely this wealthy man was in his 20s given the way he approached and addressed Jesus. He addressed Jesus as “good teacher,” which perhaps would have been an attempt at showing great respect for Jesus, but it isn’t a term found in Jewish literature of the day referring to teachers or rabbis. In fact, the saying of the day according to the rabbis was, “There is nothing that is good but the law.” Some scholars indicate the usage for describing anything as “good” was reserved for God. Regardless, this was a very unusual but meaningful greeting from the rich young ruler.

The passage from Mark gives a descriptive picture of the posture of the man as he addressed Jesus:

A man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. (MARK 10:17)

Again, such an approach not only shows great respect for Jesus as a master-teacher, it also indicates this man gave no thought to those who were around him at the time. Such kneeling in public by a man with a prominent place in the community as a synagogue official is quite a gesture of humility. Perhaps the question concerning assurance of eternal life outweighed the humiliation from the crowd. His request to know what he must do to inherit eternal life reflects the common view of salvation in the Jewish mindset. Most Jews of that day considered salvation from God as something that resulted from what they did as faithful followers of the law.

The Jewish understanding of “eternal life” or “everlasting life” is debated among biblical and historical scholars. Most agree this concept has its origins in the Old Testament. One passage in particular often linked to the study of the Jewish view of eternal life is found in Daniel 12:2; it connects eternal life with the resurrection of God’s children who remain faithful on earth:

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (DANIEL 12:2)

Jesus, being the expert at reading people and relational connection, responded to this bright young man of community prominence right where he was. He started talking about the commandments and the law, which this young religious man would have known and followed to the letter. The young man cited five of the Ten Commandments that deal specifically with responses to humanity. He had lived according to the letter of the law. However, Jesus was about to reveal how he had totally missed living according to the spirit of the law. The man’s loyalty was divided. He was interested in obeying the law in order to promote his own image and welfare. But he lacked the desire to bless the heart of God by serving others whom God loved and who were in need.

The next part of the scene totally dumbfounded not only the rich young ruler, but also the rest of the crowd in attendance that day:

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (LUKE 18:22-25)

In the ancient Jewish tradition, wealth and property were seen as signs of blessing and favor from God. Jews believed that one with so much wealth surely also was the recipient of eternal life. Some scholars note that for centuries rabbis taught that amassing wealth was actually virtuous. They also believed giving away more than a fifth of your total wealth was not only unwise but also sinful. Ultimately, this mindset led to the belief that giving to charities was seen as a way to “buy” salvation. But Jesus turned that whole worldview upside down. Not only was the rich younger ruler dumbfounded, but the disciples were standing with gaping jaws as well.

Jesus’ comment about it being easier for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven was simply a way of saying: It’s impossible to do on your own. No archeological or historical grounds exist for believing Jesus was referring to some gate or passage in the wall of the city where a camel would have to literally pass through on its knees after unloading its burden. Jesus was simply using a Jewish colloquialism for the impossible, which would have clearly been understood by his audience. Actually, it was probably a modified form of a well-known Persian expression for the impossible that substituted the elephant for the camel in the saying because the elephant was the largest known animal in the Persian world. The camel was the largest in Palestine. “It is easier for an elephant to go through the eye of a needle” is a saying found in the Talmud.

Nevertheless, the passage notes the rich young ruler went away “sad.” His whole identity and everything he had worked for just got shot down and destroyed by Jesus’ response. It’s interesting to note that the video portrays Tommy as being more mad than sad. It’s not unlikely to think this young ruler’s emotions could have swung back and forth from anger to sorrow. This rationale can be deduced from the scene that took place just prior to Jesus’ conversation with the rich young ruler.

Both the Matthew and Mark accounts show Jesus blessing little children just before the rich young ruler meeting. Some scholars believe Jesus would have likely been resting inside a home or off the public pathways—gaining some moments of respite from the crowds—when the children and their mothers found their way to him. The disciples apparently saw this as a nuisance. They may have been trying to deflect such requests like a manager turns away autograph seekers while a famous athlete or movie star is trying to relax over dinner. However, Jesus rebuked his disciples and welcomed these little children, and likely their mothers, to come close to him for blessings.

It could be that just as Jesus left the house, with these children and their mothers still in close proximity to him, the rich young ruler burst on the scene and prostrated himself before Jesus with his question about eternal life. He may have assumed Jesus would call him to arise from his knees and then proceed to affirm his “goodness” in front of the crowd. However, he was led to a crossroads of obedience and identity crisis, which left him sad. The grip of wealth had a hold of his heart and would not let him go. As he played the events in his mind while leaving the scene, perhaps he became angry at how he made a fool of himself in humiliation with all the women and children, as well as with the disciples.

Jesus’ statements about the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom shocked his listeners and his disciples. Jesus had just insinuated that the poor have a much better opportunity to receive eternal life than the rich, which was a totally new paradigm for the day. In the midst of this theological bombshell, Peter thought it necessary to remind Jesus of just how much they left to follow him. Jesus, understanding

the climate of the moment, responded with an encouragement to Peter, the rest of the disciples, and all those in the crowd still wondering what just happened.

Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” (LUKE 18:28-30)

Before we cluck our tongues in disbelief at the rich young ruler or the disciples, we would do well to take inventory of our own lives. What may Jesus call us to abandon that has gripped our hearts on this earth? Following Jesus is about single-minded devotion to him. We are called to be generous in love for those who are precious in his sight, from children to the poor. Jesus will reward his followers many times over in this life and the one to come when we sacrifice and give away our lives for kingdom purposes.

YOU TEACH: THE QUESTIONS TO PROCESS

An important part of the learning system is to allow for everyone to process concepts and questions together. A healthy exchange of sharing and listening sparks new ideas and leads to more consequential growth. These questions are designed to help your group process and own the material from this lesson. Feel free to moderate the dialogue in directions pertinent to your group and encourage your group members to practice active listening when others are speaking. As the leader of your group, be proactive in asking others for feedback, insights, or different perspectives.

1. If someone asked you what to do to inherit eternal life, how would you respond?
2. What things grip the hearts of your peers that likely keep them from fully following Jesus?
3. In the video, Eddie’s character tells Tommy’s character that “we’ve all given up something to follow Jesus.” What things do you think you have given up?
4. What one thing would Jesus say is still gripping your heart and keeping you from fully following him?
5. What would Jesus tell you to do to release the grip of that one thing from your heart?
6. Eddie tells Tommy that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.” What do you think that means?

7. Why do you think the emotion displayed by the rich young ruler was one of sadness while Tommy's seems to be one of anger?
8. At the end of the video, when Tommy drives away, Eddie says, "You bought into the lie." What lie does he refer to?
9. What's the hardest thing you've ever had to do or give up to obediently follow Jesus?
10. What's one thing you can do this week that will help you to follow Jesus with all your heart?

YOU TEACH: THE PRAYERS TO PRAY

Throughout the history of the church, followers of Jesus have recorded their prayers. The preserved prayers that follow can be echoed by those who pray to Jesus today. You can use these with your group as examples of how to pray authentically. The final prayer is intended as a prompt for you to finish the prayer in your own words.

"My Father, I abandon myself to you. Do with me as you will. Whatever you may do with me I thank you. I am prepared for anything. I accept everything, provided your will is fulfilled in me and in all creatures. I ask for nothing more, my God. I place my soul in your hands. I give it to you, my God, with all the love of my heart, because I love you. And for me it is a necessity of love, this gift of myself, this placing of myself in your hands without reserve in boundless confidence, because you are my Father." –CHARLES DE FOUCAULD, 1858-1916

"Lord Jesus, I give thee my body, my soul, my substance, my fame, my friends, my liberty, and my life. Dispose of me, and of all that is mine, as it seemeth best to thee, and to the glory of thy blessed name." –JOHN COSIN, 1594-1672

"Eternal God, my sovereign Lord, I acknowledge all I am, all I have, is yours. Give me such a sense of your infinite goodness that I may return to you all possible love and obedience." –JOHN WESLEY, 1703-1791

”O Lord, give us more charity, more self-denial, more likeness to thee. Teach us to sacrifice our comforts to others, and our likings for the sake of doing good. Make us kindly in thought, gentle in word, generous in deed. Teach us that it is better to give than to receive, better to forget ourselves than to put ourselves forward, better to minister than to be ministered unto. And to thee, the God of love, be all glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.”

—HENRY ALFORD, 1810-1871

“O God, what I really need to tell you today is...”

YOU TEACH: THE HOMEWORK

1. Talk with one of your friends this week about the story you discussed today from Luke 18:18-30. Ask how your friend would've answered the question of the rich young ruler concerning what he must do to be saved.

If the timing is right, share with your friend how you would've answered that question and see where the conversation goes. If your friend is open to it, ask if he or she has ever made the decision to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior.

2. Jesus obviously cares for the poor, according to this passage. Take time this week to serve the poor in some way, whether it's at a shelter, a soup kitchen, or a local community center.
3. Sponsor a child through an agency such as World Vision or Compassion International to help someone else around the world in need. Your group may want to sponsor a child together as you commit to provide for the needs of someone Jesus deeply loves.

Check out www.worldvision.org or www.compassion.com to get started today.

4. Write down a list of the things you have given up to follow Jesus...