

RENEW



heart • soul • mind • strength



RENEW: Soul

Large Group Talk 4

Objective: This lesson teaches students to love God with their souls, to change their focus from the temporary treasures of this world to their eternal life with God. There are many things this world clings to: wealth, power, comfort, consistency. As Christ-followers, God calls us to live differently. Christ asks us to give up our tightly held desires, to keep no part of ourselves from him. This is a daily task; it doesn't come easy. When we spend time with God in Scripture, prayer, and fellowship, he renews our souls and his desires become our desires. We may lose those things we thought we wanted, but we end up gaining so much more!

Recap of RENEW Your Strength

Say Something Like: *In our last large group session, we saw how God renews our strength. He takes our weaknesses and uses them to display his incredible power to the world. Then he asks us to defend the weak around us. In this session, we are going to wrap up the RENEW program by looking at our priorities and the things keeping us from giving all of ourselves to Christ.*

Introduction

Ask: *What's the most expensive thing you've ever bought? Why was it worth that much to you? In hindsight, are you glad you spent that much on it?*

Say Something Like: *Maybe you've heard the saying, "Everyone has a price." In other words, people will do anything if they're paid enough. I'd like to offer another saying that I think is equally true: "Everyone has a price limit." Think about the thing you want most in the world—a future job, a tech item, a girlfriend or boyfriend. How much would you pay to have that thing? What would you give up? Most likely, you'd be willing to sacrifice money, time, and comfort. But for most of us, there's a limit to what we'd give up to get the thing we want most. "I'd give anything to be a doctor—unless it doesn't pay enough." "I'd give anything for the newest smart phone—unless it's over \$200." "I'd give anything to date that girl—unless she expects me to change who I am." And in most cases, that's a good thing. Jobs and phones and most dating relationships are temporary. People retire, tech breaks down, and couples break up. You'd never give absolutely everything to get that thing, because it has an expiration date. The only prize worth everything we have would be something that lasts forever. And that's exactly what Jesus offers us.*

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Read Mark 8:34-37:

Then [Jesus] called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

Say Something Like: *Jesus is taking his followers' expectations and flipping them around—again. He's explaining what it will cost them to become his disciples: everything. In this passage, the word soul means "every part of your life." It's talking about every piece of what makes you, you. Jesus explains that, by stockpiling temporary things the world considers valuable, we'll end up losing everything. But by giving every part of ourselves to Christ, we'll end up gaining eternal life in relationship with him.*

Illustration Option 1: Show these two commercials for Klondike ice cream bars: (www.ispot.tv/ad/7oae/klondike-rocky-road-challenge-jim-vs-baby-talk) and (www.youtube.com/watch?v=FODjA6IX4VE). These commercials joke that their product is so good, people would do crazy and humiliating things for just one bite.

Illustration Option 2: Watch this video until the 1:25 mark: (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBKfFycVjel). Would your students wait outside in line for six weeks to see their favorite movie? Would they pay \$1,500 for a ticket?

Say Something Like: *People are willing to do almost anything for the things they love. But are they willing to give everything for them? That's what Jesus requires of us to become his followers. Why does he want us to give him our entire selves? That seems like a pretty big commitment, doesn't it? What does it look like for Christ to renew our souls?*

Teaching: Soul

1. We're All Hoarders

Read Mark 8:35 again.

Say Something Like: *This verse is a bit confusing. If you want to save your life, you will lose it; and if you lose your life, you will save it. That doesn't seem to make sense at first. Aren't the people who are most cautious about saving their own lives by eating healthy, avoiding risky activities, and taking all sorts of preventative supplements the ones who will probably live the longest? The world teaches us that we have to look out for number one—ourselves—because no one else will. But Jesus says there's a better way. We aren't actually the most qualified people to look out for ourselves. We have a bad habit of choosing the things that feel the best or make us happiest right now, instead of the things that are best for us in*

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the long run. So when Jesus says that if we want to save our lives we must lose them, he's talking about people who are hoarding every part of their lives and refusing to give them up to his care. We think that if we cling tightly enough to the things that are important to us, we'll be fine and never lose those things. But they're the very things that are slowly killing us!

Illustration: Show this clip from the show "Hoarders": (www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzIQ43IKjII). The people on this show suffer from a psychological condition that makes them want to hold onto everything they've ever owned. They can't stand the thought of giving something up. It all holds significance to them, and they believe they can only be happy by keeping it. So garbage piles up around their houses until there's barely any room left to live! Their houses smell terrible as trash starts to decompose. But the worst part is, this mess becomes a home for unwanted and dangerous guests: mice and fleas and mold and bacteria. The things these people thought they couldn't live without are literally killing them. Only by trusting other people to remove the garbage and to completely clean their houses will they be able to live long, happy lives.

Say Something Like: *We're exactly like these hoarders. We refuse to let go of anything in our lives because we think we can handle it ourselves. "I know exactly where I'm going to college and what I'm going to major in. Then I'm going to find the perfect spouse and get married and have three kids and be happy forever!" Or maybe it's, "I'm going to play college ball on a full-ride scholarship. Then I'll get drafted into the majors, make a ton of money, set some records, retire in my 40s, and be happy forever!" Or perhaps it's, "I'm going to go overseas, become a missionary, bring clean water to villages, rescue women from slavery, write a best-selling book about the two-thirds world, speak at large conferences, and be happy forever!" Even the good things we desire can be dangerous if we can't give up control. It's good to plan and dream, but we should remember that our plans are not more important than God. None of these things are permanent. And the biggest problem with holding onto these things is that we're doing it for ourselves: to "be happy forever!" But none of these things can make us happy forever. They'll each eventually backfire or get boring or let us down. By hoarding these things, we're setting ourselves up for sad and disappointing lives.*

2. What Are You Holding Back from God?

Say Something Like: *In Mark 10:17-22, Jesus meets a young man who seems excited to meet him. The man asks Jesus what it takes to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds by listing all of the things a person should do to live a perfect life: don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, and more. Of course, it's impossible for any human to follow everything on this list of rules; only Jesus is perfect. And Jesus knows this, so he tells the man, "No one is good—except God alone." But the young man thinks he's done the impossible. He smirks and responds, "I've followed all of these rules since I was a little kid."*

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This is when Jesus surprises the man. He says, "That's great! Now all you have to do is sell everything you own to the poor and follow me!" The man's smirk turns into a grimace. How could Jesus have known the exact thing he wasn't willing to do? You see, this young man was very wealthy. He was willing to follow all of the rules to live forever, but the one thing he could never give up was his stuff—his money and possessions. So he walked away, unwilling to give all of himself to follow Jesus. Like Jesus told the man earlier, no one is perfect. God doesn't expect us to follow a bunch of impossible rules. He wants us to love him with every part of us. By refusing to let go of his money, the rich young man proved that his wealth was more important to him than eternal life with God.

Does that mean we each have to sell everything we own to the poor if we want to follow Jesus? Not necessarily. Our money isn't ours to begin with. It's only on loan to us from God. So if we recognize this and use God's gifts to do God's will, we're showing our love for God through what he's given us. The rich young man, on the other hand, thought all of his temporary wealth was his and only his. It was more important to him than God. That was his limit, the line he drew in his life to say, "I'll give you everything up to this point, but nothing more."

Discuss: *Have you drawn any lines in your own life? What have you held too tightly and refused to give to God?*

Object Lesson: Tell the students that you're going to prove your physical might by doing 100 push ups. Tell them that, as an incentive to push yourself, if you can't do all 100, you'll give everyone a prize. Start doing the push ups, counting out loud. Get the students excited about it, and have them count along with you. Once you've reached 25 or so, act exhausted (you might not need to act!) and slow down until you stop. The students will think they've each earned an awesome prize! Then tell them that even though you didn't actually finish, you proved that you could do them, so you don't actually have to finish. If they argue, tell them that you really wanted to do all 100, and that's what really counts. Finally, if you have the resources, you can cave in and give all of the students some sort of prize.

Say Something Like: *Why didn't it count when I didn't finish all 100 push ups? What if I completed 99? It's an all-or-nothing thing! I couldn't say that I finished until I did every single push up. That's what following Christ is like. It's all-or-nothing. Why can't we follow Jesus and still hold onto something in our lives that's more important to us than him? Because that's not actually following him! That's saying, "This other thing is the true lord of my life. Jesus, I'll follow you as long as it's convenient. But if I ever have to give up the true lord of my life, sorry—I'm out."*

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3. Eternal Life

Read Mark 8:36 again.

Say Something Like: *The biggest issue with hoarding things and keeping them from God is that our priorities get all mixed up. The things that seem so important to us now will eventually prove to be of little value.*

Illustration: We're like little kids who are given a weekly allowance. Each week we take our allowance and immediately use it to buy chocolate. It tastes great for a few seconds, but it quickly melts to nothing. After five years of this routine, we have nothing to show for all those weeks of allowance (except maybe a larger gut!). The happiness it gave us was very temporary.

Now suppose you spent the money on Legos. They're more expensive, so you can't buy them every week. But every few weeks you have enough to buy a new set. Slowly the sets add up, and after five years, you have an entire closet of Legos. That seems like a wise investment, right? You spent your money on something that would last. There's only one problem. Eventually you'll get older, and you'll stop playing with Legos. Even those things you thought would last are temporary.

What about a wiser investment like a car? That could last you many more years than the Legos, but eventually cars break down and people get too old to drive. What about using the money to save up for college? A college degree will give you the skills for a job to make more money and knowledge that will feed your interests and passions for the rest of your life! Surely that's the wisest investment you could make. But even that is temporary. Everyone eventually dies. What good is a college degree when you're dead?

Say Something Like: *At the end of the day, everything we can get for ourselves is temporary. At some point it will all go away. Some things, like a car, a job, or a relationship, might last a long time, but from the perspective of eternity, they're gone in the blink of an eye. And the worst thing is, by hoarding all of these temporary things, we're losing out on something greater! Jesus offers us eternal life. That's a life with a purpose, in an awesome relationship with God forever. Compared to that, anything else we could possibly want is worthless. The apostle Paul says that even the good things he's done are garbage compared knowing Jesus (Phil. 3:8). If we really knew what we were missing out on by caring more about these temporary things than eternal life with Christ, we'd drop it all in a heartbeat!*

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Putting It All Together:

Say Something Like: *We live in a world that values money, beauty, and success. As Christ-followers, God calls us to live differently. When we spend time with God through his Word, prayer, and fellowship, our souls are renewed and his desires become our desires. As Christ-followers, God calls us to love the Lord with all that we are. He calls us to deny ourselves and our desires, the temporary things holding us back and slowly killing us. He asks us to give ourselves over to him completely. Then the Lord can protect us, provide for us, and renew our souls.*

[**Speaker note:** The following questions will be discussed deeper in the small group lesson]

Question 1: What will cause us to lose our lives? What can save them? How can we allow God to renew and transform our souls?

Question 2: What is one thing holding you back from loving God with all of yourself? How can you start letting that thing go?

Looking Forward: Let students know where they need to go next and that this is the last large group session. Challenge them to be vulnerable in their final small group time and to ask any hard questions they have about following Christ. Give them confidence that the church and the youth ministry leaders are there to walk the discipleship road with them. Tell them how they can continue to be involved with the church in the future.

**LeaderTreks recommends watching all video clips and visiting all websites in this lesson before sharing them with students. These links are optional and not required in order to lead an effective large group talk. Websites often change, and links may not always have the same result. LeaderTreks will do its best to keep them updated and fresh; however, in the event that they do not function properly, we cannot retain responsibility.*

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