



# Loyalty Tested

JESUS IS WORTH EVERYTHING.

**Scripture Passage: Matthew 10:16-20,26-34    Memory Verse: Matthew 10:28**

Many people have bought a car, house, or other big-ticket item only to discover later that it needed repairs that drove up the overall cost. Looking at it, they might shake their heads and say, “It wasn’t worth it.” Buyer’s remorse applies to time and effort as well as to money. Sometimes you pour yourself into a project with little to show for it afterwards. Again, you sigh and say, “It just wasn’t worth it.”

Only one investment never leaves one unsatisfied: a relationship with Jesus Christ. He always exceeds expectations. Make no mistake . . . following Jesus is costly. Nevertheless, at the end of the day—and at the end of life—Christ followers can say without hesitation, “Jesus is worth everything.” Like Paul, we even are willing to experience the loss of all things for the “surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

As you dig into the verses for this session, consider the sacrifices you have made for Jesus. Commit yourself to surrendering even more for Him and His kingdom. Ask Him to give you wisdom as you share these truths with the adults in your Bible study.



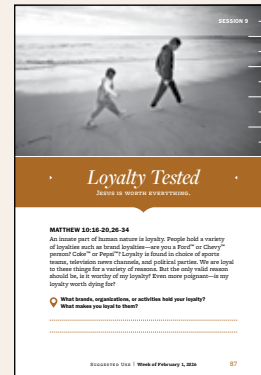
## **Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training**

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An innate part of human nature is loyalty. People hold a variety of loyalties such as brand loyalties—are you a Ford™ or Chevy™ person? Coke™ or Pepsi™? Loyalty is found in choice of sports teams, television news channels, and political parties. We are loyal to these things for a variety of reasons. But the only valid reason should be, is it worthy of my loyalty? Even more poignant—is my loyalty worth dying for? (PSG, p. 87)

**What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty?  
What makes you loyal to them?**



## Understand the Context (Matthew 10:1-42)

Jesus’s ministry was well established before He sent His apostles out on their own. They had heard Him interact with individuals and crowds. They watched Him heal the sick and raise the dead. They understood how He responded to critics. They knew better than to try this work in their own ability or authority. The word *apostle* simply means “one who is sent.” It contains no inherent authority other than that given by the One who did the sending.

We may be surprised that even Judas the betrayer was temporarily invested with power to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. Jesus gave Judas every opportunity to break through temptation and be true to Him. If seeing Jesus’s miraculous ministry was not enough, actually participating in it should have been overwhelming. Yet, from Judas to Peter, each of the apostles eventually failed to one degree or another. While Peter and others found repentance and redemption, Judas fell into despair and disaster.

As Jesus sent the apostles to minister in the towns and villages along the way, He gave them detailed instructions about how to behave and what to expect. Theirs would be a faith ministry, depending on the Lord to provide for them through the people to whom they ministered.

Still, their work was not a profit-making operation. They had received these abilities freely and offered service the same way.

Ministry in Christ’s name is not without risk. Jesus told the apostles that they should expect persecution just as their Master had been opposed. Some people they encountered would be overtly hostile. Still, they weren’t to respond in kind. They had to be wise while remaining humble as they dealt with those who would not hesitate to harm them. God would give them the words to say and the grace to say them well. Only by reflecting the spirit of Christ could they represent Him through this ministry.

In spite of dangers, the apostles were to be fearless because of the One they represented and the message they bore. As they testified of Him, He promised to testify about their faithfulness before the Father. At this point, the apostles would not have understood Jesus’s reference to taking up their cross to follow Him. Later, the day would come when they could look back at His cross and remember this saying.

Work on behalf of Christ is not without reward, even though these men served without expectation for recompense. Whether a welcome or a reward, whoever serves Him faithfully will ever say, “Jesus is worth it all.”

**Read Matthew 10:1-42 in your Bible. What warnings did Jesus give His disciples? What promises did He make to them? (PSG, p. 88)**

# ENGAGE



**PREPARE:** Hang **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Matthew Time Line) and **Pack Item 13** (Handout: The Disciples in History).

**ASK:**

**What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty? What makes you loyal to them?** (PSG, p. 87)

**INTRODUCE:**

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 87 of the PSG. Note that genuine loyalty often requires making a sacrifice of some kind.

**SHARE:**

Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13). Explain that this session focuses on Jesus's words to His disciples in Matthew 10. Point out that this chapter is identified as the Lord's second discourse on the outline.

**CONTEXT:**

To set the stage for this study, summarize this content from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 88):

“After spending weeks and months with Jesus, the time had come for Him to send His disciples out to test what they had learned. They were to preach of the kingdom of God like Jesus did and engage in a ministry of compassion as Jesus had done. Before sending them out, Jesus gave instructions about what they were to do, how they were to do it, and what to expect.”

**TRANSITION:**

*Jesus wanted His followers to experience both the joys and the struggles of representing Him in the world. While all of them (except Judas) would help spread the news of God's kingdom after Jesus went back to heaven, this was their first taste of that kind of ministry. By examining Jesus's instruction to them, we can get a better idea of what He expects of us and how we can continue sharing His message with the world today.*



## Group Activity Option

### Music

Play “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 434) and share the lyrics in print for the group. Lead a brief discussion with adults about how loyalty is defined in this hymn. Note that it suggests an unwavering commitment to Jesus that will go against the grain and endure hardships as necessary. Ask: **When you began following Christ, did you think about the cost? Why or why not?**

## Snakes and Doves (Matt. 10:16-20)

**16** “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. **17** Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. **18** You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. **19** But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, **20** because it isn’t you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.”

(v. 16) Serving Christ is rarely easy. In fact, it can be dangerous. Jesus prepared His disciples for their mission by warning them about what they would encounter and promising that they would be equipped. He used the word **look**, which can also be rendered “behold,” to emphasize what He was saying.

Jesus also used a series of word pictures to describe what they were about to experience. They were not going out on their own initiative. He was **sending** them. They went with His blessing and authority. He knew the hostile environments they would face and wanted them to be ready. They would be like **sheep among wolves**. Because of this truth, Jesus’s followers should be **shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves**.

Being “shrewd” did not mean being cunning. The apostles should be insightful as they worked among people who might harm them. At the same time, they were to be “innocent.” The term connotes a sense of sincerity and integrity.

(v. 17) Jesus’s followers should **beware** of certain people who hated them. This warning did not imply fear, but careful attention. Christians should expect opposition but trust God to walk with us through those challenges.

Jesus’s message looked further than the disciples’ immediate mission. A time would come when opponents would deliver them to **local courts** for punishment. The wording carries the idea of betrayal. Jesus warned that even families would reject them and betray them (v. 21).

Enemies would **flog** them in the **synagogues**. Some scholars, however, interpret “synagogues” as referring to assemblies where judgment and punishment were rendered. Both possibilities reveal the hypocrisy of these religious leaders.

(v. 18) Jesus prophesied they even would face **governors and kings** on His account. Looking back, we can see how this prediction came true

in the lives of Peter, John, and others. The apostle Paul even stood before the emperor in Rome.

Such severe situations would allow the disciples to **bear witness** for Christ. These common men could not walk up to palace doors with a gospel tract in hand. Only as prisoners could they gain access to the highest levels of government. Through their ordeals, they would preach to Jewish officials and leaders of **the Gentiles**.

(v. 19) The question was not *if* their enemies would persecute them, but **when**. Suffering for Christ’s sake is inevitable. When the Twelve experienced this persecution, they could depend on God to empower them. They should not **worry** about what they should say. God would provide His words **at that hour**. Anxiety vanishes in the light of our faith in God’s promise.

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### Key Doctrine

#### God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. (See Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13-14.)

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(v. 20) The disciples could stand with confident authority because the **Spirit** would be **speaking through** them. This did not mean their response to accusations was equivalent to inspired Scripture. Rather, they could depend on the Holy Spirit for the words to say as a testimony for Christ.

Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel. We may not suffer like some believers around the world. Nevertheless, we should be prepared to stay faithful to Christ regardless of hostile opposition.





## CONTEXT:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel.

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*). Point out that the events in Matthew 10 would have taken place between AD 29-33.

## READ:

**Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 10:16-20 aloud** as adults write their own paraphrases of Jesus's instructions to His disciples in the margin of the PSG.

## EXPLAIN:

Talk about the group's responses. Provide copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Disciples in History*) and briefly highlight each disciple. Note that Jesus had big plans for them, but this was their first taste of personal ministry. Share that Jesus wanted them to be well-prepared for this new adventure.

## RECAP:

To underscore the significance of shrewdness and innocence, direct attention to this content from page 89 of the PSG:

*In response to the opposition they would face, the disciples were to be shrewd as well as innocent. In many ancient cultures, the serpent represented qualities of wisdom, caution, and cunning. The followers of Jesus were to be equally alert and wise. The word "innocent" speaks of purity and integrity. Christ followers are to live with pure motives and cautious alertness.*

## ASK:

**Why are both shrewdness and innocence necessary qualities for Christ's witnesses?** (PSG, p. 90)

## SAY:

*Jesus's words described what His disciples would face as they spread across Galilee, as well as what they would experience sharing the gospel around the world after He returned to heaven. He never watered down the danger, but He did emphasize the opportunities they would get to share His message. They would stand before governors and kings for God's glory because they were willing to suffer.*

## EMPHASIZE:

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 10:19-20. Highlight the promise that Jesus made related to the Holy Spirit. Affirm that allowing the Spirit to lead us allows us to see needs more clearly and to share Jesus with confidence and boldness. Challenge adults to ask God for a greater sensitivity to the Spirit's guidance in their lives.

## Sparrows and Hairs (Matt. 10:26-31)

**26** “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. **27** What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. **28** Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. **29** Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. **30** But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. **31** So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

(vv. 26-27) Fear sometimes paralyzes people from following Christ openly. Jesus encouraged His apostles not to **be afraid** of their adversaries because the truth ultimately will be brought to light. Jesus emphasized His point by using Hebrew parallelism that repeats an idea with slightly different wording. What is **covered** will be **uncovered**, and what is **hidden** will be **made known**. Wrongdoing by the enemies of Christ will be exposed and believers will be vindicated.

Christ’s messengers should courageously share His message to the world. Again, Jesus employed parallelism for emphasis. What He told them **in the dark**, they should talk about **in the light**. What they heard **in a whisper**, they should **proclaim on the housetops**. This statement does not mean Jesus was sharing secrets, though He did address His disciples in private at times. Instead, He used these metaphors to encourage boldness in proclaiming His gospel.

(v. 28) Hearing Jesus’s cautions, the Twelve naturally might have been afraid for their safety. In time, many of them suffered violent deaths, but Jesus urged them not to **fear those who kill the body**. Those enemies can’t **kill the soul**. The spiritual part of each human endures beyond physical death, and believers are promised an eternal reward after this life ends—a reward that can’t be taken away.

So, believers should care more about the One who can **destroy both soul and body in hell**. *Destroy* does not infer annihilation in which a soul ceases to exist, and *hell* indicates an eternal state of anguish in a literal place of torment. These combine to prove eternal judgment is real. God alone is our true Judge. With proper reverence for Him, we need not fear anyone else.

(vv. 29-30) As in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:25-26), Jesus used birds to remind us of the Father’s care. Using a rhetorical question, Jesus asked, **Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny?** The word “penny” describes a Roman coin of small value. Despite having relatively little value, Jesus noted that God still knows and cares when one of these birds **falls to the ground**. Consider the enormity of that statement: Not one of the billions of birds dies outside of God’s plan and control.

Jesus reiterated the previous point with another parallel statement about the **hairs of your head**. God has **counted** each of them. The issue here is not whether a person has a full head of hair or is balding. Rather, both illustrations emphasize that seemingly insignificant things that people take for granted (like birds and hair) matter to God. This has implications for His people as they face hostile opposition.

(v. 31) Combining the two illustrations, Jesus used a familiar Hebrew technique of reasoning that moved from the smaller to the greater. The little word **so** links the previous ideas to the conclusion. If God concerns Himself with birds and hairs, He certainly cares for His children. As a result, Jesus again encouraged His followers **don’t be afraid**. The Greek verb form can be understood as “Don’t bring fear on yourself” or “Don’t let fear come upon you.” Believers don’t have to be bound by fear. We can stand with courage—not because of anything inherent to us, but because God values us.

Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel. As we are sent out by God, we are under His authority and protection. Nothing can happen to us that our Father does not permit.



## READ:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel.

**Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 10:26-31 aloud** while the group counts the number of times Jesus said not to fear.

## IDENTIFY:

Highlight the following contrasts Jesus drew in verses 26-28:

- Covered/Uncovered
- Known/Unknown
- Dark/Light
- Whisper/Proclaim

## RECAP:

Summarize this content from pages 91-92 of the PSG to explain the contrasts more fully:

“Jesus wanted His disciples to know that regardless of what they were going through, they could rest assured that in the day of judgment all the deeds and motives of all people will be ‘uncovered’ and ‘made known.’ Those who suffered for Jesus would be duly rewarded for their faithfulness under persecution. But these words of Jesus could also be instructions to take the words that He spoke privately to His disciples and make them publicly known so that others will become followers of Christ. . . . They had been in private instruction, but the time had arrived for the open proclamation of the kingdom of God.”

## ASK:

**What is the connection between fearing God and not fearing man?** (PSG, p. 93)

## STATE:

*The images of the sparrows and the hairs are really a call to boldness. They emphasize God’s care and sovereignty. Because He is with us, we don’t have to fear anyone or anything that stands against us as we follow His plans.*

## Group Activity Option

### Bible Skill

In Matthew 10:16-20,26-34, Jesus used three pairs of metaphors in preparing the disciples for their mission. Create a chart with three columns. In one column list the metaphors (sheep and wolves, serpents and doves, sparrows and hairs). In the second column, write brief summaries of the truths communicated in the metaphors. In the third column, write how each applies to you using “I will” or “I can” statements.

## Peace and Swords (Matt. 10:32-34)

**32** “Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. **33** But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven. **34** Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

(v. 32) The transitional word **therefore** links Jesus’s previous words with what followed. After sharing some harsh truths about their mission, He also offered a promise and a warning depending on how they responded. His words applied not only to the Twelve, but to everyone who claims His name. Christ spoke through the centuries to you and me today.

First, Jesus addressed whoever **will acknowledge me before others**. To **acknowledge** involves more than simply saying, “I know Him.” Trustworthy individuals hold nothing back, personally and publicly professing their loyalty to Christ. Baptism is one way believers openly identify with Christ, but true believers also share Jesus with others. In addition, we are not only called to acknowledge Jesus verbally, but also to point others toward Him through lifestyles that reflect His life and teachings.

Jesus promised to **acknowledge** such people **before my Father in heaven**. When we link our lives to Christ on earth, He claims us as His own at the throne of God. This pledge should encourage the most timid believer to proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord with confidence.

(v. 33) Jesus knew the disciples might be tempted to remain quiet when they faced open hostility. Like Joseph of Arimathea prior to Christ’s crucifixion, fear of others might lead them to be secret disciples (John 19:38). Jesus, however, referred to people who go further and reject Him outrightly. Some translations render the term **denies** as “disowns.”

The idea of denying contains several important factors. First, the word **whoever** means any non-believer can fall into this sin. Next, “denies” means more than what Peter did on the night before Jesus’s crucifixion (Matt. 26:69-75). Peter’s moment of weakness was followed by repentance and restoration. But Jesus was speaking of a deeper rejection. The word implies a base refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and one’s Savior.

Third, **me** involves a personal rejection of Jesus. Finally, **before others** reflects the public nature of this rejection. It suggests the desire to receive the favor of other people is stronger and more valuable than experiencing the favor of God.

The penalty for denying Christ is to be denied by Him **before my Father in heaven**. The cost of rejection stands in direct contrast to the reward of loyalty. Rejecting Jesus in this world results in being rejected by Him in the next.

One day people will give an account at the throne of God. His response will be based solely on what they chose to do with Jesus Christ in this life. Standing before God, it will be too late to change their minds and claim Christ.

(v. 34) Jesus’s summation might seem perplexing to some. He warned His followers not to **assume** that His mission was to **bring peace on the earth**. Of course, Jesus is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). He also promised to give the disciples His peace (John 14:27). In this verse, however, Jesus referred to the effect of people’s attitudes toward Him. Because His followers love Him so and His enemies hate Him with a similar passion, conflict and division are inevitable.

The **sword** represented this division. Jesus is the dividing line of human history. People who reject Christ also reject whoever follows Him. Even families can be divided over Jesus (see Matt. 10:35-36). Some of Jesus’s listeners would find themselves not only alienated from unbelieving family members, but they also might be betrayed into the hands of hostile authorities. Christ’s disciples must be willing to choose Him over every other claim, including those closest to them (Matt. 10:37).

Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty. Following Him now means being with Him in heaven. We should be faithful to Him regardless of the cost.





## READ:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty.

**Direct the group to read Matthew 10:32-34 silently** and to circle the verbs or phrases that are repeated in each verse.

## ASK:

**Based upon your reading of this passage, why would secret allegiance to Christ be impossible?**

## SHARE:

Encourage adults to elaborate on their responses. Point out that proclaiming Jesus to the world isn't just a good idea. Explain that Jesus actually tied it to our identity as His people. Note that we can share Jesus boldly with others because we know that He is our advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1).

## ASK:

**What are some ways you can acknowledge Christ before others?** (PSG, p. 95)

## RECAP:

Affirm that rejecting Him comes with its own consequences. Summarize the following content from page 94 of the PSG:

“Those who honor Jesus will be honored by Christ before the very throne of God. . . . Denying Jesus can be done either actively or passively. That is, it can be an outward declaration of rejection or take the form of a silent failure to acknowledge and follow Him. Either way, Jesus pointed to the consequences. The consequences would be simple: He will also deny those who deny Him.”

## SAY:

*In many ways, Jesus is the most polarizing person in human history. This means those who follow Him will face hostile opposition from those who hate Him. But while He cannot promise peace every moment of our lives here on earth, He does promise eternal blessing and peace to all who demonstrate loyalty to Him as residents of His kingdom.*

## Group Activity Option

### Object Lesson: Team Jersey

Display a jersey that shows your loyalty to a sports team. Share the back story of what drew you to that team and what keeps you loyal. Point out that your allegiance has persevered even when it was hard, such as during a losing season or a frustrating loss. Remind the group that these loyalties often become part of our identities. Emphasize that while some affect us in small ways, our identity in Christ should take precedence over everything else in our lives. Ask: ***How do you show your loyalty to Christ?***

## CHALLENGE

### REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 96 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel.*
- *Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel.*
- *Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty.*

### REFLECT:

Group the adults into teams of three or four and give each team a sheet of paper and pen. Direct them to write the word “loyal” down the side of the paper in the form of an acrostic. Instruct the teams to use the letters in the word to identify specific ways believers can show loyalty to Christ on a daily basis. After a few minutes, allow a volunteer from each team to share their work. Write their responses on the board.

### DISCUSS:

Encourage the group to consider the first set of questions on page 96 of the PSG. Using the idea on the board, lead a brief discussion on how the adults can hold one another accountable for living out their loyalty to Jesus in meaningful ways. Remind them that believers are called to encourage one another toward good works in love.

### CLOSE:

Close the session in prayer, asking God to help each adult know how to stand firm in the face of persecution. Thank the Lord that nothing happens in the lives of His children outside of His sovereign care and protection.

### AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group during the week and encourage them to look for opportunities to take a stand for Jesus, even when it might be difficult. Encourage them to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 96 of the PSG. Suggest they rate their current level of loyalty to Jesus and to pray for His wisdom and guidance as they seek to become more loyal to Him each day.

### LEADER BLOG



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