

# The Difference is Faith. The Rule is Golden!

## Your Choice!

We all make choices in life—every day, in fact. Sometimes we make co-operative choices. Some choices we make alone.

Some choices are big and important; some small and less important. The small choices, like what to pull out of the refrigerator when you want a snack, are fairly easy! But the bigger ones are harder. What is the right thing to do in a given situation? How will this choice affect my life, and the lives of those around me? How will I answer to God for the choice I am making?

Because these are important questions, it's a good idea to look at what we base our choices on. As an opportunity to do that, fill in the values mirror below. Use words, pictures, or symbols, and make it as colorful or monochrome as you wish.

## My Values Mirror

- A. What is one unbreakable rule you live by?
- B. How or where did you learn this rule?
- C. Describe a choice you made that was based on this rule.
- D. Describe one way in which this choice affected another person (in either a good or bad way).

A	B
C	D



## Dan's Story

It's always tough to move to a new town and a new school, and it was as tough for me as anybody else when I had to do it last year. I'm the kind of person who takes my time making friends anyway, and those first few months were kind of lonely and strange. But now I've gotten to know people, and they like me and know some of the things I'm good at. That helps a lot. In fact, I've gotten in with a pretty cool crowd.

One of the things my new friends don't know about me—I've never mentioned it to people here—is that a cousin I grew up with in my old hometown has a serious speech impediment. I'm used to listening for a long time and figuring out what he's trying to say, and I never laugh at the sounds he makes.

Well, just this last semester, another new guy, Jack, started at our school. I felt for him because I know what it's like to be new, but also because he has a speech problem a lot like the one my cousin has. But I really like the guy, and enjoy talking to him. He's real bright and he's into computers like I am.

The problem is my other friends. Some of them are okay with Jack, but a few of them are always complaining about how long it takes him to say what he wants to say. This afternoon a bunch of us have plans to go to a ball game. Jack was real happy when I asked him to come along. But just now one of the guys called and offered me a ride to the game. He said, "You didn't ask Jack along again, did you? I'm not planning to spend the whole game trying to get what he's saying. That guy could spoil anything."

## How Do We Decide?

Many things influence our decisions in life. Consider these:

- \_\_\_ my reason and common sense
- \_\_\_ my feelings
- \_\_\_ my values and vision—what I value in life, and what I want my future to be
- \_\_\_ parents and family—what they have taught me, what they expect of me, their attitudes and reactions to what I do
- \_\_\_ society—what society accepts as good or bad behavior
- \_\_\_ people in authority (coaches, teachers, adult leaders)—what they have taught me and what they expect of me
- \_\_\_ media—what I see, hear, and read described as good or bad behavior; moral or immoral actions of celebrities
- \_\_\_ friends—my friends' support and advice, what my friends think of what I do
- \_\_\_ the teachings of Jesus Christ and the church—what I learn from Christ's example and from the church he founded





Read this list again and think about it. Then, put an **X** in front of the influences you think are at work in Dan's dilemma. Put a check mark **✓** by the 3 or 4 items that, in your opinion, most importantly affect the decisions of young people today. Put **your initials** by the 3 or 4 items that most influence your own decisions. With the rest of the class, discuss why you chose as you did.

## Yes? No? Maybe?

When we are very small children, we learn a lot about what's what from our parents. We don't question it much, either. If our Bedtime Picture Book has the word "horse" by that brown four-legged creature on page six, and Mommy points to it every night and says "horse," that's good enough for us. A horse it is!

Things don't stay quite that simple, of course. As we get older, we have to make some of our own choices about what is right and wrong. And a lot of questions come up, including questions from our peers like, "So what's *wrong* with that?"

## Black-and-white vs. It's-all-gray

There are two common approaches to questions of right and wrong. We might call the first approach *black-and-white*. The second could be called *it's-all-gray*.

The black-and-white approach says that something is right, or its wrong, and there are no gray areas. This works for some things: cold-blooded murder, torture, and rape are wrong and can't be otherwise. But what about the driver who accidentally runs over and kills a child who suddenly darts out into the street? That driver has killed someone, but it can't be looked at in the same black-and-white way that we look at calculated murder. There are, as the law says, "extenuating circumstances."

The it's-all-gray approach would say that *every* situation depends on circumstances. For example, even though it's good and important to be truthful, there are times when you should not be altogether truthful. A child who must sometimes be home alone is taught not to tell the "whole truth" if a stranger calls and asks, "Are you home alone?" The child will say, "My parents can't come to the phone right now." Also, a person who lies all the time because of mental illness in which "voices" tell him to say the things he says is not guilty of lying in the same way as a person who consciously lies to get what he wants. It's all in the circumstances.

## A Third Approach

Christian morality recognizes that neither of these approaches, *black-and-white* or *it's-all-gray*, is sufficient by itself. There *are* things that are wrong, unequivocally, but there are also situations in which we will have to make a decision about whether a course of action is right or wrong, even though the circumstances are unclear.



Some people think that the church is just a set of rules, mostly negative. But think ahead to the time when you may be a parent, or have responsibility for someone younger and less experienced than you are. (Perhaps you take care of a younger brother or sister even now.) You'll make rules for those in your care. Why? Certainly not just to keep them from having a good time. You'll do it to keep them from hurting themselves or others. Yet out of love you will give them their freedom, and no doubt they will make mistakes, and hurt themselves and others in the process. It will pain you to see that, but it's part of the love that offers freedom to the loved one.

God is like that too. He makes rules to keep the human community going, but he gives us freedom to experiment and be independent. He gives us the assurance that we *can* know right from wrong. How? Here are some of the ways.

1. Pray to God for guidance.
2. Take part in the life of the church. Being with our church family in God's presence will help us learn how to live.
3. Consult those more experienced in living than we are. This means not only adults who are trying to live as true Christians, but also the saints.
4. Read the Bible.
5. Remember always that we are made in God's image and likeness; we are *made* for goodness and he will help us maintain it if we ask him.
6. Try to apply to every part of our lives the greatest rule cited by Jesus Christ:



***"IN ALL THINGS, DO TO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU."***  
*Matthew 7:12*

(This is sometimes known as the Golden Rule.)

Now, that last one is really something to think about. Most of us care more about the rightness or wrongness of an action when we're on the receiving end of it than the doing end. It's a challenge to put yourself in the other person's place and think about how you would like to be treated. And it's exactly that challenge that Christ is giving us.



## Just You and Me, Baby

Write the name of a person who makes you so angry that you wish gravity would turn off under their feet and they'd shoot into space!

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Close your eyes and relax for the following exercise:

Imagine that you wake up in the morning—but you're not you—you're the person you named above and you will go through the whole day as this person. As this person, how do you feel when you wake up? What do you look forward to? What do you dread?

Now, get up and get ready for the day just as this person would get ready. What do you wear? What do you eat? What do you do? How does your family treat you?

You go to where this person would go during the day. How do people act toward you? What do you do during the day? Who are your friends? How do you feel about what happens to you? What do you wish would happen instead?

As this person, what makes you angry? Why? What are you afraid of? Why? What makes you feel good? Why?

Now imagine you as this person runs into the real you. How does the real you act toward you? How do you feel about it? How do you wish the real you would act?

Now become your real self again. How can you change your behavior to be more like you wished to be treated as that person?



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# The Difference is Faith.

# The Rule is Golden!

1. The church teaches us to make good moral choices.
2. The commandment of Jesus known as "The Golden Rule" is an important resource for making choices.

*Students will:*

1. Analyze how they make choices.
2. Enumerate Christian resources, including the Golden Rule, that help them evaluate right and wrong.

## Key Concepts



## Objectives





## Background for Teacher



In this session on making moral choices, students will look at several aspects of their lives as Christians. The choices they face are not easy, and to help them, we want them to see that they are indeed children of God, whose love will always support them; that the church offers “faith resources” to assist them; that even though many situations in life are ambiguous, the “Golden Rule” given by Christ is a most basic and reliable rule to live by.

In addition, students will examine their own personal “rules to live by” and the ways that we human beings determine these.

## Materials Needed



- ◆ Colored markers
- ◆ Pencils or pens
- ◆ Copies (enough for everyone in the class) of one newspaper story the ending of which would be altered if the Golden Rule had been applied.

## Procedure



- 1.** Have class read **Your Choice!** in the student text or you might simply choose to relate its contents to the class as they follow along.  
(5 mins)
- 2.** Students can use whatever colors and designs they wish to complete their “values mirrors.” Give them about 5 minutes (more if necessary) to do the activity and plan 10 minutes for discussion.

Most of the discussion may center on students’ stories of people and experiences. Let the discussion go where they want to take it. The point is to get them to think about what influences their decisions in life.



**3.** Have the students read **Dan's Story** in their text. (They can either read by themselves or with a partner.) After reading the story, discuss these questions with the students.

- ◆ How can Dan be true to himself and feel good about what he decides to do?
- ◆ Have you ever faced a dilemma like this one? (Ask for volunteers to share their experience. Be ready with one of your own!)

Put the questions on your chalkboard or newsprint sheet, and jot notes around them reflecting students' responses.

(10 mins)

**4.** Ask the class to reflect on the ideas presented in **How Do We Decide?** in the student text. Have students do the exercise and then share their responses. Ask students to explain their choices.

(10 mins)

**5.** Relate the contents of **Yes? No? Maybe?** Use a blackboard to jot down key points and have students underline or note these in their texts. Go over the six points with some care, asking the class to share any examples of ways in which certain points may have affected their lives. (For example, some may have consulted an older person who helped them a lot, or may feel that praying helped, or had an experience of God's closeness.)

Let the class do the exercise, **Just You and Me, Baby.**

Discussion can be a brief sharing by those who wish to speak about how it felt and whether it made them think in a new way about the "difficult others" in their lives. It's an exercise in putting Christ's "Golden Rule" into practice.

(15 mins)

**6.** If time permits and as a wrap-up, distribute news stories, read and discuss. Close with a prayer.

(5 mins)