no easy answers

Making good decisions in an anything goes world

Patricia L. Nederveld | Bob Rozema | Daniel R. Vanderark

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We are grateful to Dan VanderArk for writing the case studies for this course. Dan is a former high school principal and retired director of Christian Schools International, Grand Rapids, Michigan. We also thank Bob Rozema for writing this leader's guide. Bob is a (mostly) retired editor for Faith Alive; he lives in Spring Lake, Michigan.

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how to use this course

Welcome to *No Easy Answers: Making Good Decisions in an Anything-Goes World*. This revised, online edition includes new case studies. If this brief overview doesn't answer all your questions, please feel free to call us at 1-800-333-8300 or email us at editors@faithaliveresources.org.

No Easy Answers is a practical, hands-on course on how to make Christian moral decisions. Aimed at high school students, especially juniors and seniors and recent graduates, *No Easy Answers* features the use of case studies—true accounts of persons who have struggled with some kind of moral dilemma or problem. Such cases are effective because they involve students in interesting real-life issues, allow freedom of expression, and require supporting opinion with facts from the case and principles from God's Word.

In this course, you'll be teaching your students how to make moral choices according to Christian ethical principles in concrete life situations. You'll be helping them to form for themselves a Christian pattern of moral living, making decisions, and taking actions that seek the glory of God, the good of neighbors, and personal well-being. These are ambitious and absolutely crucial goals, especially in the "anything goes" world teens encounter every day—in the sitcoms and movies they view, in the music they listen to, on the Web, among their classmates, on the job, and just about everywhere else.

In such a world, your teens need all the help they can get in making good choices and living as followers of Jesus Christ. This course aims to get them started on the road to making sound, Christian choices.

Organization

Two introductory sessions are followed by ten others that are modeled after the Ten Commandments—the basic, biblical imperatives that express God's will for our moral choices and actions. When seen in the light of Christ's fulfillment and obeyed in the freedom of the Spirit, these commandments become a useful catalog of basic ethical principles.

A concluding session encourages students to practice the ethical principles they've been studying. Leaders who want to stretch the course to more than thirteen sessions may use some of the alternate case studies provided for each commandment (in addition to the main case for each commandment).

Student Materials

For sessions 3-12 on the Ten Commandments, you'll need to print out either the **main case** or the **alternate case** or an **archived case** for each session. Use the alternate case or an archived case if you prefer it to the main case or if you wish to expand the course to more than thirteen sessions.

It may seem obvious, but be sure to give students only one case study at a time. This prevents students from reading ahead, which robs the cases of their freshness and effectiveness.

Actual outcomes of each case are provided in this leader's guide and are meant to be shared with students only *after* the case has been thoroughly discussed.

Included with the cases are a number of **archived cases** retained from previous editions of this course to give you still more choice in selecting a case. Directions for using these cases are included with the case itself, not in this leader's guide (see archived cases file).

In addition to the case studies, students will use **resource pages** that you will need to print out for each session. These include a variety of resources you'll need to teach the sessions, including Bible passages, excerpts from the Heidelberg Catechism, and more.

Leader Materials

This leader's guide gives you detailed suggestions for teaching each session. Each session features

- **Focus:** Briefly describes the main idea or theme of the session.
- **Scripture:** Lists the passages used in the session.
- **Goals:** Summarizes what you and the students want to accomplish in the session.
- **Background:** Provides helpful insights into the content of the session. Written by the late Harvey A. Smit, these backgrounds have been updated with references to the cases and with other material written by Dr. Smit.
- **Session at a Glance:** Outlines each step of the session, the materials you'll need, and the approximate time each step requires (sessions are designed for 50-60 minutes).
- **Leading the Session:** Gives detailed directions for each step, including (for sessions 3-12) directions for teaching both the main case and the alternate case. Includes a number of options, activity adaptations, and tips.

We encourage you to modify the suggestions for leading the sessions to suit your own time frame, teaching style, and the needs of your students.

In addition to the leader's guide and case studies, you'll need Bibles, newsprint (preferably with an easel), markers, and notecards. Check the materials section for occasional additions to this list.

Feedback

Your comments on these sessions and case studies are always welcome. Call us at 1-800-333-8300 or e-mail us at editors@faithaliveresources.org.

tips on teaching cases

Case studies are a great way to learn, as your students will soon discover. But it can take a little practice to get used to this method. Since many of the cases do not have a definite right or wrong answer, your role will be mainly that of helping students examine the question or issue.

What Are Case Studies?

Case studies are true accounts of persons who have struggled with some kind of moral dilemma or problem. Cases always call for a decision (from the students) that will end the dilemma or resolve the problem. For example, a Christian must decide if, in good conscience, she may participate in a non-Christian religious ritual. A teen must decide what to do with damaging information she has about a popular praise team leader. A young man must weigh the advantages and disadvantages of working on Sunday. A governor must decide whether or not to pardon a prisoner on death row who has become a Christian. A young office assistant must decide whether to blow the whistle on a principal's illegal activities. All these cases involve a problem that Christians could resolve in different ways.

You will notice that some of the case studies have a stronger dilemma or problem than others. A few cases have a clear moral "ought"—we call these "teaching cases" because, while the solution may be more obvious than in other cases, they are nevertheless useful for teaching an important issue. For example, in the case "Looking Buff," a young woman is tempted to take steroids; few will argue that she should, but talking about the case and its outcome will help students understand the consequences of yielding to this increasingly common temptation. Also be aware that while the solution of such cases may be very apparent to you, it may be less obvious to some of your students.

In this course, all the case studies (except for the case "Stop or Not" found on the resource page for session 1) are true. We have found from experience that these cases have a down-to-earth realism that appeals to students far more than fictional cases. After exploring a case, students decide what should be done to resolve the dilemma. Once they've decided that, you can tell them what actually was done to resolve the dilemma, for better or for worse.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be a good listener. Case studies demand that you do more listening than talking. Try not to be intimidated by times of silence. Any discomfort will wear off when students realize you care enough about their responses to give them time to think.
- Encourage students to think through a case before jumping to a solution. The approaches in this course will help students look at biblical evidence and consequences before they suggest a solution.
- Wait until students have thoroughly discussed a case before revealing how the case actually turned out and before giving your own opinion. If and when you do offer your opinion, present it as an option you believe is in keeping with God's Word, not as the only right answer to the dilemma.
- Ask questions that encourage thought. When a student says, "I think that so-and-so should have done this or that," ask, "Why do you say that?" or, "What Bible passage or principle supports that view?" or, "Good, but what would be the consequences of her doing that?" If a student gives an answer that is flat-out wrong, direct him or her back to the case.
- Use a variety of approaches when discussing cases, as this leader's guide suggests throughout. At times you'll want to lead the class through a case, explore various options with them, list supporting rationale, and arrive at a recommended solution. Other times, you'll want to have students work in small groups, as is often advocated by this leader's guide. Small groups may act as a jury in one case, perform a role play in another, or look at biblical principles and project consequences in yet another. Working in small groups often helps build student involvement and promotes freedom of expression. If you're teaching a really small class—say, three or four students—you'll need to find ways to work around procedures that require several groups of two to four students each. Often this leader's guide will give you ways to adapt a group procedure to a small class.
- Point students toward the truth. As the mature Christian in your classroom, you need to hold up the standards of Christian ethics by which we judge our decisions and actions. In other words, you need to point students toward the truth, to teach them that some answers to moral issues are clearly more Christian than other answers.

Writing Your Own Case Studies

From time to time you may find yourself thinking, "I know a case that would really work great for this commandment." Great—write it up and use it!

Writing your own cases takes time, of course, but it's not all that difficult.

Keep your eyes open for case study material in newspapers and magazines. If you stick to the facts and quotations presented in the articles, formal permission to write a case study just for your class (not for publication) should not be required. Of course, if you write a case based on someone else's unpublished experiences, obtaining permission to use the case with your class is both necessary and ethical.

Here are a few tips for writing case studies:

- In the first paragraph, state the problem and indicate the need for a decision. In the next couple of paragraphs, give the setting and introduce the characters. Next, narrate past events, including dialogue (quotations, conversations) as much as possible. In the final paragraph, restate the focus and call for a decision.
- Generally, use the past tense and third person. Avoid injecting your opinion by your choice of words. Be as objective as possible.
- Conceal the identity of persons and places involved, except for well-known cases. When inventing new names for places or persons, don't try to be funny or cute. Maintain the reality of the case by using ordinary names.
- Allow room for debate about what the decision-maker should do.

Your students may also enjoy writing their own cases. To facilitate that process, you may want to allow fictional cases rather than insist the cases be true.

SESSION 1

the way we decide

SESSION FOCUS

The way we decide to act in a given situation is influenced by the moral principles (basic ethical assumptions) we hold.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:43-45

SESSION GOALS

- to give examples of tough decisions faced by teens
- to give examples of principles that influence people's decisions and behavior
- to show how these principles influence the way we behave in a specific situation
- to think about why we decide and act as we do

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Learning Activity	Materials	Time
1. *Small Groups: "Don't Know What to Do!"* Small groups list examples of "tough decisions" faced by their age group.	Newsprint, markers	10-15 minutes
2. *Bible Study: Good Tree, Bad Tree.* We discuss Luke 6:43-35, with its image of a tree and its fruit, to pinpoint the link between our beliefs and our actions.	Bibles, notecards, pens	5-10 minutes
3. *Case Study: Stop or Not?* We read a case study, then look at how twelve principles (or moral values) could affect our actions in a specific situation that requires us to make a tough decision.	Pens, resource page: "Stop or Not?"	20-25 minutes
4. *Closing: Guidance from God's Word.* We find and read a verse or two from passages that guide or comfort us when we're faced with problems or tough choices (alternate activity for students not familiar with the Bible is a responsive reading of selected passages).	Bibles	5-10 minutes

SESSION BACKGROUND

This is a course in Christian ethics. More precisely, it's a course in how to make Christian moral decisions.

In this course, you'll be teaching your students to see the complex moral issues that underlie quite ordinary acts. You'll be pointing out the compass points of concern—for God and neighbor, for family and self, for justice and mercy—between which swings the needle of their decision-making. You'll be teaching them how to make moral choices according to Christian ethical principles in concrete life situations. You'll be helping them to form for themselves a Christian pattern of moral living.

This first session helps your students see that the decisions we repeatedly (and often unthinkingly) make in specific situations really spring from moral principles. This holds true even if our pattern of decision-making is impulsive and unconscious instead of reasoned and deliberate. What I do and what I believe are linked together, although that link is often not as clear and tight as it should be.

The Bible uses the image of a tree to illustrate this link between beliefs and actions. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit" (Luke 6:43). Ethics draws from the well of faith the standards and principles that give the water of life to moral behavior. Our own particular moral pattern, our accustomed way of acting and reacting, is largely formed by the principles we have drawn from our faith and our faith community.

Say I stop and help a woman who has stumbled and fallen. So does John Smith. Our actions are the same. Together we help her up, each supporting one arm. Together we pick up the scattered packages. We're both courteous and kind. Yet the *why* of our actions, the reason for our decisions, the principle behind our kindness may be quite different. I may help because my self-image requires it; John may act out of loving concern. I may feel superior in serving; John may feel humble in helping. I may assist a woman who falls but never a man; John may as readily help either. I may hesitate for fear of legal complications; John may never consider such a thing. I may remember how my mother fell and no one helped her; John may remember the good Samaritan.

In some cases differing moral principles cause different decisions; in other cases, for differing reasons, people do the same thing. But in either case the moral dimension is prominent. This session means to help your students see that the moral character of an action comes partly from the act itself (some acts—like stealing, slander, or sexual abuse—are intrinsically bad) and partly from the ethical motives, goals, and principles that the act embodies. Such insight is a necessary first step to moral reflection and Christian decisions.

This session points your students toward the unique character of Christian ethics and poses a question: In contrast to other patterns of moral decision-making, what makes ours Christian? If our faith is truer, our hopes higher, and our love deeper than that of other religions, does that make our morality, our daily living of that faith, better? If Confucian Chinese have the Golden Rule, devout Muslims meticulously obey the law, and animistic Inuit share the last crumb of food with hungry strangers, how are we better?

The answer to this key question comes in the next session and is actually the theme of the entire course. For what you will be teaching is not a better ethical or moral strategy, but how we, who are Christ's, must be Christlike "in all our living."

LEADING THE SESSION

1 Small Groups: "Don't Know What to Do!"

Materials: newsprint, markers

Divide student into groups of two to four. Give each group a marker and sheet of newsprint. Tell them they have five minutes to list and briefly describe as many tough decisions as they can—decisions they or others have had to make or might have to make that could lead them to think, "I really don't know what to do!"

If groups need help getting started, here are a few suggestions to pass along:

- issues with parents
- friendship issues—choosing friends, clashes with friends over the rightness or wrongness of some activity
- peer pressure
- personal stuff—tough decisions you've made or might have to make in the not-so-distant future

After five minutes, have someone from each group display the group's sheet and present the group's examples of tough decisions. There's no need to discuss the examples—just get them out there. You may want to note examples that more than one group mentioned.

Point to a couple of the more challenging decisions (on the newsprint sheets) and ask: **Suppose you had to make this decision—how would you know what to do, what to decide?** Welcome all suggestions but do not discuss details at this point. Instead, explain that this course—*No Easy Answers*—will look at this very question and give us practical help and guidelines in making decisions like these, and many more.

TIP

Don't be concerned if some groups come up with silly examples, such as that huge decision about what kind of toppings to put on pizza. The point is just to let kids list the decisions they see as difficult and challenging. It's OK if some are just for fun or less challenging than others.

TIP

Save the newsprint sheets of tough decisions kids listed. You may be able to use them later in the course, perhaps as starting points for the group to write its own case study.

activity adaptation

If this is an opening session with a new class, consider asking kids to introduce themselves by giving an example of a tough choice they've recently made—or a choice they might have to make soon. Examples could be serious or funny. Afterward, ask how they will decide what to do in these (or other) situations.

Or have each group invent and dramatize one tough decision someone their age must make—a situation in which he or she is not sure what to do.

TIP
Of course you don't have to do the notecard thing—you could just ask kids to say what they think the passage means. But writing out the verse and what it means is worth the extra time it takes because it gets everyone (not just the talkers) involved and encourages a more thoughtful response.

2 Bible Study: Good Tree, Bad Tree

Materials: Bibles, notecards, pens

Distribute Bibles and notecards, and ask someone to read Luke 6:43-45. Have everyone copy verse 43 on the notecard: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit." Then say something like this: **Suppose you wanted to explain to a friend—in plain English—what Jesus is saying here. What would you say?** Have students write their responses under the verse they just copied.

Invite each person to read aloud what he or she wrote. Emphasize the idea that what we are on the inside determines what we are like on the outside—the way we talk, the way we act. What's in our hearts shapes what comes out of our mouths and what we do with our hands. Ask, **What does this have to do with making decisions and choices?**

Listen to comments (there may not be any!), then summarize by saying something like this: **Our decisions and actions are influenced by what's in our heart, by the values and principles we have about life. In a minute, we're going to see how this works in a specific situation.**

3 Case Study: Stop or Not?

Materials: pens, resource page: "Stop or Not?"

TIP
Go around the circle for this activity, asking each person to read a principle aloud and to give an initial response.

Distribute a printout of the resource page to each student. Read the case aloud to the class. You may want to mention that while this is a fictional case, the remaining cases used in the course actually happened.

Work through the list of principles with the class. For each principle, ask students to respond to the question on the handout: **If I held this principle, would I stop or drive on? Why?** Be flexible as you listen to responses. Remember that any one moral principle could motivate different responses—see examples below.

1. *Glandular principle:* Drive on! Who wants to get soaked? Why ruin my good clothes!
2. *Me-first principle:* Why stop? Won't do me a bit of good. Besides, the whole thing could be a setup for robbery. If someone is in that car, he'll have to take care of himself. I've got more important things to do right now. Maybe I'll call the cops later, if I get a chance.
3. *Universal principle:* I hate to go out there, but it's the logical thing to do. Suppose no one in the world ever bothered to help someone in trouble? What a lousy world this would be!
4. *Golden Rule principle:* Sure, I'll stop. It's the least I'd want someone to do for me.
5. *Conscience principle:* I'd feel awfully guilty if I didn't stop. Something tells me it's the right thing to do.

6. *Pass-the-buck principle:* Look, I've got to get to graduation. Other cars will come along. Let someone else help. I wouldn't know what to do anyway.
7. *Good Samaritan principle:* Someone could be injured in that car. If there is, I have an obligation to help. I'll take a look and see what I can do.
8. *Legal principle:* If I stop, I'd have to park partly on the highway and that's against the law. Too bad . . . better just go on. (*Note:* this principle doesn't fit our case very well; we mention it because it is a key principle for discussing the rest of the cases in this course!)
9. *Minimum risk principle:* I'll call the cops when I get to school. No sense taking any chances.
10. *Tradition principle:* Helping people in trouble is what our family always does. I'll stop.
11. *Sanctity of life principle:* Someone's life could be in danger here. That life is more important than my inconvenience.
12. *WWJD:* It's pretty obvious what Jesus would do in this situation. Since he is my example, I better stop.

After reviewing the list, discuss the questions in the handout.

- **Do you have any other principles to add to this list—motives or attitudes that would help determine what we should do?** Students may mention Christian love as a guiding principle set forth by Jesus himself. Other possibilities: putting God and others before self, giving unselfishly, serving others, and so on.
- **Give an example of how one moral principle could motivate different responses.** If students need help on this one, give them an example and let them supply others. For instance, the "me-first" principle might motivate me to drive on because I'm unwilling to take the risk or trouble of stopping; on the other hand, if I have a great urge to see my name in print or my face on TV, that same principle could influence me to stop and help. Similarly, the conscience principle could influence me to stop and help, but if my conscience is callused, I'd probably drive right on by. Even the good Samaritan principle may not, in these times of increasing crime and litigation, make me stop. It may only direct me to the nearest phone to call the police.
- **Do our moral principles influence the way we decide and act (a) a little; (b) some; (c) a lot; (d) not at all? Why?** We hope, of course, that kids say "a lot," since that's the key idea of this session and course! Whatever they say, it's a good idea to give your group a chance to react, now that they've seen how principles can affect actions in a specific case. So use this opportunity to listen to your students. Some may feel that most of our decisions are made on the spot, without much conscious thought or moral reasoning. You may want to point out that moral principles often function at almost a subconscious level, but we still base our actions on them.
- **What do you think you might do if you were in that situation—stop, drive on, or something else? Why would you do it? What principle would influence you? (You may use a principle that's not on the list, if you wish.)** Give students time to think this over, then invite responses. Because they are familiar with the

parable, some students may mention the good Samaritan principle. If they do, use this opportunity to point out that Christian principles are derived from the Word of God. Ask students if they remember the question the parable addressed *(Who is my neighbor?).* Also ask how the parable might help us if we were faced with the decision of stopping or driving on (by reminding us that all people are our neighbors and therefore deserving of our help and love).

Other Christian principles students might mention include: sanctity of life, the Golden Rule, love for others, conscience, and WWJD. Obeying the law, while not very applicable in this case, is also a key factor in Christian decision-making. Next week's session will focus on the principle of love within the law of God. The remainder of the course follows the Ten Commandments.

activity adaptation

Instead of just reviewing the twelve principles with your class, ask students to pair off and have each pair role-play how one or two principles would determine whether they would stop or drive on. One of the two role players should be the person in the ditched car, the other the driver of the car passing by. The latter sees the car in the ditch, does his moral reasoning out loud, then either stops or drives on. Let kids have fun doing this—piteous cries for help from the ditch, driver rolling down the window and peering out into the rain, maybe looking at his watch or hunting for an umbrella, and so on.

option: apply the principles

If you have extra time, have students work in small groups and apply the twelve principles to one or more of the situations they listed at the beginning of today's session.

4 Closing: Guidance from God's Word

Materials: Bibles

Remind students that the decisions and actions of everyday life ought not to be separated from the Word of God and prayer.

If your students are familiar with the Bible, ask them to find and read a verse or two from a passage that gives them guidance or comforts them when faced with problems or tough choices.

If your students are not familiar with the Bible, invite them to turn to Psalm 139 (or a passage of your choosing). Divide into two groups and read verses 1-14 responsively as your closing prayer.

option: alternate closing

Or close today's session by returning to step 1 and the choices that students listed. Have students pick one tough decision and then pray aloud for God's help and wisdom, should they ever have to make that decision.

SESSION 1

stop or not?

You're driving alone on a lightly traveled highway, heading to your high school graduation. Your robe and cap are in the backseat of the car. You're mentally rehearsing your speech—as class president you've been asked to speak on behalf of the graduating class. You are a little nervous since you want to make a good impression on the hundreds of people who will be at the graduation ceremony in the school gym.

It's a nasty night in early June. At times the rain comes so fast and heavy that your wipers can hardly keep up. So you hold your speed down to a cautious 45 mph, despite the fact that you're running a bit late. Suddenly, off to the right, you see tail lights glowing upward at an impossible angle. You slow down, realizing that a car has skidded off the road into the ditch. From the road it's impossible to see if there's anyone inside.

Another driver passes you impatiently, laying on the horn. You wish you had taken your cell phone, but in the rush of getting ready, you've forgotten it. Do you stop and investigate? Do you risk ruining your clothes in the cold rain and missing your own graduation and speech? Or do you drive on?

For each of the following moral principles, ask yourself: **If I held this principle, would I stop or drive on? Why?**

1. *Glandular principle:* If it feels good, do it. If not, why do it?
2. *Me-first principle:* Looking out for number one. What's in it for me?
3. *Universal principle:* Suppose everyone acted this way? What would our world be like?
4. *Golden Rule principle:* How would I feel in that person's place?
5. *Conscience:* An inner voice tells me what's right or wrong.
6. *Pass-the-buck principle:* Let someone else do it.
7. *Good Samaritan principle:* Love for my neighbor is the highest good.
8. *Legal principle:* The law is always right. Do as you are told.
9. *Minimum risk:* How can I fulfill my obligation but at minimum risk to myself?
10. *Tradition principle*: We've always done it this way.
11. *Sanctity of Life principle:* Human life is sacred; it has top priority and claims.
12. *WWJD:* What would Jesus do in this situation?

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For Discussion

- Do you have any other principles to add to this list—motives or attitudes that would help determine what you should do?

- Give an example of how one moral principle could motivate different responses.

- Do our moral principles influence the way we decide and act (a) a little; (b) some; (c) a lot; (d) not at all? Why?

- What do you think you might do if you were actually in that situation—stop, drive on, or something else? Why would you do it? What principle would influence you? (You may use a principle that's not on the list, if you wish.)

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