

Judging Moral Scenarios

Name: _____

Every day we are faced with many decisions. Some are trivial, such as what shoes to wear. Others are more significant, such as whether to answer a question honestly.

Men and women throughout history have had to make decisions to do what is right or wrong. Saint Thomas More was an English lawyer who worked as chancellor to King Henry VIII in the 1500s. Henry sought to establish the Church of England, breaking away from the Catholic Church, in order to divorce and remarry during his reign. Saint Thomas refused to accept and defend the king’s decision to break away from the Church. He believed that Henry was making an immoral choice, and was beheaded for not publicly supporting him. Saint Thomas More is remembered for his courage and integrity.

Instructions

Read and analyze scenarios 1–4, using the prompts below to guide your thinking:

- A. Consider—What should the character do?
- B. Evaluate—If you were in the character’s situation, how difficult would it be for you to do the right thing? Rate your decision on a scale of 1–5 (1= very easy, 5= very difficult).
- C. Reflect—What makes this choice easy or difficult?

Scenarios

1. Molly sees Beth take an apple from the cafeteria at lunch without paying for it. Molly knows that Beth did not have money for lunch and was very hungry. Later, a teacher asks Molly if she saw anyone take food without paying.

A. What should Molly say?

B. If you were in Molly’s position, how difficult would it be for you to do the right thing? (Circle your response).

(Very easy) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very difficult)

C. What makes this choice easy or difficult?

2. Quinn sees Mackenzie take an orange from the cafeteria at lunch without paying for it. Mackenzie walks away laughing. She gives a classmate a high five and throws the orange in the trash can. Later, a teacher asks Quinn if he saw anyone take food without paying.

A. What should Quinn say?

B. If you were in Quinn’s position, how difficult would it be for you to do the right thing? (Circle your response).

(Very easy) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very difficult)

C. What makes this choice easy or difficult?

3. Greg is walking to soccer practice with his teammates, and they start making fun of a classmate who fell while trying to kick the ball in PE class earlier that day. Although Greg feels bad for his classmate, he continues walking with his friends without saying anything.

A. What should Greg do?

B. If you were in Greg’s position, how difficult would it be for you to do the right thing? (Circle your response).

(Very easy) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very difficult)

C. What makes this choice easy or difficult?

4. Chloe’s mom told her that she was not allowed to download a popular social media app onto her phone. A friend tells Chloe that there is a way to download the app without her mom knowing and encourages her to do it because everyone else is using it and there’s nothing wrong with it.

A. What should Chloe do?

B. If you were in Chloe’s position, how difficult would it be for you to do the right thing? (Circle your response).

(Very easy) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very difficult)

C. What makes this choice easy or difficult?

Conscientious Objection

Name: _____

Listening to the Voice of God

“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey...His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.” (CCC 1776)

“Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful.” (CCC 1783)

Because of Original Sin, we are not always inclined to do what God wants. Instead, we have a tendency to listen to our own desires and do what we want. Or we rationalize our actions, trying to convince ourselves acts we know are wrong are actually good. Since only God’s desires for us will lead us to the fullness of life that he promises, it is especially important to form our conscience so we are able to respond to God’s will.

Turn to the section entitled “Judgment of Mind” on page 99. Review the discussion on how we form our conscience.

1. What are two things you can do this week to form your conscience well?

A. _____

B. _____

Conscientious Objectors

Blessed Franz Jägerstätter was a husband and father living in Austria in the 1930s, during the rise of Nazi Germany. By 1940, Austria was occupied by Germany, and Jägerstätter was called into service with the Nazis. Franz accepted the call, believing that he was morally obligated to serve his nation. Later he was allowed to return home, due to the societal need for the produce of farmland. In March of 1943, however, he was once again called upon to join the Nazi army. During the three years since his original draft, Jägerstätter had talked with priests, prayed, and evaluated his moral duty to serve. He refused to join the army because he thought the Nazi ideology conflicted with his Catholic faith. He could not in good conscience support the immoral actions of the Nazis. He stated that his duty to God and the moral law was more important than his duty to the state. He was executed in August 1943 for his refusal to serve, and was beatified in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI.

2. How did Blessed Franz Jägerstätter form his conscience?

3. On the question of his obligation to serve in the Nazi army, what conclusion did he come to?

The Church teaches that there is such a thing as a “just war”—a situation where it is morally lawful for a government to declare war (see CCC 2308–9). In such situations, the government has a right to call upon its citizens to provide for the nation’s defense (see CCC 2310). As Catholics, we can lawfully and morally participate in the armed forces. At the same time, the Church also recognizes that other wars are unjust. These wars can either be unjust *from the very beginning* or they can *become* unjust in the way they are carried out. The Nazi government’s actions were unjust in both ways.

The Church teaches that governments should respect those who are “conscientious objectors” (see CCC 2311). A conscientious objector is someone who has determined that fulfilling the orders of the military would cause him to violate his conscience. A conscientious objector does not just think a particular government policy or military action is ineffective or inconvenient to him—he believes it is *unjust*. He thinks that his own participation *would be sinful*. Blessed Franz was a conscientious objector because he thought participating in the Nazi military as a soldier would be sinful.

For Discussion:

- **What do you think made it possible for Blessed Franz Jägerstätter to follow his conscience?
What do you think made it difficult?**
- **Why is it important that citizens have the right to be conscientious objectors?**

For Reflection:

- **Reflect on a time when it was difficult to follow your conscience. How can you use the witness of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter to help you the next time you are tempted to disobey your conscience in order to do what is easier?**

1. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (December 7, 1965), no 16.
2. “Bl. Franz Jägerstätter (1907–1943): Layman and Martyr,” Vatican News Services, October 26, 2007, Bl. Franz Jägerstätter (1907–1943) - Biography (vatican.va).
3. Robert Ellsberg, “The Franciscan Saints: Franz Jägerstätter,” *Franciscan Spirit Blog, Franciscan Media*, June 7, 2023, <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/the-franciscan-saints-franz-jagerstatter/>.
4. “Conscientious Objectors,” Selective Service System, <https://www.sss.gov/register/alternative-service/conscientious-objectors/>.

A Call to Repent

Name: _____

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Saint Peter recognized Christ as the Son of God, and Christ declared, “I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18). And yet, when Jesus was being condemned and sentenced to death, Peter denied even knowing Christ (see Lk 22:57). Peter immediately realized his sin—Luke writes that “he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). Like Saint Peter, we also have moments when we make choices that go against our conscience, and we sin.

When someone is trying to resist doing a wrong action, he might use the expression “I don’t want it *on my conscience*.” One of the jobs of our conscience is to judge whether our past actions were morally right or wrong. Our conscience not only tells us when we’ve done something wrong, it also reminds us of our need to repent and repair our relationship with God.

Recognizing our failure when we haven’t followed our conscience brings sorrow, guilt, and shame, but we know that our hope is in Christ, and he offers us his forgiveness. This is what we declare in the Act of Contrition, which we pray during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

My God,

I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.

In choosing to do wrong

and failing to do good,

I have sinned against you

whom I should love above all things.

I firmly intend, with your help,

to do penance,

to sin no more,

and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.

In his name, my God, have mercy.

- **Reflect on a time that you did not follow your conscience.**
- **Use the template below to write your own Act of Contrition, stating how you have learned that your choice was wrong, asking forgiveness, and vowing to do better next time.**

My God,

I am sorry for

I ask you to

I promise to
