

LESSON 72

The Heart's Desires

JAMES 4:1-10



BIBLE TRUTH

SINFUL DESIRES LEAD US AWAY FROM GOD

LESSON SNAPSHOT

1. OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

2. BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read James 4:1–10 from the Scriptures or read story 150, “The Heart’s Desires,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

3. OBJECT LESSON 1 10 MIN

Idol Talk

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ candy bar
- ✓ ice cream container (empty and rinsed out)
- ✓ a popular video game
- ✓ movie case (DVD of an appropriate popular movie)
- ✓ football
- ✓ alarm clock
- ✓ five-dollar bill

4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

5. OBJECT LESSON 2 10 MIN

Mint Giveaway

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ mints—one for everyone in the class

6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

7. ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Drawing Idols

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ paper
- ✓ crayons, markers, or colored pencils

8. CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON 20 MIN

Confession of Idolatry

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ paper and pens or pencils

TOTAL 75 MIN

PREPARING TO TEACH

TEACHING POINTS

Sinful desires lie at the root of conflict—The Holy Spirit through James, the brother of Jesus, gives us a wonderful look into the human heart. He tells us that our quarrels and fights spring from sinful desires. We want something but we don't get it (James 4:1–2). We like to blame our circumstances for our sin, but God tells us squarely that our sin comes from within our hearts, not from outside us.

We might say, for example, “I needed to get a good grade, so that's why I cheated.” Or we like to blame others as if they are responsible for our sin: “You make me so angry!” Sometimes we excuse our sin because of hardship or suffering: “I spoke harshly because I was tired.” God cuts through our excuses and goes right for the heart. We sin because we don't get what we want: “You desire and do not have.” Our hearts are full of idols ready to replace God. In our hearts we want money, we want control, or we crave comfort and ease. The Bible says that these kinds of desires, though not always bad in themselves, can rise to sinful heights and lead to sinful behaviors. When that happens, we will strike out against anything or anyone who stands in our way of getting what we want. Inordinate desires wrestle for control against God's Spirit within us.

Sinful desires lead to selfish prayers—If we don't check our sinful desires, soon we will be asking God to fulfill them (James 4:3). While most folks would hesitate praying for God to bless them with a million-dollar lottery win, asking God to fulfill sinful desires can be much more subtle than that. Sometimes we treat God as if he were a servant there to fulfill our desires instead of the other way around. While God loves to bless us with good things, God wants us to pray according to his will, not just for what we want for our own pleasure.

God is not required to answer our prayers—He will always hear our prayers, but he will not always answer our prayers the way we want. Clearly, James says that God's best for us is sometimes to refuse our requests (James 4:2). When God doesn't grant our requests, he is actually loving us. Think of it this way: we tend to love worldly things instead of God. For example, the Bible says we cannot love both God and money. If God were to grant our request for a lot of money, he could be helping us on a path away from loving him.

God's grace comes to those who repent—What a joy to know that if we humble ourselves, God will pour grace into our lives (James 4:6). Paul told Titus, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly

passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11–13).

When we humble ourselves, we receive God’s grace (James 4:10). We need his grace to resist the devil and our own sinful desires. James tells us to repent and draw near to God. Then he promises that God will respond by drawing near to us (James 4:8).

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Sinful Desires

Our sinful passions are called sinful desires in the Bible. In the parable of the sower, Jesus tells us that the thorns that choke the seed represent desires for other things that choke the word making it unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). Paul teaches that our sinful desires are at war with the Spirit within us and that if we live according to the Spirit we will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). In the opening verses of James, we see how sinful desires work in our lives.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (*James 1:13–15*)

Where Is the Gospel? _____

How does today’s Bible story fit into God’s greater plan of redemption?

James rebukes his readers by calling them “adulterous people” (James 4:4). This is not because they were stealing someone else’s wife or husband, but because they had turned to loving the things of the world instead of God.

Scripture compares our relationship with the Lord to a marriage. When we turn to idols, it is like turning to another husband or wife. It is adultery against God. This is a serious sin because God has demonstrated his love in the most profound way—by sending his own Son to take the punishment for our sins. When we covet something in the world, we are rejecting God’s love and the relationship he extends to us in Christ. God wants our pleasures, our desires, and our love to be focused on Christ.

THE LESSON

OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week's lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read James 4:1–10 from the Scriptures or read story 150, “The Heart’s Desires,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

OBJECT LESSON 1 10 MIN

Idol Talk

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ candy bar
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- ✓ a popular video game
- ✓ movie case (DVD of an appropriate popular movie)
- ✓ football
- ✓ alarm clock
- ✓ five-dollar bill

The object of this lesson is to help the children understand the way idolatry works in our hearts.

Arrange these items in a row on a table in front of your classroom. Ask the children the following questions:

- Which of these objects are your favorites?
- Which of these objects is an idol?
- How can we tell if something is an idol?

Read through James 4:1–12. Then ask them the last question again.

After explaining that an idol can be anything we love more than God, have the children come up with scenarios that address how these items might become idols for them. Ask if any of them are willing to share a time when one of these items became an idol in their heart. Remember

James gives us this clue: if it causes a quarrel or fight, you can bet you have an idol at work in your heart. So ask the kids if they have ever fought over one of the objects on the table.

If anyone shares a confession, thank them for being humble and point out that confession is one of the best ways to humble oneself. Then review the promise James gives in this passage for those who humble themselves.

TEACHING/DISCUSSION 10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

OBJECT LESSON 2 10 MIN

Mint Giveaway

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ mints—one for everyone in the class

The object of this lesson is to illustrate how God does not answer our selfish prayers.

Pull out a pack of mints, take one for yourself and then ask the class who would like the rest of your mints. Interview those who raise their hands and ask them to tell you why they want your mints. If they only mention their own desires, go on to the next person. If they say they are willing to share, give them the mints.

Explain that God, in a demonstration of his love for us, does not always answer our selfish prayers. Compare this to parents who will not allow their children to eat all of their holiday candy at one time, or all of their birthday cake at once. A child might be upset at first, but the parent knows that too much sugar will make them sick.

Now offer the mints again. You will likely have newly unselfish requests. Share the mints with the class.

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Drawing Idols

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ paper
- ✓ crayons, markers, or colored pencils

Draw pictures of things that can be idols if we love them more than God. Have the students write across the top of their paper “Everything we love more than God is an idol.”

CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

Pick several children to pray prayers based on the day’s Scripture passages.

BONUS OBJECT LESSON 20 MIN

Confession of Idolatry

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ paper and pens or pencils

Explain that an idol is something we desire more than God. It is something that leads us to disobey God’s Word if we don’t get it. Share an example of something in your life that can draw you away from God. That could be something like watching too much TV instead of reading your Bible. It could be something that makes you angry, like having noisy children. Remember, if it causes a quarrel or fight, you are probably struggling with an idolatrous desire. Even seeking peace and quiet from our environment, if it leads to fighting, is an idol. After all, we are supposed to find our peace in God and treat others with kindness.

Explain to the children that humility is the antidote to idolatry (James 4:10). One sure way we can humble ourselves is through sharing our weaknesses with others.

As an exercise, hand out paper and pencils and have everyone write a confession to God for something that has become an idol in their lives. When they are done, ask for a few volunteers to share with the class what they wrote. (Preview what they wrote to make sure it is appropriate to share.) Explain that it is good for us to confess before God, but that it takes even more humility to confess sin to other people. Get their commitment to share their confessions with their parents.