

## THE HEART'S DESIRES

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: JAMES 4:1-10



*Sinful desires lead us away from God.*

## The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

### Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

**Sinful desires lie at the root of conflict.** James gives us a wonderful look into the heart of every man. He tells us that our quarrels and fights spring from sinful desires. We want something but we don't get it. We like to blame sin on our situation, but James places responsibility for our behavior in our hearts.

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."

James cuts through our excuses and goes right for the heart. We sin because we don't get what we want. 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, 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 bless them and give us what we sinfully long for. We treat God as though He were a servant to our desires instead of the other way around. God wants us to pray according to His will, not 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. When God doesn't grant our selfish 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 a request for a lot of money, He may be helping us on a path away from the love of God.

**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. Paul told Titus, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-14).

When we humble ourselves, we receive God's grace. 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.

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### WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

*Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.*

In James 4:4, James gives this rebuke: "You adulterous people." This is not because the people were struggling in the area of physical adultery (stealing someone else's wife or husband) but because they had turned to other loves. 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 upon Christ.

### ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

**Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.**

**Bible Passage: Psalm 22:7,8**

#### **Connecting the passage to Christ:**

Psalm 22 details the suffering and crucifixion of our Lord with amazing accuracy. It is astonishing to consider that this psalm was written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. In this passage we see that it even predicts what the mockers would say to our Lord when He was crucified.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- Read Matthew 27:39-43. How are the two passages similar? (Draw out your children regarding obvious similarities.)
- What does seeing this kind of detail prophesied hundreds of years before the event tell us about the sovereignty of God? (God does not simply know about what is going to happen. He knows exactly what is going to happen and is in control of all things, down to the last word!)

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### SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

#### BE A DOER OF THE WORD

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.

### ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

#### IDOL TALK

##### Supplies:

- candy bar
- Ice cream container  
(washed out)
- video game cartridge  
(Pick a popular game)
- movie case (DVD or VHS  
tape 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.

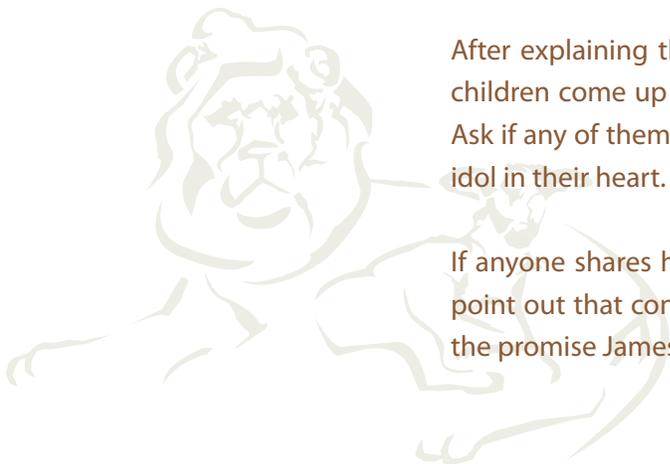
Ask the children the following questions:

- Which of these objects are your favorites? (Draw them out.)
- Which of these objects is an idol? (Draw them out but don't move on to instruct them about idols yet.)
- How can we tell if something is an idol? (Just draw them out don't give them answers)

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 when these items might become idols to them. Ask if any of them are willing to share a time when one of these items became an idol in their heart.

If anyone shares his or her own confession, thank him for humbling himself 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



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### MINT GIVE-A-WAY

**Supplies:**

Several packs of mints,  
enough for everyone in  
your class to get one

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 the people who raise their hands and ask them why they want your mints. If they mention their own desires go on to the next person. See if anyone tells you that their reason for wanting the mints is to share them with others.

Explain that God does not answer our selfish prayers and help the children understand that this actually a demonstration of love. Compare it 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.



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### BEFORE AND AFTER

**Supplies:**

enough pretzel sticks for  
your students

Use this exercise to help the children see how even a pretzel can be an idol. Read through and talk about the James passage before you do this exercise.

Ask for volunteers to act out a skit for you.

Tell the children you are going to pretend they are siblings and you are the parent. You are going to give them three pretzel sticks to share and then leave the room. They are to demonstrate just how our sinful desires lead to quarrels. Explain that you will hand the pretzels to one of the two. The problem comes in when you both consider how to spit the third pretzel.

Let the kids act this out spontaneously. Remind them to demonstrate sinful desires.

Do the skit several times with different groups of children and then ask the following questions:

- Why was it so easy for the children to act out the scene? (We have all struggled with sinful desires. They were merely demonstrating what they have done in real life.)
- Are pretzels evil? (No, it is the desire for drawing our comfort from food instead of our Lord that is evil.)

Now invite a few new sets of actors to come up and re-do the skits without selfish sinful desires at work. Help the children to see that when we argue over material things we are disobeying God's Word. Instead of obeying God and not arguing, we are obeying our desires to fight for what we want. Anytime we obey something over God, we are committing the sin of idolatry.

Give the extra pretzels to anyone who didn't get a chance to act and receive one.



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### PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

### IN CLASS PROJECT

Draw pictures of things that can be idols if we love them more than God. Then write across the top of your paper: "Everything we love more than God is an idol!"

### FOR THE OLDER GRADES

#### CONFESSION OF IDOLATRY

**Supplies:**

Paper and pencil

Explain that an idol is something that we desire more than God that leads us to disobey God's word if we don't get it.

Explain to them that humility is the antidote to idolatry. We humble ourselves through our confessions.

As an exercise, hand out paper and pencils and have everyone write a confession to God for the idols at work in their hearts. When they are all done, ask for a few volunteers to share what they wrote with the class. 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.



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### 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 some of the seed fell among the thorns and the desires for other things came in and choked the word making unfruitful.

The apostle Paul teaches us 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 our sinful nature (Galatians 5:16).

In the opening verses of James we see how sinful desires work in our lives:

“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:13-15).

