

Deep Desire- Lesson 4

1 John 2:12–17

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Traditionally, many Christian churches and colleges have enforced a negative view of the world. Certain activities were not permitted—no tobacco, no alcohol, no social dancing. These were considered worldly forms of entertainment. If you were raised in this kind of environment, you may wonder if you're missing something. Have you wondered if you're really prepared to forsake all those "worldly pleasures" for the rest of your life? If you love God do you have to hate everything else?

Discussion Questions:

[Q] If you were raised in church, what did your church teach about worldly pleasures?

[Q] For those of you that were raised with a lot of rules about what you can't do, did you ever rebel against those rules? And if you did, why?

[Q] We all need rules to function, but what might be the problem with rules we don't understand?

[Q] It has been said that rules without relationship never work. Has that been true in your experience? Explain.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Read 1 John 2:12–14.

The three groups—children, fathers, and young men—most likely refer to three spiritual stages represented by John’s readers. Some are new believers, still rejoicing in their forgiveness. Some are seasoned believers, mature in their knowledge of God. And others are just hitting their stride as followers of Christ, full of zeal and strength. Wherever they might be in their journeys, he doesn’t want them to get discouraged by his challenging words, and he wants them to understand that he has their best interests at heart.

[Q] Why is it important to recognize where we are in our spiritual journey?

[Q] Which stage are you in—new believer, seasoned believer, just hitting your stride?

[Q] Name all the positive things mentioned in this passage. Which ones encourage you most?

Teaching Point Two: Do not love the world or anything in the world.

Read 1 John 2:15–17.

This is a stern warning. It’s one of the relatively few times in the letter John uses the imperative mood, as if giving a command. Just to help you appreciate the significance of that: the Book of James, which is also five chapters long, uses the imperative mood 35 times to give a command or a prohibition. John only does that 15 times, and this is one of them. “Do not love the world.” That’s how serious he is.

[Q] What exactly does John mean by “the world?”

[Q] What about “anything in the world”?

Note: He’s using the Greek word, kosmos, here, which generally has one of two meanings in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the created world- that is the earth itself and its inhabitants, humans beings. The Bible is clear that the created world is good; in fact, God pronounced it “very good” when He was done creating it. And as we said it’s clear from the Biel

that God loves the world and sent His Son to save the world. So, when He says here, “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” He’s not referring to the earth itself or to the human race. Sometimes that word kosmos is used to describe the sinful world- that is the earthly system of value, beliefs, and behaviors that are in opposition to God and His purposes. John uses the world this way two other times in this letter (4:3; 5:19).

[Q] How do you know if you love the world?

[Q] You can’t love the world and God at the same time. It’s like trying to have one foot in a canoe and one foot on the dock. Eventually you have to throw yourself in one direction or the other. When have you tried to do keep one foot in and one foot out, and what was the result?

Teaching Point Three: The desires to do, to have, and to be can be destructive.

There are a variety of ways to translate verse 16. John identifies three worldly desires that are characteristic of a worldly way of life. One explanation is: the desires to do, to have, and to be.

The first is the desire to do, “the lust of the flesh.” The word lust actually applies to all three desires. In the Greek language, lust is a compound word which takes the normal word for desire and puts a prefix on it that intensifies it. Literally, it could be translated “hyper-desire.” Lust begins with a healthy desire but takes it to an unhealthy extreme.

Remember, there’s nothing wrong with desire. Most desires are God-given. The desire to eat, to drink, to work, to play, to build, to procreate, to achieve, to conquer—these desires are all natural to human beings. What the world does is take these natural desires and pervert them, corrupt them, or exaggerate them, so that they become unnatural and sub-human.

The world takes these desires and twists them into something they were never meant to be. There’s nothing wrong with food, until we eat too much of it. There’s nothing wrong with a drink (liquor or coffee!), until it alters our behavior, or until we can’t live without it. There’s nothing wrong with skiing, until it crowds God right out of your life. There’s nothing wrong with a kiss on the lips, as long as the person you’re kissing is rightfully yours to kiss.

[Q] What kind of destruction does the pursuit of pleasure bring over time in our lives? Can you give an example?

[Q] How does such a pursuit eclipse our love for the Father?

The second worldly desire John identifies is the desire to have, “the lust of the eyes.” This desire is not directed toward sensation and experience, but toward material objects—things the world tells us we have to have. It’s the desire for possessions.

There’s nothing wrong with material things, whether it’s clothes or houses or toys or tools—if God should provide the resources for them. The Bible never condemns anyone for desiring things or having things. We meet plenty of wealthy, godly people in Scripture, and Jesus had plenty of wealthy friends and acquaintances.

[Q] What causes us to cross the line that makes a particular thing we want to acquire destructive instead of productive to us?

[Q] How can such a desire become more important than God to us?

The third worldly desire is the desire to have, “the pride of life.” This is the pursuit of success, achievement, and recognition (pride).

[Q] There’s nothing wrong with taking pride in a job well done, feeling good when you achieve a milestone, or reveling in the affirmation of others when it’s rightly deserved and received. God placed within us a desire to pursue excellence and impact and accomplishment. So how can you know when you’ve made it an idol?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

According to C. S. Lewis, these desires—to do, to have, to be—are merely the rumblings of a much deeper desire. It’s a desire so deep, so profound, even Lewis couldn’t find a word for it. He talks about it in his writings, this inconsolable longing for something more. Sometimes he describes it as beauty, other times as joy, but by his own admission, none of those words quite gets at it.

The closest word he could find was the German word *sehnsucht*. It’s hard to define, but we know it when we feel it. *Sehnsucht* combines the ideas of wanting something and missing something. It describes a deep existential yearning for something that we can’t name but know to be true. In his book *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis describes it as “the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.”

It's the longing for every good and perfect thing all at once. It's the longing for God and his kingdom. And until that deepest of all desires is satisfied, nothing else will ever be enough. No earthly pleasure or possession or achievement can ever satisfy the deep longing of our souls. "The human heart was made for God," Augustine said, "and our hearts are restless till we find rest in him."

But once that desire is satisfied, once we have turned to God and aligned ourselves with his good and eternal purpose for our lives, we can experience earthly things as they were meant to be experienced—in relationship with him.

So John's message for us this week is this: You know you're living deep when you want life with God more than anything this world has to offer.

Action Points:

- Discuss which of the three worldly desires has the most pull on your life. Then pray that God will help you resist that pull and fill you with a desire for him, the only one who can truly satisfy your deepest desires.
- Carry a journal with you over the next week, noting when you feel pulled to meet one of these three worldly desires. Note what you were doing when it happened. After a week, take a look back to see what patterns may be present.