

LESSON 1

GOD AND YOUR HEART

BIBLE READING

1 John 1:8 – 2:2; 2:15-17

Key verse: Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).



TEACHING POINT

Love for God conflicts with love for the world. There is only one number one in your life.



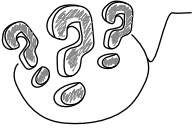
LEADER'S PREPARATION

This session is about raising the awareness amongst the young people of the constant pressure on them to be 'worldly'. The aim is to set up the rest of the series and to introduce the idea of worldliness, which remains a problem and attraction even when we are committed Christians.

'The world' is used in various ways in the Bible. It can mean the physical world, as in Genesis 41:57, 'the famine was severe



in all the world', or the people in the world, e.g. John 3:16, 'God so loved the world'. In this passage it means human society in opposition to God.



QUESTIONS

Read 1 John 1:8 – 2:2. We are all sinful, but what does God promise to do? What does Jesus do?

If we confess then God promises to forgive us (1:9). He will purify us (i.e. make us holy). He also provides Jesus as the 'one who speaks in our defence' (2:1). In other words, Jesus speaks up on our behalf. Furthermore, Jesus is the atoning sacrifice – the one who perfectly covers the punishment for our sins.

This opening question is important since the subject passage of this session is dangerous when it is taken out of the context of sin and salvation. A blind obedience to rejecting the world, without the context of this being our response to the rescue God has provided, might lead us into all sorts of legalism and isolation.

Read 1 John 2:15-17. What are we not to do? What are the sort of things that verse 16 defines as worldly?

We are not to love the world – that's simple. (See above for the meaning of 'the world' in this context.) Verse 16 expands on the idea of worldliness. 'The cravings of sinful man' encompass our wrong desires and priorities whatever they may be. 'The lust of his eyes' is about where we look, which is a good indication of our desires and is certainly meant to include sexual lusts. 'The boasting of what he has and does' is about basic materialism and a self-centred world view.

Where do these things come from?

They come from the world, not from God. Worldliness is an attitude that seeks to ignore God and live life our way without him. Think of the lyrics to the song 'My Way', a very popular song at funerals. It is a song that praises a self-centred world and represents that worldly attitude exactly.



What two reasons does John give for not loving the world? (v. 15, 17)

Firstly, it contradicts our love for God (v.15) – *if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. Just as Jesus said, it is impossible to love two masters – you cannot serve the Lord and money (Matthew 6:24).

Secondly, the world is temporary (v.17) – *The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever*. Why put your trust and resources into something that is second best, something that will one day be destroyed?

APPLY:

What sort of things are we tempted to love that are worldly?

As well as possessions and money you may want to steer the discussion towards less materialistic but equally worldly things, e.g. praise from others, status, power and influence, etc.

Are these things permanent or temporary? Why do we crave them?

All worldly things are temporary. The real meat of the question is why we crave them. It might be a sensitive area or even something that the young people have not considered at



all, so you might need to take a step back and look at things from a wider perspective, e.g. what do they spend their time and money on, what do they daydream about, what informs decisions such as choice of school subjects, potential careers, etc.?

It is not that there is anything wrong with wanting to do well at school, to be a doctor or spend time with friends. It is our attitude towards these things that matters and this is an indicator of what is going on in our hearts.

Which way is your heart pointing?

Mark 10:17-31 tells the story of a rich young man whose heart was pointing in the wrong direction. Jesus was able quickly to get to the root of his problem – his materialism and status. In doing so Jesus taught some important lessons:

- Our priorities matter as well as what we do with our possessions. Note that Jesus did not ask the rich young man if he had kept the first four commandments (about loving God), only the 'easy', outward looking ones. (v.18-20)
- We cannot do this by ourselves. Changing the way we feel, taking decisions, setting priorities, etc. is not easy. We cannot do it alone. Jesus reminds the disciples that with God all things are possible. (v.27)
- Jesus reminds the disciples how much we have to gain by putting him and his kingdom first. (v.29-30)

Use the story with the group to reflect on the way their hearts are pointing – towards God or towards themselves. Let the reflections lead into a prayer time.



22 THE JUNCTION

PLANNING THE SESSION

Welcome

- Introduce yourselves.
- Start the meeting with prayer.



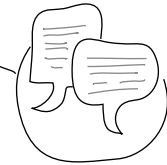
Getting to Know You

Play a game that involves describing yourself in three statements based on favourites, e.g. I love X-factor (favourite TV), I like chocolate (favourite food) and I love shopping (favourite hobby). You might want to give people several favourites from which they have to choose three. Have each member of the group write secretly on a card and then mix all the cards up. Then guess who is who from the description, in teams or as a group.



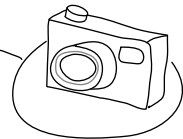
Talk Time

The Bedroom Wall – talk about who you might have had on the bedroom wall (or what groups or football teams, etc they might have followed). Talk about why we move on from following certain groups or doing certain hobbies.



Focus Time

One Hit Wonders quiz – this could be done as a picture quiz, using pictures of past celebrities who are no longer in the public eye, or listening to past musical hits and identifying the artist(s). So many celebrities, groups and songs come and go that we get used to the transient nature of fame.



Bible Time

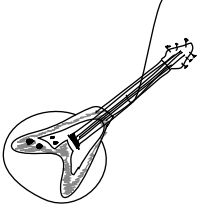
See the worksheets on pages 68-69 for the Bible Study questions and running order. Photocopy these pages for each group member for use during the study.





Prayer Time

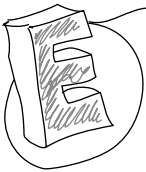
In small groups read and pray about the first commandment (Exodus 20:1-3).



Praise Time

Musical groups – songs such as 'The Lord is gracious and compassionate' (see www.kingswaysongs.com or www.emumusic.com for words and music).

Non-musical groups – read Psalm 25 together.



Extra Ideas

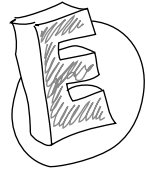
1. If you want further discussion, use the following simple scenario, or make up your own along similar lines. It is based on a real situation, but has been semi-fictionalised and pushed towards an extreme in order to stimulate discussion. You can use the scenario at any point in the session, but it is recommended that you do the Bible study first in order to equip the group to answer profitably.

Permanently Connected

Jason is a technophile, a modern, online young man. He has the latest phone; he is a computer 'geek' in the nicest possible way and can fix anything; he reads pretty much every magazine there is to do with technology. Start a conversation about the latest i-pod and just sit back whilst he gives you every specification in minute detail. He's a very nice person, although sometimes you just have to wonder whether he speaks the same language. The problem comes in the grey areas of the internet, such as downloading music files and movies. Jason knows every trick in the book and is quite happy to distribute his 'free' music to the group.

Is Jason wrong to embrace technology in this way? What are the dangers in his doing this? What does Jason need to consider

as a Christian when he is tempted to dabble in the grey areas of downloading and file-sharing? What advice would you give Jason about fitting his faith into his already frantic, modern lifestyle? The group needs to be reminded that file-sharing can be illegal and Christians should obey the law (Romans 13:1).



2. Have the group list their five favourite possessions on a card. Once they have done this tell a story that involves them losing four of these possessions one by one – they have to rip the card up and put it in the bin. The items might be stolen, broken, lost, etc. This forces the group to choose their most treasured possession and introduces the uncomfortable idea of the impermanence of these things.