

### Adult Lesson Twelve

# The Grass Is Always Greener

*You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, or his maidservant, nor his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17, NRSV).*

The final commandment deals with the status of the heart. It is the capstone of the final six commandments dealing with interpersonal relationships. Covetousness, or desiring that which belongs to someone else, is a primary reason for the breaking of the four previous commandments. Murder, theft, adultery, and lying all flow from a covetous heart. After describing the actions that a community in relationship to God must not take part in, God described the orientation of the heart in regards to other people. We are not to desire what our neighbors have. Such desire leads to the destruction of community. This desire also belies an unhealthy preoccupation with worldly possessions. When importance is placed on material wealth and goods, it takes the emphasis off of God, which in turn leads to the breaking of the first commandment.



Jesus also dealt with a people that were focused on material possessions over a relationship with God. This was a recurring theme through many of his parables and much of his teaching. Material possessions are not inherently bad, but they often lead to wanting more and more things. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Today we live in a society driven by consumerism with its cornerstone that more is better. From movies to TV to advertisements, we are constantly barraged by the induced need for the latest gadget, the perfect car, a bigger house, and the perfect mate. Given the onslaught, we should not be surprised to find ourselves longing for these things. It is, however, a big problem.

#### OBJECTIVES

- To assess what we mean when we say "covet."
- To examine the biblical teaching on this subject.
- To understand the interaction between covetousness and materialism.
- To consider Jesus teaching on materialism.

#### SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:17
- Luke 12:13-21, 29-31

#### WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of Handout #12.1 for everyone in the class
- Copies of Handout #12.2 for everyone in the class
- Blank paper for everyone in the class
- Chalk/chalkboard; marker/dry erase board; or something else to write on
- Dictionary

## Part 1 - Covet or love it?

Begin the class by saying **Today we are talking about the last commandment, "Thou shall not covet." Before we read the scripture, let's consider what we think of or mean when we use the word "covet."** Distribute Handout #12.1. Give the class four or five minutes to work through the exercise. Stress the fact that the emphasis is not on "right" or "wrong" answers, but to get them thinking about what it means to "covet." After they have filled in the sheet, discuss each scenario. Ask for a show of hands to see if people thought a scenario exhibited covetousness or not. Then take some time to define "covet" and write your definition on the chalk- or whiteboard. Ask **What do you think the word "covet" means? Write down each definition and then try to come up with one definition that everyone in the class can agree on. It might help to have at least one dictionary available, but be careful not to give the dictionary definition until after there has been a good discussion.**

## Part 2 - The heart of the matter

Have someone read Exodus 20:17. Ask **Do you see a difference between this commandment and the other nine?** (This commandment deals with inward sin, the orientation of the heart. The others deal primarily with sinful actions.) Ask **Why do you think God chose to put wanting things that don't belong to you on a list that contains such huge sins as murder, adultery, and stealing?** Allow them some time to answer this, but be sure to emphasize that these three things usually stem directly from covetousness. Ask **Do you think adultery or stealing is even possible if the person hasn't coveted first.** (No.) Ask **How often do you think that murder stems from covetousness?** (Often.)

Ask **Is it possible that coveting material possessions is a form of idolatry?** (Yes, money and possessions become our gods when we allow ourselves to lust after them. We are saying that God is not able to satisfy our needs and wants, and we must look elsewhere for them to be satisfied.) **Do you think we can say that covetousness is an outgrowth of being discontent with what God has given us?** (Yes.)



## Part #3 - One dollar more

Chances are everyone in the class is saving for or "wants" something right now. Ask

**What is one thing that you feel like you have to have in the near future?** Allow time for class members to answer this question. **Why do you want that item? Is it a physical need? Is it motivated by materialism? Is it motivated by covetousness?** To help facilitate the discussion, you may wish to ask **Are materialism and covetousness the same thing or are they different?**

Read Luke 12:13-21 to the class. Ask **Does Jesus say there is anything wrong with owning things or having possessions?** (No.) **Then what did the man in the parable do wrong?** (He wasn't rich towards God, which means that he put his possessions before God.) Read Luke 12:29-31. Ask **What are some things that we are tempted to worry about needing?** (New car, money for the kids' college education, the mortgage payment, new clothes, retirement.) **According to the scripture, who chases after these things?** (The nations of the world.) **What are we to seek?** (God's kingdom.) **If desiring other things before God is a form of coveting, how can we be more content with what we have?** (It will take a change of heart. We must shift our focus from worldly possessions to God's kingdom.)

## Part #4 - Filling the void

Explain **When we covet something, we are trying to fill a void that we don't think is being met.** Distribute Handout #12.2. Go over these areas orally. Say **If we are coveting other people's possessions, at some level we are not trusting that God will give us all that we need. In fact, we are raising ourselves to the level of God by saying "I will decide what my needs are and how they are best met." But what does Luke 12:29-13 tell us about this?** (That God knows what we need and he will meet our needs.)

*If we are coveting other people's possessions, at some level we are not trusting that God will give us all that we need.*

In closing, give everyone a blank sheet of paper. Have them write down the five most precious things in their lives. Say **Has God given anyone else these things? (No, not these specific things.) Why would we not choose to trust God with our needs and desires when the things that we most love and cherish have been God's gift to us?** Have your class put this list in their Bible and thank God everyday in their prayer times for all that he has given them, especially these five things. Then have them pray for the grace to be content with what God has given them.

Close in prayer.

# To Covet or Not to Covet

In each of the following scenarios, mark whether or not the person is coveting.

Scenario	Covet	Not Covet
<p><b>1</b> A couple down the street gets a new luxury car, something you could really use instead of the mini van that keeps breaking down.</p>		
<p><b>2</b> The woman next door goes jogging every morning and you notice how attractive she is.</p>		
<p><b>3</b> A fellow employee in your company gets the promotion that you were after. It doesn't seem like she's as knowledgeable or has worked as hard as you.</p>		
<p><b>4</b> Your brother, always the "winner" in the family, gets a new three-story house for his family of three while you and your family of six are crammed in a three bedroom fixer-upper.</p>		
<p><b>5</b> Your best friend's husband is always bringing her flowers, sending cards, and taking her to out-of-the-way places. Your spouse never does things like that and you find yourself wishing for someone "more like Sean."</p>		

# If I Only Had A Brain!!

For every item that we covet, we may be trying to fill a perceived need or void in our lives. These might include the need for excitement, intimacy, or worth. For every item below that some people may be tempted to covet, decide what need or void they might be trying to fill.

<u>Object Desired</u>	<u>Need or Void</u>
1. New car	
2. Position at work	
3. Attractiveness	
4. Someone else's spouse	
5. Family	
6. Good hair	
7. Happiness	
8. Mansion	
9. Manservant	
10. Intelligence	

Add some items with which you struggle.