

### Teen Lesson Twelve

# Beneath Our Actions

*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).*

#### SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:17
- 2 Samuel 11

#### WHAT YOU NEED

- Bibles
- "Must Have" bag (see Gettin' Goin')
- TV commercials collage

#### PURPOSE

**To Know:** God not only cares about our actions, but also our thoughts and feelings. Mere external observation is not what the commandments are intending to produce. As this commandment points out, they go much deeper than that, into the crevice of our hearts and minds where actions are conceived before performed.

**To Value:** This commandment is an effort to align our hearts and minds to God so that our lives may also reflect the reality of who he is. The question of what we value and love the most reflects who we serve and seek to imitate. If our desires are money, popularity, and success as defined by the world's standards, we will not be able to serve God.

**To Apply:** Spend time reflecting on the things that mean the most to you. Is God just one member on a long list of commitments? Does he permeate the list? The commandments are an effort to re-order all of life in the way it was intended, that is, to glorify God. Is this reality reflected in your daily life?

#### WHAT'S GOING ON?

**Why the last?** It is interesting that we find this commandment listed as the tenth. The last few we have looked at were brief, specific applications to what it means to live in right relationship to God within community. This last commandment, however, takes us a little deeper by looking at the question of *motivation* and *desire*. This commandment is different from those previous in that it does not offer another external requirement. The tenth commandment clarifies how the previous commandments are to be understood. It is not enough to say "I don't kill or steal." What we find here is God placing the measure around our heart and reminding us that this is where all actions are birthed. If we are to live in right relationship with him as well as our neighbors, our hearts and minds will need to be pure.



## WHAT'S IT MEAN?

**The Nature of Agape.** Jesus dealt with this commandment in different ways throughout the New Testament. It is rather obvious that the people had perverted the law by failing to emphasize its heart and proper motivation. The Sermon on the Mount is a beautiful portrayal of the way the Ten Commandments were intended to function in the life of the people. Rather than merely abstaining from killing, the people were not to have evil thoughts of their enemies, and were to bless and serve them. Rather than merely abstaining from adultery, the people were not to have improper thoughts concerning members of the opposite sex, and were to bless and serve them. The message interwoven throughout the Sermon on the Mount was "seek first the kingdom." Keep your priorities and your desires in the right order and you'll not have to worry about your life. The people of this world live as if everything was up to them. It is not to be this way among the people of God. Trust God to supply your needs and receive life as a gift.

While there are three basic words for "love" in the Greek language, only two of them are used in the New Testament. *Phileo* is a brotherly or friendly type of love. *Agape* is the love that is reserved for God. It is the covenant love that orders our priorities correctly and allows us to live as God intended. It is the complete love that unifies our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

Love, however, can be terribly distorted. Sometimes we find ourselves in a downward spiral of unmet expectations and unfulfilled dreams. The problem is not that we have too much desire, but that we desire the wrong things. All too often we seek fulfillment in the trivial and temporary. This commandment is a call to re-prioritize our desires and to find identity and meaning in God rather than in things and people who will only frustrate and disappoint us.

**What's the deal about coveting?** To understand the use of coveting here, we need to pull the curtain back and look at what motivates people to covet one another's life and possessions. When we possess envy and jealousy it reflects an inner discontentment with life. It says that we are finding our meaning in things that were never intended to supply self-worth. The community God seeks to establish through these commandments is threatened when people find their identity in things rather than right relationship with him and the community. The tenth commandment is a warning to protect our hearts from greed and jealousy. It is also a reminder that we are not to worry about our life, but should receive it as a gift and trust God to provide.



## Interactive Lesson Guide

### GETTIN' GOIN'

Ask the teens to fill in the blank, **If only I had \_\_\_\_\_, life would be perfect.** Ask **What is it that we think will make our lives complete?**

**In our society, what prompts us to want more and more things?** (Advertising; peer pressure, etc.) Divide the group into teams of three or four. Without looking in the bag, ask a person from each team to reach in the bag and pull something out. The team is then to write a television commercial trying to convince the audience that this is a "must have" item. Be creative in what you put in the bag, maybe a little off the wall: fruit, drinking straw, article of clothing, etc.

Try to help the teens see the absurdity of many of the messages we see on TV. Ask the teens if they ever witness this type of advertising on television? Where? (Ask for examples). Does it work?

An alternative opening would be to video tape several TV commercials for analysis. This video tape might be something two or three of the teens put together the week before. After showing the commercials, discuss them while you point out the absurd claims and implications often made by the media.

Say **The truth is that no *thing* can make life perfect. Desire is a tricky and deceitful thing because it can never be content. There will always be *more and more recent*. Much of our desire is not the result of true need as much as it is imitative and competitive. We desire certain things because we have seen it on television or seen others with it. Often behind all of this is an effort to gain a sense of self-worth and accomplishment. We want others to acknowledge us and to recognize our uniqueness.**

**How does this pertain to clothing? Is it right to find your identity in the name on your jeans? What are other status symbols that teens use to create identity? How should we respond to these type of things?**

## DIG IT

Read Exodus 20:17. Ask **If we were writing this commandment, what items from our culture might we include in the list?** Write the student's responses on a chalk- or whiteboard, if one is available. **What does it mean to covet?**

Ask someone to read 2 Samuel 11. (You may want to use several students due to the length of the passage). Ask **Where do you see the tenth commandment being broken in this story? What were the ramifications of David's sin?** Many people were affected, including David's own family. Emphasize the public nature of our sins. We often think that our sins have no effect on other people. Use this story to illustrate our inter-connectedness as human beings.

Read or summarize the What's The Deal About Coveting? section. Ask **How do you see these truths reflected in the David and Bathsheba story? What can we learn from this story about coveting?** Ask the students to make specific parallels from this commandment to the temptations they face on a daily basis.

Ask the students if they have witnessed or heard of any contemporary examples of someone who coveted. Say **In 2001 a Kansas City pharmacist was arrested for diluting chemotherapy drugs to increase his profit margin. The irony of the story was that he was a church member who was trying to cover a large building fund pledge he had made to his congregation. This story, as well as the David and Bathsheba story, illustrates the fact that this temptation is just as difficult for people in the community of faith as it is to non-believers.** Ask **What can we do to avoid this dangerous temptation?**

Spend some time talking about the nature of agape love. (See The Nature of Agape Love section.) Ask **What steps do we need to take to realign our priorities and make sure that our worship is being extended to God rather than the gods of our society?** Remind the students that desire is not evil, but rather it is often misdirected to the wrong things.

To illustrate this, make a comparison to the alignment of car tires. Ask **What happens a car's tires are out of alignment?** Just as a car has trouble steering if the tires are out of alignment, so we create problems for ourselves when our desires are in conflict with each other. It is important to maintain a single of focus and seek first the kingdom of God.

## TAKE OUT

Distribute Handout #12.1, Life Alignment. Instruct the students to use the closing minutes for personal evaluation. What are the things that are competing for their allegiance with God? What are their strongest desires and how do they align with their relationship with God? It is important for teens to hear that there is more to life than the things of this world. Their meaning as a person should not be gauged by their level of popularity, collection of designer clothing, medals earned, or any other achievement or position. Peer pressure is strong, however, and this call to find your identity in Christ is the most important, but sometimes difficult step to take. Our identity must be grounded in our relationship with God. Once we are confident with our identity in Christ, it becomes easier to avoid the temptation of coveting.

Close in prayer.

# Life Alignment



If the four tires on this car represented the four things most important to you, what would they be?

Are the tires all headed in the same direction? Do you need a life alignment?

What steps will you take this week to ensure that you are headed in the right direction and not swayed by the things of this world?

What are the potential potholes you may face this week in attempting to avoid the temptations of coveting, that is finding your identity in other people and material possessions?

