

What does the Bible Say?

Lesson 2: The Problem – The roots of sin

The story of Adam and Eve in Lesson 1 is not just a story of the first man and woman in the Bible. Their story is our story because like Adam and Eve, we've all listened to Satan's lies and sinned against God and others we love. While we don't know all the thoughts that entered Adam and Eve's minds as they listened to Satan, we do see that his lies fed their insecurity and pride and led them to trust themselves instead of God. Tempted by Satan, they believed the lie that they lacked something that God had already given them: they were already like God and possessed all the wisdom they needed under his guidance and protection. They had all the fruit they needed and could ever want, but they desired the one thing they couldn't have. They even believed that a single piece of fruit could open the door to a greater life, but this was the piece of fruit that opened the door to their destruction. These desires were greater than Adam and Eve's desires to obey and honor God, and Satan used these desires to lure them into sin. In the New Testament, James 1 describes this process of how our thoughts and desires can lead us down the wrong road:

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1, NIV)

How are temptation, our own desires, sin, and death related? What role does desire play, and why are our desires important?

Our Problem of Sin: *What we desire*

Like Adam and Eve, we too have been led away by our own desires. Maybe we too have wanted our own way, honor, and even glory, instead of God's. Maybe wisdom or knowledge has been our passion. Perhaps we've lived for freedom and independence to make our own decisions without God or others. Maybe we're living now for that next shiny piece of fruit! Whatever we think about the most; wherever we spend our time, energy, and money; and whatever gets most of our attention is what we desire. These desires aren't always bad. The question is, do they include God, or is God absent in our desire? Do we want these things for our own glory or for his? Below is a list of some things people desire and live for today:

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ourselves | <input type="checkbox"/> pleasing people | <input type="checkbox"/> our body / clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> possessions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> romance | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> personal time | <input type="checkbox"/> sexual activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friends | <input type="checkbox"/> work | <input type="checkbox"/> fun / vacation | <input type="checkbox"/> status / honor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family | <input type="checkbox"/> money | <input type="checkbox"/> sleep / rest | <input type="checkbox"/> power |
| <input type="checkbox"/> spouse / partner | <input type="checkbox"/> food | <input type="checkbox"/> control / our way | <input type="checkbox"/> fame / competition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> children | <input type="checkbox"/> media | <input type="checkbox"/> security / safety | <input type="checkbox"/> freedom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | | | |

In each column, find anything you've desired and lived for instead of God. **(Check each box.)** Feel free to add to the list. Discuss how you've lived for these things without God's influence?

In the Old Testament, idolatry is defined as worshipping any god other than God of the Bible and included the worship of physical idols made by human hands. Idolatry was the main sin that God hated. Many of the examples found in the Old Testament were physical representations of what we later see in the New Testament: idolatry of the heart. Jesus talks about this kind of idolatry in these passages:

³⁷ “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10, NIV)

³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. (Luke 14)

What do you think Jesus means in these verses? Why does Jesus use our family as an example?

What happened to Jesus on the cross? How does taking up our cross relate to Matthew 10:39?

What promise does Jesus give us in verse 39? What do you think this means?

What happens if we don't do the things Jesus is asking us to do? (Matthew 10:39, Luke 14:33)

Idolatry in the heart is anything we desire and value above God. While we may have worshipped nature, animals, spirits, statues, idols, or other gods, we may have also worshipped some of the things listed in the box above, or at least valued them more than God. In a sense, these become our gods. In this way, all of us have committed idolatry again and again. As we saw with Eve, when our desires and values don't agree with God's, then obeying God becomes a struggle. We find ourselves choosing sin instead of love – love for God, love for others, and a healthy love for ourselves. But if our heart's desire is to live for God, our priorities will change, and obeying God becomes more of a pleasure than a burden. The things we used to live for are no longer as important, and the people we love, we love even more – the way God loves them because our desire is to please him, instead of ourselves! If we love and trust God above anyone and anything else, then we'll entrust every area of our lives to God to bring him honor and glory because we know how much he loves us. We'll want to live in his image, instead of the one we, our society, or even our families created for us. We'll even let go of our lives, because we know that no matter what happens in this life, eternal life with God is waiting for us.

Go back to the box of things or people we live for. Pick one or two examples and talk about what it would look like for you to honor, trust, and please God with this area of your life.

Our Problem of Sin: Lies we believe

While Jesus is here to rescue us, he gives us tools to help us overcome sin and Satan's schemes. One tool is to understand how Satan works. According to Jesus, Satan “is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Just as Adam and Eve were tempted, we too are influenced by Satan's voice. But his voice doesn't come in the form of a snake! It often comes through people we love and trust, perhaps even more than God. Not all voices in our lives are bad, even if a person doesn't know God. But some voices lead us away from

God, not toward him. Those voices might include Satan, ourselves, our parents, children, spouse, other family members, friends, authority figures, peers, media, society, or our culture. Since these people are so important to us, we may even think God is speaking to us. Like Adam and Eve, we can begin to listen and agree with these voices and never consult God's Word to see if they are true. Yet when we examine our thoughts – words spoken to or about us, expectations placed on us, words spoken about others, words spoken about God, and just our thoughts – we can begin to compare these thoughts and opinions to the truths we find in God's Word. In this way, we can discover the lies Satan wants us to believe and turn to the truths of God's love instead. This brings healing to us and leads us away from temptation. Paul, one of Jesus's first followers, explains this process to us in this way: "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Corinthians 2:5).

Are there people or voices in your life who have pulled you away from God, challenged you not to listen to God, or caused you to doubt him? Discuss.

Are there people or voices in your life who have caused you to feel unloved or insecure about who you are, how God made you, or about some area of your life? Discuss.

Our Problem of Sin: Choices we make

Even if we do all that we can to change our desires, prioritize our values, put God first in our lives, and dispel the lies of Satan, we still might choose sin over obeying God's commands to love. No one is perfect, and it's important to understand that we will never be perfect either. The good news is that this doesn't change God's love for us! Romans 8:39 says, "Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!" Since God *is* love (I John 4:16), it's impossible for him not to love us. When we understand that God is love, then we can also begin to understand what sin is: sin is the opposite of God's love. But we need to define love the way God defines love and define sin the way God defines sin. Read these passages to learn more about sin and God's love:

Galatians 5:13-26

¹³ My brothers, God called you to **be free**. But do not use your freedom as an excuse to do the things that please your sinful self. **Serve each other with love.** ¹⁴ The whole law is made complete in this one command: "**Love your neighbor as you love yourself.**" ¹⁵ If you go on hurting each other and tearing each other apart, be careful! You will completely destroy each other...¹⁹ The result of sin's control in our lives is clear. It includes sexual immorality, impurity and wild living, ²⁰ worshiping false gods [idolatry], doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people, ²¹ having envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties, and doing other things like this. I warn you now as I warned you before: Those who do these things will not be in God's kingdom. ²² But the Spirit gives **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, self-control.** There is no law that says these things are wrong. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their own sinful selves. They have given up their old selfish feelings and the evil things they wanted to do. ²⁵ We get our new life from the Spirit. So, we should **follow the Spirit.** ²⁶ We must not be proud. We must not make trouble with each other. And we must not be jealous of each other. (ICB)

Ephesians 4:25-32

²⁵ So you must stop telling lies. **Tell each other the truth** because we all belong to each other in the same body. ²⁶ When you are angry, do not sin. And do not go on being angry all day. ²⁷ Do not give the devil a way to defeat you. ²⁸ If a person is stealing, he must stop stealing and **start working**. He must **use his hands for doing something good**. Then he will **have something to share with those who are poor**. ²⁹ When you talk, do not say harmful things. But **say what people need—words that will help others become stronger**. Then what you say will **help those who listen to you...** ³² **Be kind and loving to each other. Forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.**

Sin is the opposite of God's love. Write an example of God's love in the column below that is the opposite of the sin listed: (For ideas, see the highlighted sections, or add something that you believe shows healthy love for God, others, or yourself.)

arguing / violence	
sex / impurity	
wild living / wild parties	
idolatry	
witchcraft	
hatred	
causing trouble	
jealousy / envy	
anger	
selfishness	
causing division	
drunkenness	
pride / conceit / boasting	
lying	
stealing / greed	
gossip / slander / hurtful words	

What is the consequence of living for the sins listed? (Galatians 5:21) What are the promises if we live for God's love instead? (Galatians 5:22, 24-25; Ephesians 4:32)

Overcoming Sin

We've learned that replacing our desires and thoughts with a deep desire for God and his truths are foundations for our healing. Understanding and turning away from sin are also crucial. But we must remember that loving God is a choice. We can choose to turn to Jesus for his love, his ways, and his help, and walk in relationship with him because we genuinely desire to be close to him, or we can choose to live for things we desire, the lies of the Satan, and the sins that we think fulfill us. The good news is that Jesus helps us to overcome sin. Paul tells us in Romans 5 that though we were once full of sin, enemies of God, and powerless without him, he still loved us and died for us. Through his blood, Jesus cleansed us and made us right with God. But we're not just saved through his death; Jesus continually strengthens us with the gift of power to follow his life (vv. 6-10, 17-21). What an amazing promise! Will we be perfect? No, we will sin, even daily. Yet, we'll begin to see the struggles of the flesh decrease and the old nature

disappear if we continue to imitate Jesus's life and follow his teachings. As we strive to follow him, he comes alongside us and strengthens us more and more. So, what should we do if we sin? We know now that we don't have to hide or live in fear or shame. There is still another tool that Jesus gives us to lead us out of hiding and into his wonderful light:

1 John 1:5-9

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him, and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

James 5:16

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

What does it mean to walk in the dark and walk in the light? What are the benefits of walking in the light? (1 John 1:7)

What does God promise us if we confess our sins to him and to each other? (1 John 1:9, James 5:16) How do you think confessing our sins to each other allows us to have true fellowship and healing? How does prayer play a role? (James 5:16)

Why do you think many people choose not to confess their sins to God and other people? (Hint: Remember Adam and Eve's reaction to their sin.) How do you think we can overcome this problem?

As we realize that we are as sinners who need help, we can begin to see why everyone needs Jesus, his Holy Spirit, and his Word. We see how much we need others in our lives to encourage us, pray for us, help us to recognize our distorted desires and the lies we're believing, and remind us of what's true. The more we feed on God's Word and walk with other Christ followers who are also trying to do this, the stronger we will be! But if we continue in sin and pride, or hide what's going on in our lives, we will fail to experience our heavenly Father's full love, plans, purpose, and direction for us. But we can begin the journey of change today. Here's some homework this week to help you on your way!

Homework:

- Read and pray over Psalm 32. Then reread Galatians 5:13-26 and Ephesians 4:25-32, and circle the sins you struggle with the most and the ones you feel are the hardest for you to overcome. In a journal, describe how you struggle in these areas and give some specific examples, details, or stories of where you've seen this sin in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit or a friend to help you identify sins, if you need help.
- Take a minute to write what love might look like in each example you gave. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. See also the chart above.
- Be prepared to share next time what you learned from the homework and come prepared so that everyone will feel comfortable sharing. Facilitators should also prepare this homework and set an example of openness and vulnerability.