JAMES
Week 4: Control Your Selfishness

This includes:
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1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW
In the fourth chapter of his letter, James addresses jealousy, pride, judgment, and boasting—and he warns us of the damaging effects of these poisons. He tells us that we need a humble heart and urges us to focus on responding to God by trusting him with what he’s doing in our own lives, one day at a time. This week, your teenagers will be challenged to talk about how selfish sins impact our relationship with God and others, and consider a practical plan on how to avoid them.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: Selfishness affects our relationship with God and with others and damages all the good things God desires for our lives.
2. WHY: The “me first” attitude ends up in self-destruction, but when we surrender to God, all of our needs will be met.
3. HOW: Students will examine the roots and some solutions to jealousy, pride, judgment, and boasting.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
James 4:1-17

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE
Philippians 2:3-11

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you’ll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

Read James 4:1-17.

James continues to give direct advice for Christians. Chapter 4 tells us what gets in the way in our relationship with God—and we know from our own experiences how these things also affect our relationships with other people. James specifically addresses jealousy, pride, judgment, and boasting—and their destructive consequences. This text offers a reminder of how God brings healing and freedom from those things through Jesus.

We become jealous when we see other people succeeding in ways we want to succeed or acquiring things that we desire. Pride is the sense that we’re superior or perfect or better than others—and this often leads to a feeling of judgment toward other people, especially people who are poor or less talented or seemingly less blessed. And boasting is the decision to forget God’s role in our lives—we think we’ve accomplished things on our own.

All of these selfish conditions are common among teenagers, and all of these selfish conditions hurt relationships. Fortunately, your students can learn how to avoid or combat
these attitudes. In this lesson, find ways to encourage the SELFLESS behavior and attitudes you’ve observed. Focus on the God-honoring, positive traits—and talk about how our selfless actions will help us handle the selfishness we all battle.

As we’ve noted each week in this series, if your teenagers have a relationship with Jesus and want to grow spiritually, hold them accountable—talk about how God wants us to respond to his love by the way we live our lives. Emphasize grace and forgiveness, but also talk about how Christians are called to live lives that honor God through our actions. Being disciplined and making intentional choices to get sin out of our lives is biblical and important—these are choices that grow from our love of God because of his love for us!

If you have teenagers who have not yet decided to follow Jesus, use this as an opportunity to share with them how God desires to give us full, complete, meaningful lives and how sin gets in the way of that.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions
We’ve provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- What’s the number one thing that keeps your friendships from going to the next level? Tonight we’re going to talk about James chapter 4 at small group.
- How would you like to have better relationships? Hope to see you at small group tonight!

Parent Email
We’ve provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We’re continuing our journey through James in our small groups, and this week our teenagers discussed how selfish sins affect our relationships with God and with each other. We talked about practical ways to protect our relationships by rejecting such sins as jealousy, pride, judgment, and boasting.

This week, I’d encourage you to find a few minutes to talk with your teenager about the small group lesson. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How do fights and quarrels undermine healthy relationships?
- How can pride affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your relationships with other people?
- Why do we find ourselves so easily judging and evaluating others?

Thank you so much for encouraging healthy relationships! I’m praying for you and your teenager to grow closer to God every day!
GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Imagine going through your entire day without a single concern for another person. Every minute of every hour was all about you. Everyone around you had to focus every ounce of energy on pleasing and satisfying you!

ASK:
- How easily could you live this way?
- At first, you might enjoy this kind of attention, but with time, what would that kind of life be like?
- How might you interact with God if everything in the world revolved around you?
- We may not go to this extreme, but how is this illustration a reminder of the way we sometimes choose to live our lives?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Most of us would have little problem letting the entire world revolve around us—but that isn’t how God calls us to live. Our selfish sins create barriers and undermine healthy relationships with God and other people. But God can help us grow and change in these areas, allowing us to better control our selfishness.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Jealousy is a poison, (2) Surrender and humility provide an antidote, and (3) Avoid the trap of overconfidence.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read James 4:1-17 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: I think it’s true that we all want healthy, meaningful relationships in life, so let’s see what we can learn from James about protecting these relationships.

1. Jealousy is a poison

ASK:
- Read verses 1-3. How do fights and quarrels undermine healthy relationships?
• Why do Christians sometimes have fights and quarrels with other Christians? Shouldn’t we be “above” this kind of behavior?
• What kinds of relationship problems does James mention here? Which ones do you encounter or observe on a regular basis?
• How can jealousy affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your relationships with other people?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: We sometimes get annoyed by people who get things we want. God desires to bless us in different ways—sometimes not in the ways that we think are the best for us. But instead of praying about it and talking to the one who loves us and desires the best for us, we lash out in jealousy toward others. God is a relational God, and jealousy affects our human relationships and our relationship with him. But we can choose to turn our thoughts to God when we feel jealous or envious.

2. Surrender and humility provide an antidote

ASK:
• Read verses 4-12. How would you summarize in one sentence what James is saying here?
• How can pride affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your relationships with other people?
• Why do we find ourselves so easily judging and evaluating others? Why is it that we hate to be judged but we’re often so quick to judge others?
• How can judgment affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your relationships with other people?
• How might surrender and humility help you avoid or overcome a selfish perspective on life?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Pride is a battle for all of us. But when we submit to God out of trust and love, we find freedom and gain a weapon in the battle against sin. James tells us that God will lift us up when we are humble. We can’t escape from sin on our own; we need Jesus.

3. Avoid the trap of overconfidence

ASK:
• Read verses 13-17. What are some ways you sometimes act or speak with overconfidence? Why do you do this?
• How can overconfidence affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your relationships with other people?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: James reminds us that only God knows what will happen in the future. God is master and creator of the universe, and James reminds us to take on the humble, dependent attitude encouraged earlier in the chapter. It’s not sinful to have self-esteem or confidence, but boasting about the idea that we have God’s knowledge and power—knowing what will happen in the future—is sinful. We live knowing that we’re under God’s authority, with a humble heart.
**ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]**

**ASK:**
- How do you define the word “humble”? Give us some examples of people you know who you consider humble, and why you’d use that word to describe them.

- Read Philippians 2:3-11. What can we learn from Jesus’ example of humility? What are some ways you can develop and practice humility in your life?

- How can a Christian be both humble and confident?

- How would you describe our culture’s attitude toward humility? What are some examples to back up your opinion?

- Can you have a healthy relationship with God but unhealthy relationships with other people—and can you have an unhealthy relationship with God but healthy relationships with other people? Why or why not?

- What do you think it means, in James 4:5, that the Spirit envies intensely? What does this say about God’s character?

**APPLICATION**

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** So far in this lesson, we’ve talked about jealousy, pride, judgment, and overconfidence—four selfish traits that can affect our relationships with God and with other people. What are the remedies? How do we protect our relationships against sin?

Pair up with another person in the group for these questions.

**ASK:**
- Pick one of the four areas where you feel you’re struggling the most. In your own heart, where do you think this is coming from?

- Is there a verse or phrase from today’s lesson that gives you some practical help to handle this issue in your life? [NOTE: It may be helpful to reread the chapter.]

- How can we help each other as we grow in these areas? What action steps can we take together?

**SUMMARY**

End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

**FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]**

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it (James 4:17).