

Idolatry:

“I am more prone to listen to therapeutic advice than spiritual advice, say, from a pastor.”

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Lesson Two:

Title: Do I want advice which reflects what I hear in the world?

Biblical Texts: I John 4, Matthew 7:24-29, Genesis 11:1-9, Psalm 53:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Matthew 16:23

Lesson Objectives: The students will be able to:

1. Distinguish between mundane and religious advice. (Comprehension)
2. Restate the fallen nature of the world using key Scripture. (Comprehension)
3. State the key to determine true and false spirits. (Knowledge)
4. Apply this key to examples of advice. (Application)
5. Analyze portions of Scripture, pointing out godly and therapeutic advice. (Analysis)
6. Compose a set of rules to distinguish between godly and therapeutic advice. (Synthesis)

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Setting Our Sights

What is the difference between spiritual advice and that which I would hear from the world? How am I to know the difference? In this lesson we will distinguish between spiritual and worldly advice. We will illustrate the fallen nature of the world using key portions of scripture. We will also state the key to determine true and false spirits, and apply this knowledge to examples of advice. We will analyze portions of scripture, pointing out spiritual verses worldly advice. Marshalling all this learning, we will finally compose a set of rules to distinguish between spiritual and worldly advice.

Getting Started

1. We are bombarded by advice each day. The sources of this advice are as diverse as the advice itself. Some of this advice pertains to God and Christianity. Much of what we hear and read is spot-on truth. As you might guess, some is falsehood. Complete the brief opinionnaire below which includes statements of belief regarding God and Christianity. Try to answer "Uncertain" as little as possible.

- We are not certain how long God took to create the world.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

- God the Father and Holy Spirit are fully God, but Jesus is only partially so.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

- I am not responsible for my sin until I am able to make decisions for myself.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

- God is love. Therefore, all people will make it to heaven one way or another.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

- Jesus suffered and died for most of my sins, but I need to obey Him and serve others to complete my salvation.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

- If I pray hard enough, God will give me what I want in this world.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

2. Try to recall where you heard the information that led you to answer as you did. What made this source of information trustworthy for you?

Digging In

1. The key to recognizing mundane or worldly advice from spiritual advice is that the spiritual comes from God's Word, as opposed to mundane advice which contradicts the Bible. Note that spiritual advice can come from other sources than the Bible, but must agree with God's Word. Below are the statements you worked through above in "Getting Started" Read the Bible verse after each to determine if the statement is from God's Word or not. Discuss your answers with the leader and other participants.

a. We are not certain how long God took to create the world. (**Genesis 1:31**

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.)

b. God the Father and Holy Spirit are fully God, but Jesus is only partially so.

(**Colossians 2:9** ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,)

c. I am not responsible for my sin until I am able to make decisions for myself.

(**Psalms 51:5** ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.)

d. God is love. Therefore, all people will make it to heaven one way or another.

(**John 3:18** ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.)

e. Jesus suffered and died for most of my sins, but I need obey Him and serve others to complete my salvation. (**Ephesians 2:8-9** ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.)

f. If I pray hard enough, God will make all my troubles go away. (**John 16:33** ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”)

2. The problem with advice from the world is it has fallen into sin. Read the passage below.

Psalm 53:1-3

53 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. ² God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Underline the words and phrases which explain the ways in which sin has affected human beings. Using these words and phrases, restate what is wrong with human beings in your own words.

3. Where the world will give us bad advice regarding nearly anything, the Devil is particularly interested in giving us false information regarding Christianity, especially Jesus Christ. John wrote regarding false spirits, which could be human or demonic, those that teach lies about Jesus. Read the passages below. Where the Devil works in the world to teach lies about Jesus, God gives us two truths we can use to determine if advice about Jesus is trustworthy. Circle the two truths.

1 John 4:15

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

1 Corinthians 1:23

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

Hitting Home

1. I John and I Corinthians provide us with key information regarding Jesus Christ. Have this information is an invaluable tool for discerning which advice or information is worldly or spiritual regarding Jesus Christ. Based on the verses from I John and I Corinthians, let's use this key.

“Jesus Christ is the Son of God Who was crucified, died, and rose again for the forgiveness of our sins.”

Now let's try examining statements about Jesus Christ. Using this key, decide if the following statements are worldly or spiritual. At the end of each statement, write a “W” for worldly or “S” for spiritual.

- God forgives my sins simply because He is loving. _____
- Jesus gave of a good example of living a life to earn God's forgiveness. _____
- Jesus had special favor with God, but was still only a man.
- Jesus' death on the cross paid for my sins. _____
- Jesus' main reason for dying and rising was so that I could have a comfortable life. _____

2. We learned earlier in the lesson that spiritual advice is that which either comes from or agrees with God's Word, the Bible. Worldly advice is that disagrees with God's Word. Let's try applying this rule to two portions from Genesis. In the first, God gives Adam rules for living in the Garden of Eden. In the second, the Devil changes what God's Word says to tempt Eve into sin.

Genesis 2:15-17

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

a. How did God provide for Adam in the Garden? What did God forbid? What would be the consequence?

b. Now read Genesis 3:1-5, where the serpent changes God's commands. Circle where the two passages are the same. Underline where they are different.

Genesis 3:1-5

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

c. Consider verse five. Explain the Devil's strategy in this verse.

3. We've learned a great deal in this lesson regarding worldly and spiritual advice. To put things together, we are going to develop a set of rules for distinguishing worldly advice from the spiritual. Our goal is five rules. The first is given as an example.

- Spiritual advice comes from God's Word.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Wrapping Up

Litany of Thanksgiving for Spiritual Advice

People: Thank you Lord for the truth given to us in Your Word, and worked in us by Your Holy Spirit.

Leader: Dear Lord, we are apt to neglect studying Your Word.

People: Thank you Lord for the truth given to us in Your Word, and worked in us by Your Holy Spirit.

Leader: We listen to the advice of the world even when it contradicts Your Word.

People: Thank you Lord for the truth given to us in Your Word, and worked in us by Your Holy Spirit.

Leader: We listen to our own advice when Your Word doesn't fit our thoughts and actions.

People: Thank you Lord for the truth given to us in Your Word, and worked in us by Your Holy Spirit.

Leader: Turn us away from worldly advice and instead direct us to Your unchanging truth.

People: Thank you Lord for the truth given to us in Your Word, and worked in us by Your Holy Spirit.

Leader: Keep us always mindful of Your unchanging promise of salvation in Jesus Christ.

People: Thank you Lord for the truth given to us in Your Word, and worked in us by Your Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Extra Mile

During the week pay attention to the advice you hear or read. Is it spiritual or worldly? How did you decide? Choose one example and be prepared to share at our next lesson.

Helps for the Leader

Lesson Two: Do I want advice which reflects what I hear in the world?

❖ Getting Started

(About three minutes.) Be sure to start on time out of respect to those who arrived promptly, and to complete the content of the lesson. Before beginning, make sure you have a few Bibles and writing utensils for those who may have forgotten to bring these items. As they arrive, welcome participants into the learning space with a friendly smile and give each person a copy of the study. Have any new participants introduce themselves. It's possible that some will not remember the names of other participants. To review, prepare a bowl of candy. Invite a volunteer to name the other participants. If he or she is successful, allow the volunteer to choose a piece of candy. The other participants might be hungry. So don't hesitate to allow them a piece of candy to start the study out right!

Have students turn to lesson number two. Ask a student to read the introductory portion under "Setting Our Sights. Without forcing, encourage someone who has never read or read seldom.

1. (About six minutes.) Move the group immediately to the exercise under "Getting Started." Invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph. The goal in this opinionnaire is not to present information or to lead the students to ascertain the correct answer, but rather to begin thinking about advice and information they receive regarding God and Christianity. One of the objectives of this lesson is that participants will be able to distinguish between advice and information which comes from a fallen, sinful world, and that from God's Word.

Give participants a few minutes to complete the questionnaire. Encourage them to respond "yes" or "no" as often as possible.

2. (About three minutes) Then direct them to number two. Encourage a few participants to share sources of advice and information regarding God and Christianity which he or she has received, and what made that source credible. Sources might include: the Bible, other religious material, family, friends, television, social media, etc.

❖ Digging in

1. (About seven minutes.) Invite a participant to read paragraph number one. The goal of this activity is to move participants from merely speculating regarding the truth of the statements in “Getting Started” to examining them considering God’s Word, and by doing so develop a greater appreciation for the danger of attending to the world’s advice, particularly about God and Christianity. Have one student read statement “a” along with the Bible verse, and decide if the statement is true or false. Repeat this process with the remaining statements. Share the answers below with the group. Drive home the point that because we are exposed to worldly advice all the time and are often neglectful of worship and Bible study, it’s easy to believe the world’s bad advice.

a. God took six days to complete creation.

b. The fullness of God dwells in Jesus.

c. I am sinful at conception.

d. Those who die not believing in Jesus will not go to heaven.

e. We are saved by grace, not works.

f. God does answer prayer, but we are bound to experience trouble, nonetheless.

2. (About five minutes) Invite a participant (preferably one who has yet to read) to read number two and Psalm 53:1-3, including the paragraph below it. The goal here is that participants come to understand and then restate the fallen nature of human beings and how this affects their use of advice. Below is Psalm 53:1-3 with example words underlined. Suggest these portions if participants struggle.

Psalm 53:1-3

53 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. ² God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Participant restatements should include sinners reject the idea of God; they do evil; they are corrupted fully; there are no exceptions. To reinforce the idea of this section, read the passage below aloud.

Our fallen sinful nature has affected us regarding advice in two primary ways. Firstly, because human beings are corrupt and reject God, they also reject His advice given in the Bible. Instead, the sin fallen human beings seek after advice which agrees with his or her thinking and desires. Secondly, when there is no advice which I like, I will make up advice of my own, again, agreeing with my own thinking and desires. Therefore, we cling to God's Word and check the world's advice against His truth.

3. (About four minutes) John wrote his letters in the eighties and nineties of the first century. His goal was to encourage believers in Christ to remain faithful as many walked away from the faith. Also, the congregations were plagued with false teachers, and John desired to equip them with the truth. Paul's goal was to specify what was and is to be the center of the Christian faith.

Invite a participant to read paragraph three, the Bible verses, and the directions below them. The Devil knows that misinformation regarding Jesus Christ and His work on the cross is the best tool to dissuade believers from the truth of the Gospel. The two truths participants should find are "Jesus is the Son of God," and that Christ was crucified. These two truths will become important later in the lesson. Drive home the point that even if people are correct about everything else in the Bible, they are not saved unless they believe correctly regarding Jesus.

❖ Hitting Home

1. (About five minutes) Invite a student to read paragraph one, the key, and the paragraph below it. The goal of this activity is that participants would practice discerning between worldly and spiritual advice, in order that with this simple key, they will be equipped to separate such advice in daily life. Below is the same set of questions with both the answers given and the correction when needed.

- God forgives my sins simply because He is loving. W (God is loving, but He forgives me for the sake of Jesus and His work on the cross.)
- Jesus gave of a good example of living a life to earn God's forgiveness. W (Jesus is an example of righteous living, but I can never earn God's forgiveness.)

- Jesus had special favor with God, but was still only a man. _W_____ (Jesus is a man, but also fully God.)
- Jesus' death on the cross paid for my sins. _S_____
- Jesus' main reason for dying and rising was so that I could have a comfortable life. _W_____ (Jesus does bless me, but His main reason for dying and rising is that I would be forgiven of sin and have everlasting life.)

2. (About six minutes) Invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph, Genesis 2:15-17, and the questions in letter "a". Students should understand that God provided Adam with food from every tree in the Garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God forbade eating from this tree and warned that doing so would lead to certain death.

b. Have a participant read paragraph "b" and Genesis 3:1-5. This passage is listed below with the appropriate portions circled (in parenthesis) or underlined.

Genesis 3:1-5

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, ("We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,) ³ but God said, ("You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.") ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

c. Have a student read this question. The Devil's strategy was to offer Eve godhood and the ability to know good and evil. This would sound good to anyone. This was not the Devil's to give, nor was it what God intended for Adam and Eve. To summarize this portion of the lesson, read the paragraph below.

Notice that the serpent, who is the Devil, doesn't come to Eve with blatant, outrageous lies, but rather changes what she already knows. This kind of lying is easier to believe. Much of the bad advice we hear from the world is partially true. Therefore, we often believe statements such as, "There is God, but He would never

punish us,” or “There may be a heaven, but if there is, everyone will be there,” or “God is loving, and His greatest wish is that I be happy and comfortable in this life.” As we learned earlier, we are drawn to advice that fits our thinking and wishes. The Devil appealed to what he knew Eve would like to hear.

3. (About six minutes) Invite a participant to read paragraph number three. There are two goals for this portion. Firstly, that participants would compose a list of rules to distinguish between worldly and spiritual advice, and thereby be better equipped to interpret advice they encounter. Secondly, composing this set of rules based on the lesson material will serve to summarize it. Below is the first rule given, along with four more in case the group has trouble generating its own.

- Spiritual advice comes from God’s Word.
- Worldly advice contradicts God’s Word.
- Spiritual advice teaches that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was crucified for our sins.
- Worldly advice is designed to support our thinking and actions.
- Worldly advice teaches that God’s first goal is that I have a happy and comfortable life in this world.

Read this paragraph aloud to summarize this portion of the lesson.

It is quite tempting to trust in worldly advice. The people we love often give us this advice. Such advice often makes sense on first glance. Worldly advice is sometimes easier to listen to, where God’s Word often troubles us. However, we are comforted to know that, where worldly advice changes, God’s Word never changes. His expression of love, guidance, and provision are ever present. We can trust where He speaks of Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again for our salvation. We can trust His promise of forgiveness and everlasting life through faith in His Son, Jesus.

❖ Wrapping Up

Explain to the group that a litany is a responsive prayer between a leader and a group of people, which normally involves thanksgiving to God and requests for help. Litanies were used in temple worship in the Old Testament and can be

found in the book of Psalms. Use this litany to reinforce what was learned in this lesson.

❖ **The Extra Mile**

The goal of this activity is to give participants an opportunity to put what they have learned into practice in daily life. Stress that both spiritual and worldly advice can come from various sources, both trusted and otherwise. Advice is not spiritual simply because it comes from a trusted source, and vice versa.