

# A Biblical View of Psychology

By Dale Johnson

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read Genesis 3:1–19; Romans 5:12–21; and Psalm 14:1–7. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How would you summarize Scripture’s view of man after sin entered the world?

### Assignment Two

Read Jeremiah 17:9; 1 Corinthians 2:11–15; Roman 7:18; and 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:12. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: According to the Bible, how do people tend to interpret their own life experiences?

### Assignment Three

Look at yourself in the mirror for two minutes. Once you’re finished, sketch a picture of yourself without looking back in the mirror. Prepare to share the sketch with your group.

### Scripture to Memorize

*“As he calculates in his soul, so is he.”* Proverbs 23:7 (\*alternate translation footnote)

### Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that true Christian psychology explains man in relation to God rather than viewing him only as a product of his environment or biology.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

As you walk down the hall at work, you hear friends talking about their parents. They are saying things like, "If my parents hadn't divorced when I was younger, then maybe I wouldn't be so angry." Or, "If I had parents like yours, then I might not be such a bad kid." Even though parents aren't perfect, we all know they have tremendous influence in the life of a child. People often blame parents for their own attitudes and behaviors. Are there some of ways you blame your parents for your attitudes and actions? What are they?

Read 2 Peter 1:3 out loud.

### What Is Psychology?

The literal meaning of *psychology* is "the study of the soul." At its core, psychology is an attempt to understand human nature. The discipline of psychology attempts to make sense of man's problems while providing remedies to those problems.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 3. granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.** God, in His Word, reveals man's nature, meaning, purpose, problems and solutions to those problems. A biblical view of psychology must begin with a biblical view of God. We cannot understand man's nature, purposes or problems, without knowing God's character.

Read James 1:12–25 out loud.

### Who Is at Fault?

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 12. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.** Our hope in enduring trials is directly related to our faith in the character of God.

**Verse 13. He Himself tempts no one.** James reveals part of God's character. James teaches that God is not a source of our temptation because His character cannot commit evil. Just like Adam and Eve, we want to blame something or someone else for our sin.

**Verse 14. he is lured and enticed by his own desire.** We easily are deceived by our circumstances, but *our own* desires lure and entice us into sinful attitudes and actions. Our basic human nature, cursed by sin, gives us the desire to please ourselves over anything else.

**Verse 15. sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.** We only can understand ourselves and our life experiences by relating to God. In contrast, the problems of humanity are consistently birthed out of desire for personal pleasure driven by self-focus. James calls the manifestation of this process sin, and it leads to death.

But there is good news. As Christ reigns in our hearts, He empowers us to overcome those sinful desires. Then we receive desires pleasing to the Lord. "Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Once the word of Christ richly dwells within you, then you can "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

### Discussion Question

The various theories of psychology blame outside influences (your body, your parents, your town, etc.) for many of the problems in your life. The fact is, we all sin because of the things we desire. What are some common desires that lead to sin, and thus to problems?

### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** may now share a report.

### On Your Own

In the space below, write down the actions or attitudes you tend to blame on others. Then examine *your* desires that lead you to those same attitudes and actions. Add a brief prayer, asking God to give you His perspective on those things.

## Self-Related or God-Related?

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 16. Do not be deceived.** Seeing the world through the character of God guards our soul from deception.

**Verse 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift.** God is the source of all good. People and cultures change. If we try to see ourselves through these blurry and shifting lenses, our life never appears in focus or makes good sense. God provides good for us so that we will glorify and reflect Him on the earth.

**Verse 21. put away all filthiness and . . . wickedness.** James urged us to put aside the things that remain in us. Pride is fertile ground for wickedness to grow, but humility is its slayer. As you receive the Word of God in humility, wickedness is rooted out. **receive with meekness the implanted word.** The purity of the Word and our obedience renews our soul. Disciples shudder at the thought of looking within their own hearts, and not God's Word, to find the answers to life.

### Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** may now share a report.

### Discussion Questions

What would change about the way you see yourself if you were more concerned with the way God viewed you than the way significant people in your life viewed you?

## Expose Yourself by Exposing God

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 22. doers of the word . . . not hearers only.** Our old nature cannot be overcome by simply hearing God's Word on a regular basis. If we are not doers of the Word, our old desires will come back which results in more wickedness (James 1:14).

**Verse 23. a mirror.** James compares the Word of God to a mirror. Nothing else on the planet allows us to see ourselves so clearly. “For the Word of God is living and active, . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). As our dark desires are exposed by God’s law, Satan can no longer use them to deceive us.

**Verse 24. At once forgets.** If we forget the Word, we are not seeing God clearly. If we are not seeing God clearly, we cannot understand ourselves, and life will not make sense in this world. As one’s desires are exposed by God’s Word, the tempter has difficulty in his favorite game of deception. The danger of modern psychology is its call for individuals to listen more to themselves rather than to the implanted Word.

**Verse 25. A doer who acts, he will be blessed.** A biblical view of psychology, that accurately exposes our hearts, is founded on knowing and doing the Word. That is the only way to understand human nature and to transform that nature into a valuable vessel for the Creator.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Three** may now share the picture they drew after looking in the mirror. Discuss the difficulty in drawing a picture of your own face when you can’t look in the mirror.

### **Discussion Questions**

How does forgetfulness blur our understanding of our heart’s desires? Why might that be dangerous in this sin-cursed world?

### **On Your Own**

In the space below write down several ways you can become a doer of the Word. Then, comment on how these practices will help you to live out God’s purpose for you.

## **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

**Since Last Week**

5 minutes

**Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

**Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

**Prayer**

7 minutes

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

The literal meaning of the term *psychology* is “the study of the soul,” but at its core, it is an attempt to understand human nature. As a discipline, psychology has attempted to hijack a biblical explanation of man.

Satan uses our desires to lure and entice us into sin. Secular psychology prefers to excuse man for his thoughts and behaviors or make him the source of all good.

Humans cannot properly be understood outside of a relationship to God. A biblical view of psychology, therefore, must consider man as dependent on God. The first chapter of James provides valuable insights for understanding human nature.

Secular psychology often separates man’s significance, meaning and purpose from God. The individual becomes the focus. This is the polar opposite of a biblical perspective. In the power of the Spirit, disciples are to die to self for the glory of Christ and for the sake of others.

Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Only God’s Word can accurately reveal the deepest parts of man. Not only can Scripture discern our inner desires, but it also is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to change our desires into those that please the Father. This is our hope in Christ.

This week, think carefully about how the Word of God helps you understand yourself and provides direction, meaning and purpose for your life.

Using Scripture, identify desires that are pleasing to God and those that are pleasing to self. Identifying what you treasure most will get you started. Then invite the Spirit to change your desires into those that bring glory to Him.

### **Follow up Question**

*What does the Bible teach about the true nature of man, before salvation and after?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.