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# An Unusual Messenger

## Bible Study

Balaam's Donkey

## Theme

God knows our hearts.

## Scripture

Numbers 22

## Supplies:

You'll need a slip of paper from the "Matching Motives" handout (p. 10) for each person, scissors, a bowl, a box filled with small items from around the house or the church, Bibles, paper, and pens or pencils.



## Preparation:

Before this session, make enough photocopies of the "Matching Motives" handout (p. 10) for each person to have a slip of paper from the handout. Cut the handout apart where indicated, and place all the slips of paper in a bowl.

Gather some small items from around the house or the church and place them in a box—for example, a Bible, a heart cut from construction paper, a CD, a hammer, a screwdriver, and a pair of scissors. You'll need one item per person.

Study Numbers 22. Then read the entire session outline. Evaluate all the activities with your group in mind, and make any necessary changes.

## Overview

This session teaches students about Balaam and how God made a donkey talk to reach him. It will help students remember that God knows our hearts and all our motives. Students will

~ define and discuss the word "motive,"

- ~ explore the difference between pure and impure motives,
- ~ experience the motives of the Bible story characters,
- ~ express willingness to have pure motives, and
- ~ respond in prayer.

## Opener

As students arrive, have them form pairs, and ask each pair to discuss and define the word "motive." When everyone has arrived and has had a chance to create a definition, ask for volunteers to share their definitions with the group.

Say: **I really like the definitions you came up with. Today we're going to learn that God knows our motives and wants them to be pure.**

Ask:

~ **What do I mean when I talk about pure motives?**

~ **What makes a motive pure or impure?**

Say: **When our motives for doing something are impure, our actions can cause problems.**

Have each person take a "Matching Motives" slip from the bowl. Explain that each slip of paper has on it one of three statements that go together and that each person must find the other two people whose statements correspond to his or her own. Let them know that one statement must be an activity, the second must be a pure motive relating to that activity, and the third must be an impure motive relating to that activity. If you made more than one photocopy of the handout, some students will have identical statements.

After students have formed their trios, instruct them to discuss their statements and decide

## Tell Me More

*You may want to share this background information with your students to help them understand the story of Balaam's donkey.*

Moab has an interesting history. It was formed by people with unusual origins. Lot's virgin daughters didn't want to die without having children, so they got their father drunk, slept with him, and had children. These babies were named "Moab," which means "from the father." These people settled east of the Dead Sea. Because they were considered outcasts, they had hard feelings toward Israel. God had ordered Israel to leave the Moabites alone, and Moses had probably let the Israelites know this. However, the Moabites wanted to ruin Israel if they had the chance.

which of the two motives is the right one, and why. Ask a volunteer from each group to share with the class. Say: **In every positive activity we do, our motives can be pleasing to God. Or we can do the right things with the wrong motives. That can cause problems. This is what happened to Balaam. God directed him to do something, and although he was doing what he was asked, his motives were all wrong. That caused Balaam some problems.**

## **Exploring God's Word**

Have the class turn to Numbers 22 in their Bibles. Read the passage aloud to the group, or have students take turns reading a verse at a time. Say: **This is a pretty powerful story. The king of Moab came to Balaam and offered to pay him if Balaam would put a curse on the Israelites.**

**Balaam wasn't a follower of God. He was a pagan who thought that he could manipulate God. When Balaam asked God to put a curse on the Israelites, God told him he wouldn't do it because the Israelites were a blessed people. But when Balak heard Balaam's answer, he sent more messengers promising Balaam a handsome reward for a curse on Israel. So Balaam went back to God and asked him again what to do. God told Balaam that he could go this time, but he was only to say what God directed him to say.**

**Balaam was very pleased and got on his donkey. But God was angry with Balaam because God knew what was in Balaam's heart. God saw that Balaam's motive for going to Moab wasn't pure. God knew that Balaam intended to curse the Israelites after all. Balaam didn't know God and didn't understand who he was dealing with. So God showed him by sending the angel.**

Have students form four teams. Give each team paper and pens or pencils, and assign each team one of the following characters: the princes of Moab, Balaam, the donkey, and the angel. Direct each team to write a monologue, dialogue, or short skit about its assigned character. Teams must address what happened to each character in this Bible passage, the character's motive, and what the character may have learned from the experience.

After each team has prepared its scene, have students perform for each other. Lead the whole group in applauding after each team performs.

Then ask:

- ~ **What was each character's motive?**
- ~ **Let's look specifically at Balaam. Why was Balaam's motive impure?**
- ~ **How did God know Balaam's motive for going to Moab?**
- ~ **Why did Balaam's motive matter to God?**
- ~ **What was God's response to Balaam's impure motive?**

*You may want to share this background information with your students to help them understand the story of Balaam's donkey.*

Who was Balaam, anyway? According to Hitchcock's *Bible Names Dictionary*, his name means "the ancient of the people, or the destruction of the people." He was a man of some importance among his people, and he had a reputation as a successful prophet. It was because of this reputation that Balak sent for Balaam to curse Israel.

~ How did God open Balaam's eyes to the impure motive?

~ After the donkey talked and Balaam saw the angel, do you think his motive was changed? Why or why not?

~ What can we learn from the story of Balaam's talking donkey?

Say: Sometimes God uses unusual means to open our eyes to the truth. In Balaam's case, God used an angel and made a donkey talk.

## Applying God's Word

Set out the box of items you previously prepared. Ask each person to secretly get an item from the box and then find a partner. Make sure students understand that their partners shouldn't see the objects they're holding.

Direct students to take turns playing Twenty Questions as they try to guess their partners' hidden items. In this game, one person answers questions asked by his or her partner. The questioning partner can ask only questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" in seeking clues to the object his or her partner is holding. Each person can ask up to twenty questions before the game is over.

Ask:

~ How can we relate this game to our personal lives?

~ Why do we try to hide things?

~ Who do we hide things from?

~ How does God know our hearts?

Say: We learned from Balaam's story that God always knows our hearts. And God sometimes uses unusual ways to get our attention.

Ask:

~ If Balaam wasn't a follower of God, how did God know what was in Balaam's heart?

Say: God knows everything about everyone, even those people who don't believe in him. We can't hide anything from God. He doesn't have to play Twenty Questions to figure things out, either. He knows all the good and bad in our hearts that we hide from the world and sometimes even from ourselves. That's why in everything we do,

**we should strive to have pure motives. We should seek ways to glorify God in every activity. Just as God knew Balaam's intentions, he knows our hearts!**

## **Worship Time**

Lead the group in the following responsive reading. After going through the reading once, encourage the group to create movements to go along with the words. Then repeat the responsive reading, using the movements students created.

**Group:** O God, make our hearts clean

**Leader:** So we can serve you.

**Group:** O God, make our hearts clean

**Leader:** So we can be made new.

**Group:** O God, make our hearts clean;

**Leader:** Make us more like you.

**Group:** O God, make our hearts clean

**Leader:** So we can serve you.

Say: **Isn't it amazing that even after all the times we've disappointed God, he still loves us? We sometimes get so wrapped up in the world and what it sees that we forget God sees the truth. He knows our hearts. He knows when we have clean and pure motives, and he also knows when we're doing things for all the wrong reasons. Remember that as you seek God, God will help you have a clean and pure heart—a heart that's pleasing to him, and one you won't have to hide.**

### **Age Level Tip**

Have older teenagers form small groups and create new responsive readings for the whole group. They can use the words to a song or look in the book of Psalms for inspiration.

## **Closing**

Ask the group to stand and pray with you by repeating after you.

Say: **Help us, O Lord, to seek you in all that we do. (Pause.) Help us recognize the need for pure motives in every activity. (Pause.) Help us remember that we can't hide anything from you. (Pause.) You know our hearts. (Pause.) Help us be honest with you and with other people. (Pause.) And make our hearts clean and holy. (Pause.) Thank you, Lord, for your love. (Pause.) In Jesus' name, amen.**

# Matching Motives

ACTIVITY	PURE MOTIVE	IMPURE MOTIVE
Singing in the church youth choir...	to worship and glorify God.	to bring attention and honor to myself.
Attending church...	to learn about and worship God.	to find people to date.
Playing football...	to bring glory to God and share my faith with others.	to become popular.
Working a part-time job...	to learn to be responsible with money.	to buy lots of new clothes.
Doing homework...	to learn and do my best.	because there's nothing better to do.
Attending a school sporting event...	to have fun with my friends and share my faith with others.	to make out under the bleachers.
Getting involved in a school ministry...	to learn more about Jesus and be a leader at school.	because it will look good on college applications.
Going to a Christian concert...	to worship God and enjoy good music.	to make fun of other people who are having a good time.



# **THIS IS A SAMPLE**

## **The number of pages is limited.**

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