

INTRO

- Have you ever really longed or desired for something? (e.g. promotion, good grade, special item of clothing etc). What was it like when you got it or didn't?
- What kind of things do we as humans tend to live for? How can they be helpful and/or harmful to us if we pursue them?

READ

Romans 1:18-25

REFLECT**WHAT ARE IDOLS?**

In the OT, we see God refer to 'idols of the heart' (Ezek 14:1-2). God connects outward objects of worship to our hearts. In the NT, this idea is taken further with the word *epithymia* often translated *lust* but a better translation is an over-desire for something. Our hearts are not vacuums and so if God isn't the basis for our happiness, meaning and identity in life, something/someone else is filling that space.

*Qu: often we think or say: "if I have/do **that**, then I'll be happy, my life will have meaning, and I'll be somebody". What is your **that**? Or what has been your **that**?*

HOW DO IDOLS AFFECT US?

Read Rom 1:21, 25 again. Idols hijack the core of who we are, our heart, in the form of our:

Attention (mind) —> DECEIVE our minds

Affection (emotions) —> DISTORT our desires

We take on the values and identity of what we value most. We become what we worship (Ps 115:8).

What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration. — G. K. Beale

Allegiance (will) —> DOMINATE our wills

Whatever is most important to us in life, we have to have. Therefore, whatever we 'have to have', we will serve.

Qu: How is it true that what we worship we become like? What examples of this do you see in our culture today?

HOW DO WE ESCAPE FROM IDOLS?

It's not enough to change our lives through sheer self-discipline and willpower. Our problem, sin, is more than wrong behaviour; it is the sinful over-desires in our hearts that drive us. The only way to get our hearts to stop over-desiring other things is to over-desire the right thing!

Practically:

Name your idol (use the diagnostic questions on the next page to discover areas of potential idols in your own life);

Expose your idol in their *inadequacy* to ultimately save and satisfy you, in their *danger* to you, in how they *grieve* Jesus;

Forsake your idol — allow Jesus to take his rightful place in your attention, affection and allegiance again.

A sample prayer:

"Lord I see how repulsive this idol is for what it is —an idol. In desiring after this, I have turned away from you as the true source for my heart's needs. I realize now that the greatest sin in my life is a lack of thankfulness, a lack of grateful joy for who you are and what you have done for me."

RESPOND & PRAY

- What was most challenging/encouraging for you in today's discussion?
- How will you apply this to your life?
- Pray for one another to be more captivated by the worth, value and beauty of Jesus.

IDENTIFYING YOUR POTENTIAL IDOLS

Use the following diagnostic questions to help you identify areas of potential idolatry in your heart. This can be done individually, or conversationally with people who know you well.

- What is really driving me?
- What is really depressing me?
- What is my chief joy?
- What goals must I obtain?
- What do I tend to fear or worry about?
- What do I manipulate others for?
- What do I crave or long for?
- What do I functionally trust in daily life?
- What makes my emotions most uncontrollable
- What consumes my thoughts or imagination
- What is more important to me than holiness
- What do I require for life to be meaningful?
- What do I have to resist spending too much money on
- What do I lean on when I'm distracted or bored or exhausted?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. [The Expulsive Power of a New Affection](#) — Thomas Chalmers (pdf)
2. [Counterfeit Gods](#) — Tim Keller (book)
3. [You Are What You Love](#) — James K.A. Smith (book)
4. [gods AT WAR sermon series](#) — Every Nation GTA :-)

HELPFUL QUOTES

The heart is so constituted that the only way to dispossess it of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.

— Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*

Idolatry is huge in the bible, dominant in our personal lives, and irrelevant in our mistaken estimations.

— Os Guinness

The opposite of theism is not atheism, it is idolatry.

— Peter Kreeft

We wants it.

We needs it.

Must have the preciouss.

— Gollum, *LOTR*

“My will be done.” Sounds like freedom, leads to slavery. “Thy will be done.” Sounds like slavery, leads to freedom.

— Matt Smethurst

If you wonder why you choose to worship other gods rather than wholeheartedly devote yourself to the Lord you love, examine the thought and desires that captivate your heart. That’s where you’ll find the answer to every sin and failure in your life. Don’t be deceived into thinking that you need to develop more willpower. We need to develop godly thoughts and desires.

— Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone*

Jesus is a teacher who doesn’t just inform our intellect but forms our very loves. He isn’t content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings.

— James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*