Counterfeit Gods

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Bethel Church Growth Study 2013
Counterfeit Gods
Session One
Bethel Church Growth Study

Introduction: The Idol Factory
Prepare by reading the Introduction of Counterfeit Gods (xi-xvii)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of when you hear the word, ‘Idol’? Read Exodus 20:3-5. What do these words from the 10 commandments tell you about idols?

2. Opening Quote: “There are more idols in the world than there are realities.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, xi). What do you think about this quote?

3. On page, xii, there is an observation from Alexis de Tocquerville from 1830s. He observes that with the people of America, there is a “strange melancholy that haunts the inhabitants…..in the midst of abundance.” What does this mean? Do you think this is still true about our country? Why?

4. Page xxiii describes idols as the things we love, trust and obey. What do you think about this description? Given this description, what idols do you see in your life and in the culture around you?

5. Read the bottom paragraph on page xx. Keller notes that the ancient pagans had sex gods, work gods, war gods, money gods, and nation gods. What are the manifestations of these gods in our world today?

6. Keller associates “psychological problems“ as simple issues of idolatry near the top of page xxv. Is this fair? In what ways do you see these in:
   1. Your life
   2. Your family
   3. Your church
   4. Your culture

7. On page xxvi, Keller says, “With the global economy in shambles, many of those idols that we have worshipped for years have come crashing down around us. This is a great opportunity.” What does he mean by this?

Closing Prayer: In the context of Idols, what forgiveness do you need? What is your prayer regarding the idols in the church and culture today?
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Chapter One: All You’ve Ever Wanted
Prepare by reading Chapter One (p. 1-21)

Discussion Questions

1. Read page 3 and Romans 1:21-25. Keller observes that the greatest punishment is to allow someone to achieve their fondest dreams? What are your fondest dreams and how could achieving them be such a bad thing?

2. Read the 1st paragraph on page 1; Is the ”pursuit of happiness” dangerous? Why or why not?

3. Read Genesis 22:1-2. Keller uses this time of testing to show that Abraham had turned his offspring into a counterfeit god. Do you agree? Why, why not?

4. Read the 1st two paragraphs on page 13. Why do you think God tested Abraham as He did?

5. Do agree with Keller that family/children can be an idol in our culture? If not, why not? If so, what do you think idolizing children/family looks like in our culture today?

6. Read the full paragraph on page 14 about Anna. What is your reaction to this paragraph?

7. How have you idolized your family and/or your children?

8. Why is it so easy for our families and our children to become idols?

9. Keller says that to be rid of this idol, we need to “offer up” the “Isaacs” in our lives. What does this look like?

10. How do certain family relationships need to change for you?

Closing Prayer:
Prayer for family and children. What prayer concerns do you have regarding this idol?
Prayer for the ability to “offer up the Isaacs” of our lives.
Chapter Two: Love is Not all you Need
Prepare by reading Chapter Two (p. 22-47)

Discussion Questions

1. Read Genesis 29. What strikes you about this story? What evidence is there of Jacob’s obsession with Rachel? What makes Jacob obsessed?

2. What are the consequences of Jacob’s idolatry?

3. Rachel, Laban, and Leah also struggle with their own idols. What are their idols?

4. Read the last paragraph on page 23 onto page 24. Keller notes here that an “idolatrous attachment can lead you to break any promise, rationalize any indiscretion, or betray any other allegiance, in order to hold on to it….to practice idolatry is to be a slave.”

   a. How did this manifest itself in Jacob’s life?
   b. How does it manifest itself in your life?
   c. How does this manifest itself in the church and in our world?

5. Read the last paragraph on page 27 onto page 28. Do you think Becker’s observation about our culture is correct? Why or why not?

6. Read Genesis 29:30-35. What was Leah doing?

7. Read about Leah’s Breakthrough on pages 42-43. What does Leah’s story tell us about our relationship with God?

8. On page 39 Keller says, “You are going to think you have gone to bed with Rachel, and you will get up and it will always be Leah.” What does this mean?

9. Keller lists 4 responses to this realization on page 39; which of these 4 best describe the way you handle disappointment?

Closing Prayer

Prayer for the central priority of our relationship with God.
Prayer for marriages, institution of marriage, and the idol of romance in our culture.
Chapter Three: Money Changes Everything
Prepare by reading Chapter Three (p. 48-71)

Discussion Questions

1. Read Luke 19:1-10. What strikes you about this story? What cultural dynamics are at play in the story?

2. After Zacchaeus decides to follow Jesus, he follows through with overwhelming generosity. Why does he do this?

3. Read the quote from Nietzsche on page 51. What do you think about these words? Do you agree that money is the central counterfeit god in our culture? Why or why not?


5. Why is it so difficult to see greed in ourselves?

6. Read the story of Andrew Carnegie (bottom of 68-middle of 70.). What strikes you about his story? How did he fall victim to greed despite his own awareness of it’s destructive power?

7. Read the full paragraph on page 62. What do you think about this? Do you agree with Keller’s thoughts on Tithing? Why or why not?

8. On page 67, read 2 Corinthians 8:9 and the following paragraph. What does this mean for us?

9. In what ways should you try to be more generous?

Closing Prayer
Prayer for the strength to overcome greed.
Prayer for the ability to be generous.
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Chapter Four: The Seduction of Success  
Prepare by reading Chapter Four (p. 72-96)

Discussion Questions

1. Read 2 Kings 5:1-13. Why does Naaman get so upset?

2. Naaman expected to be healed through his own reputation and success. What does this have to do with us?

3. What is significant about the way in which Naaman was to be restored? How does this relate to baptism?

4. Read Psalm 135:15-18 and Ezekiel 36:22-36. What do these verses say to you about how we see ourselves and the things that we do?

5. On pages 75-76, Keller lists 3 signs indicating you have made success into an idol. Which of these 3 signs best applies to you and why?

6. Read Mary Bell’s quote starting at the very bottom of page 73 onto page 74. Do you agree with her quote? Why or why not?

7. Why do you think achievement and success (regardless of money) is so addictive?

8. Read 2 Kings 5:14-16 and the following paragraph on page 94-95. What does this story have to do with us?

Closing Prayer
Prayer for enjoyment instead of addiction of success.
Prayer for us to model the Suffering Servant.
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Chapter Five: The Power and the Glory
Prepare by reading Chapter Five (p.97-125)

Discussion Questions

1. Read Daniel 2. Why was Nebuchadnezzar greatly troubled by the dream?

2. What about this story strikes you? What challenges you about this story? What encourages you about this story?

3. Nebuchadnezzar is pretending that he is not limited in his power and control over life. Do you ever find this true of yourself? How do you seek to establish control in your own life?

4. Read Daniel 4:24-27. Why does God do this? Is God being gracious or cruel?

5. Keller observes that much of our addiction to power and control flows from a false conception of God. What is this false conception? How can a false conception of God lead us to become addicted to power and control?

6. What does this have to do with politics? Would you say that you look to political power in our country as a source of control? Why do you think this is so common in our country?

6. What is moralistic therapeutic deism (page 115)? Why do you think this is the dominant perspective among younger Americans? Is there anything about moralistic therapeutic deism that you tend to believe?

7. Read pages 124-125. Keller articulates that Jesus shows us another way to overcome our sense of powerlessness. What do you think of this? Why is this so hard to do?

Closing Prayer
Prayer for release of power and control in our lives.
Prayer for our political leaders and the political state in our country.
Chapter Six: The Hidden Idols in our Lives
Prepare by reading Chapter Six (p.126-153)

Discussion Questions

1. Read Jonah 1. In what ways can idolatry function inside the church? What are the consequences of this idolatry?

2. Read pages 135-136 ‘The Man on the Run.” What were Jonah’s idols? What caused him to have these idols?

3. Read page 138 through 1st half of 139. What do you think of Keller’s observations about this passage?

4. Read Jonah 4:13. What is so troubling about these verses?

5. Read “Idols in our Religion” on pages 131-133. Keller talks about idols within our religious communities. What are these 3 idols and how do they manifest themselves in the church?

6. Why are these 3 idols so destructive to church life and ministry?

7. Read the middle paragraph on page 144 that begins with “Jonah so loathed…….” If we were completely honest, what people or groups of people today do we loathe like Jonah loathed the Ninevites?

8. Read ‘Jonah and Us’ on pages 152-153. What do you think about this? How does this story challenge us in the church today?

Closing Prayer
Prayer for the church today; that we might overcome our idols and our racism.