Idolatry :: the sin beneath all sins
Little children, keep yourselves from idols. 1 John 5:21

:: A Beginning ::
A stranger visiting from out of town walks up to you and asks the question, “Excuse me sir, could you explain to me what the word IDOL means?” What would you say?

“The human heart is a factory of idols. Every one of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols.” John Calvin – What do you think this means?

Make a list of identifiable idols in your current life context. (ie. football, money, etc.)

:: Find the Truth ::
- Read Isaiah 42:8. What does God reveal that he wants the most from his people?
- Read Psalm 115:1-11. How are the idols of the nations described? Describe the difference between something that man has made compared to something God has made.
- Read Habakkuk 2:18-20. Go find a small toy (or something similar). Speak to it in the words of vs. 19. Discuss how God is described differently in vs. 20
- Read Romans 1: 21-25. Compare the “Creator” to the “created things.” Explain the difference between knowing God and honoring God. Describe how people exchange the glory of God for images of others things.

:: Consider ::
One of my favorite pastors, Mark Driscoll has summarized idolatry in the following statement:

“Idolatry taking a good thing and making it a god thing and then it becomes a bad thing.”

- Name 5-7 possible options for good things that could be considered bad when they become someone’s ultimate passion or pursuit.

“Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.” – Puritan Matthew Henry

If you have ever been snorkeling in the ocean, you know that there is a whole other world below the surface. What you see below the water is an entirely different view that what you see standing on the shore. The people in our lives most often only seen above the surface. Idolatry happens in a deeper place. In our hearts and we are often the only ones who know it (and God of course). Let’s look deeper into the causes of the idolatry in our lives.

(Charts on next page taken from Timothy Keller’s book Gospel in Life)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have power and influence over others.” (Power idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am loved and respected by _______________. (Approval idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.” (Comfort idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of ______________.” (Control idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... people are dependent on me and need me.” (Helping idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.” (Dependence idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.” (Independence idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am highly productive and getting a lot done.” (Work idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work.” (Achievement idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.” (Materialism idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in its activities.” (Religion idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... this one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me.” (Individual person idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality.” (Irreligion idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.” (Racial/cultural idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in.” (Inner ring idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me.” (Family idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... Mr. or Ms. ‘Right’ is in love with me.” (Relationship idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am hurting, in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt.” (Suffering idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power.” (Ideology idolatry)
“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have a particular kind of look or body image.” (Image idolatry)

If you seek

Your greatest nightmare
Humiliation
Rejection
Stress, demands
Uncertainty

People around you often feel
Used
Smothered
Neglected
Condemned

Your problem emotion
Anger
Cowardice
Boredom
Worry

If you circled one of the first four on the previous list, the following table may help you think through some of the issues involved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you seek</th>
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Now that you’ve answered the questions above, look for common themes.
What things tend to be too important to you? What are your idols?

:: Confront Your Idols ::
1. Name your idol(s) out loud.
2. Confess your hearts dependence on your idol(s) to God and someone else.
3. Repent, or turn away from, the idol(s) in your life.
4. Rejoice, or take joy in, the absolute certainty of Jesus’ mastery of your life.
5. Replace your idol(s) with a renewed passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ.