Fall 2016
SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

Counterfeit Gods
BASED ON TIMOTHY KELLER’S BOOK
“COUNTERFEIT GODS”
FOREWARD

You hold in your hands a study guide that compliments the Tim Keller book Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters. I first created this curriculum with the help of many friends at Jacksonville Chapel. We went through this as a small group study and it was life changing. Our group, me included, was able to identify some hidden idols that were blocking us from living our lives to the fullest and finding our complete joy in Christ.

As we began dialoguing with Andy Crouch about speaking in the fall of 2016, I revisited Tim Keller’s book. Both authors hit similar themes regarding what is going on in our heart and are we truly devoted to Christ, or Christ plus. I gathered a group of men together and we updated and expanded the original small group curriculum. Again, we found this a monumental moment in our walks with Christ. New idols had taken root in my heart and needed to be replaced with pure devotion and worship of Jesus.

I hope you will take this book as a group and use it as a tool to expose your heart to one another, to identify the idols in your life, and to have the courage to replace those idols with Jesus. I am praying you will enjoy this journey as much as I have.

Just to be clear:

- This study guide was created by David Fuquay and copyrighted by him
- It is intended for the small group use at Northwest Bible Church
- This study guide is not written or endorsed by Tim Keller, Redeemer Church, or any ministry associated with them.

To get the most out of this study, I suggest each participant having a copy of this guide and journaling your thoughts and answers in a separate location.

In Christ,

David Fuquay
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Counterfeit Gods Group Study Guide
Introduction: The Idol Factory

Preparing

Read the Introduction to Counterfeit Gods. Pray for each person in your group, (by name, if you know them) that they would allow the Holy Spirit to expose their idols and then take the necessary steps to topple them. Pray also that you will be bold with your witness and vulnerable about your struggles.

Breaking the Ice

1. After reading the introduction to Counterfeit Gods, what is your first impression of the book?
2. What do you hope God will reveal to you as you read this book together?
3. How did you become a Christian? If sharing your testimony is new or uncomfortable, talk about high points in your life or about your heroes.

Going Deeper

5. What are the shrines, rituals, and priesthhoods we have today which relate to cultural idols?
6. Keller says: “What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.” (p. xvii) Let’s start the process of uncovering our idols by asking the following questions (p. xxii):
   a. “Idols capture our imagination, and we can locate them by looking at our daydreams.” What do you daydream about? What do you enjoy imagining?
   b. “Idols give us a sense of being in control, and we can locate them by looking at our nightmares.” What do you fear the most? What activity, person, or thing, if lost, would make life not worth living?
   c. Idols have power over us. What makes you uncontrollably angry, anxious, or despondent? What racks you with a guilt you cannot shake?
7. Keller basically says idolatry is turning something good (p. xl) into an absolute that overturns everything else. What good things do you see easily becoming idols?
8. Keller writes, “Idols are spiritual addictions that lead to terrible evil.” (p. xv) What idols do you think our society is addicted to? You?
9. Since potential idols are everywhere and unavoidable, how do we strengthen and protect ourselves from worshipping them? What does Scripture call the person who places something before God? (See Jeremiah 3:20; Isaiah 1:21 and 57:8; Ezekiel 16:30; James 4:4-5)
10. Does the metaphor of God being our spouse and idolatry being a mistress help you? Why or why not?
11. Keller concludes, “The way forward … is to discern the idols of our heart and our culture... The only way to free ourselves from the destructive influence of counterfeit gods is to turn back to the true one. The living God ... is the only Lord...” (p. xxiv) Are you willing? If so, do you want our group to help through accountability, challenging assumptions, and encouragement?
12. Read Exodus 20:3-4. How will you begin to ensure you are not placing any gods before the one true God?
Toppling Your Idols

Over the next seven weeks we will be talking about idols and your identity in Christ.

- Decide now that you will expose your idols.
- Decide now that you will be vulnerable with the group and you will do your part in creating a safe environment for everyone to expose their idols.

Reflect on Ephesians 5:8-14.

Are you willing to drag your idols out of the darkness and expose them to the light? Doing so may create fear, anxiety, or even anger because it touches a deep place within ourselves. However, be encouraged that followers of Jesus Christ are children of the light and those idols are already powerless and dead. We simply need to live in the light and not in the darkness those idols create.

Renewing through Prayer

Spend time asking God to forgive you for the times you have desired good things more than you desire Him. Ask Him to reveal hidden idols in your heart. Pray that this group will be a safe place, a place where idols can be exposed and toppled - even when it’s difficult. Pray you will be the instrument of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others as He is working in your life.
Preparation

Read Chapter 1. Set some time aside to consider these questions before your group meets: What have you built your life on? In what ways have you sought wrongly to heal the hurt? In what ways do you say one thing and live another? (Example: “Family is important to me, but I make little time for them.”) What is your natural reaction to pressure? How have you managed that? What steps have you taken to change it?

Breaking the Ice

1. What were your dreams growing up? What are they now?
2. How do you pursue happiness? What do you find pleasure in? Why is happiness elusive?
3. Have you ever had to make a major move or drastic change that seemed bizarre at the time, but you truly felt God was calling you to do it?

Going Deeper:

4. Read Romans 1:24-25. “Why would the greatest punishment imaginable be to allow someone to achieve their fondest dream?” (p. 3) What biblical stories can you think of that support this idea? Do you know someone in your life (or popular culture) that exemplifies this?
5. In your own life, how have you been tempted to use God as a means to an end? (pp. 5-6)
6. Think about the sacrifice God called Abraham to make (Gen 22:2, and p. 7). - can you even imagine what Abraham was thinking or feeling? How have you been “tested?”
7. Have you ever looked to God and said, “I know He can do it, I just don’t know how?” (p. 11) Share that story and its outcome.
8. Keller says, “God was putting Abraham through the furnace, so his love for God could finally ‘come forth as pure gold’.” (p. 13) How do you react to that statement? How have you seen it true in your own life? Why is this not initially a comforting thought? Why should it be?
9. Abraham could not see that his love might become idolatrous. (p. 14) How can we keep our eyes open to our own idols? Since there are idols everywhere and unavoidable, how do we strengthen and protect ourselves from worshipping them?
10. How do you need to follow Abraham up the mountain? (p. 15)
11. Keller writes, “Abraham took that journey, and only after that could Abraham love Isaac well and wisely.” (p. 15) What journey has the Lord been taking you on lately? What past journey did you have to go on in order to get where you are today? What lessons did you learn?
12. As long as Abraham never had to choose between his son and obedience to God he could not see that his love for Isaac was becoming idolatrous. Can you recall a time when you had to make a choice between God and another good thing? What was the outcome?
13. Keller argues that idols “are not spiritually safe to have and hold.” (p. 17) How can we recognize our own idols? How can we loosen our grip on them? What can we do to ensure we do not purposely embrace a new idol? Re-read the last paragraph on page 17.
14. Keller says, “The most painful times in our lives are times in which our Isaacs, our idols, are being threatened or removed.” (p19) Have you seen this in your own life? Are you willing to go through pain in order to have an undivided focus on the Lord?
15. Keller writes, “... we must not make the mistake of thinking that this story means all we have to do is be willing to part with our idols rather than actually leave them behind.” (p. 20) What do you need to leave behind? How can we help? Write one thing in the cover of your book that you will work on for the next six weeks to leave behind and we will ask how it’s going every week.

**Toppling your Idols**

Read and reflect on Hebrews 12:1-8. How is your race towards the cross going? What distracts your eyes from Jesus? What hardships are you enduring now? Are you truly relying upon the Lord for all of your life?

Consider the metaphor of God being our spouse and idolatry being a mistress. Are you being faithful to the Lord? In what ways do you need to strengthen your “marriage?” Keller said, “The way forward... is to discern the idols of our heart and our culture... The only way to free ourselves from the destructive influence of counterfeit gods is to turn back to the true one [the] living God.” (pg. XXIV) Confess your sins, pray for repentance, and set a plan in order to be obedient, even if obedience seems impossible right now.

**Memorize**

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

**Renewing through Prayer**

Like Abraham, Jesus struggled with God’s command on His life (Matthew 26:36-46). In the end, He obeyed and walked up the mountain. We are to do likewise. While simple, it’s not an easy climb.

Spend time praying together and for each other as you truly die to self and ask help in toppling your idols. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you and your group the strength to walk up the mountain.

Share any personal requests, challenges, hopes and fears. Pray for the people in your life who don’t know Jesus.
Counterfeit Gods Group Study Guide  
Chapter 2: Love Is Not All You Need

Preparing

Read Chapter 2, and set some time aside to consider these questions before your group meets: How does my family background affect my personality, character, and life today? (p. 25) Where do I seek acceptance and affirmation? Am I trying to please God or man (see Galatians 1:10)? Does something have a hold of me (see Ephesians 4:27)? Do I have proper boundaries?

Breaking the Ice

1. When do you feel most alive? Free? What do you enjoy doing? What is your favorite pastime? Could you become a slave to it?
2. If you are married or dating, tell the story of how you met. Was there a moment or “tipping point” when you realized you were “in love?”

Going Deeper

3. Idols are easy to identify when your life is in ruins (like Jacob’s in Genesis 27:42-45). But how do we identify idols when our life is not yet ruined? How can we tell if we are living an empty life? What, if anything, can be done before someone’s life gets to the point of destruction? (p. 25)
4. Have you ever strived for something over a long period of time only to be disappointed by it? Have you ever been fulfilled by it? (p. 27)
5. Keller seems to suggest unfulfilling marriages, divorce, and serial relationships have a root cause of “bitter disillusionment.” (Page 29 and 37) Why do you think marriages (relationships) break up? How can we as Christians help before it hits a crisis? What role could this group play?
6. As image bearers of the triune God, we are created with a need and desire for loving relationships. Yet, this seems to be an area where substitutes, false fulfillments, etc. seem to abound. Why does this need for relationship have such power in our lives? Why is this an area where control can easily over take us? How can we avoid it? (p. 31)
7. How can we keep a healthy view of love?
8. Keller claims Jacob acted like an addict. (p. 33) Some say we are all addicts of something. What do you think about Jacob being characterized as an addict? What do you think about being characterized that way yourself? Do you lean towards one particular addiction (work, shopping, golf, etc.)?
9. Leah was “the girl that nobody wanted.” (p. 35) Have you ever felt that way? How, as Christians, can we help those who feel unwanted and rejected instead feel loved and accepted? Name something practical this group could do for a specific person (or group) who may feel unwanted.
10. When “the things upon which we most set our hopes” disappoint us, Keller says we tend to blame those things, blame ourselves, blame the world, or reorient our focus towards God. (p. 39) Have you been disappointed lately? Did you choose blame, or a renewed focus? How can you consistently reorient your focus on God? How are you doing in this?
11. How have you recently experienced, as C.S. Lewis did, that you are made for a different world (p. 39, and Ephesians 2:19)?
12. Keller says God is our ultimate spouse (p. 44) and then asks a question: “How can we know God’s love so deeply that we release our lovers and spouses from our stifling expectations?” (p. 45) Answer this question and list some practical ways to apply.
13. Has your life ever “fallen apart” because of something or someone you loved mistreated you, or made you feel worthless? How can we help you today?

14. Jacob was not the only one who struggled with idols. (Genesis 29) What idols did Rachel, Leah, and Laban serve? What were the consequences of that slavery? Who do you most identify with from this story?

15. Do you feel valuable, and loved? Read the following verses and talk about your value and new identity in Christ: Romans 5:8, Galatians 4:3-7, and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

**Toppling Your Idols**

Read and reflect on Ephesians 2:11-22. You were once alienated from God but now, being reconciled to God, you are an alien in this world. Does this resonate with you, or seem strange? Do you constantly feel out of place in one way or another? Do you long for something different? How can you be a better ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)?

Consider Keller’s words on page 37. He points out that the Bible is a single, continuous story about God reconciling a broken world to Himself through Jesus. Reflect on your role in this story. What part does God want you to play in His story? How can you better serve in your calling? Would you be okay if your role was seen by others as a minor role (See Romans 9:21)? (Keller seemed to suggest Isaac was a link in a very important chain page 24-25.)

**Memorize**

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household …*

_Ephesians 2:19 (NIV):_

**Renewing Through Prayer**

Acknowledge your desire for loving relationships, and then ask the Lord to be the fulfiller of that desire. Pray that every person in your group would desire an intimate connection with the Lord above the fleeting affirmation of another person. The power to overcome an idol of love is found in Jesus Christ alone. He says, “I am the true Bridegroom.” Christ came into the world not through beautiful Rachel, but through lineage of unwanted and unloved Leah. Pray to be so deeply moved by the depth of His love for you that it detaches your heart from other would-be saviors. Thank God for sending His Son for us. Pray for a fresh awakening in your heart to the beauty and worth of the gospel.
Preparation

Read Chapter 3, and set some time aside to consider these questions before your group meets: How do you view your possessions - are they necessities, friends, luxuries, or tools, and how would you categorize them? What lessons about money - and how to use it - did you learn from your family? Are you currently giving at the level the Lord wants you to give? Why or why not? Do you see giving as an act of worship?

Breaking the Ice

1. Do you agree that we live in a culture of greed? What evidence do you see of that? What evidence is there to the contrary?
2. When it comes to finances, do you lean toward risk or control? If you were in danger of mismanaging money, would it be because of impatience or missing opportunities?

Going Deeper

3. Do you agree or disagree that the sexual revolution and our current attitudes about finances are similar? (p. 50) How so? What has been the consequence of each? What future consequences can we expect from this financial attitude?
4. Keller claims we cannot see our own greed. (p. 51) Why is it hard to see greed in ourselves and yet so easy to see it in others?
5. Keller says, “The money god’s modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart.” (p. 52) How can we cultivate eyes that see the deformities of our own heart? What role should this group play in that effort?
6. Keller points out that, “Jesus warns people far more often about greed than about sex, yet almost no one thinks they are guilty of it.” (p. 53) List some ways that the idol of loving money is offensive to God, enslaves us, and is destructive to all who are touched by it.
7. Keller suggests, “Therefore we should all begin with a working hypothesis that ‘this could easily be a problem for me.’ If greed hides itself so deeply, no one should be confident that it is not a problem for them. How can we recognize and become free from the power of money which blinds us?” (p. 53) Discuss.
8. Zacchaeus sacrificed everything for money. (pp. 53-55) Do you think he realized what he was giving up? Do you think it was a conscious decision? What do people today sacrifice in the pursuit of money? Are you in danger of this? If not, why not?
9. How would you define greed? Keller points out that Jesus defined it as not only the love of money, but having excessive anxiety about it. (p 56) How does that change or affect your perception of what greed really is? Can we control our own anxieties? If so, how? If not, then why would we be held accountable for that?
10. Read the following verses: Luke 12:15 and 16:13-15; Colossians 3:5; and Ephesians 5:5. Keller points out that the Bible says we do three things with our idols: love them, trust them, and obey them. (pp. 56-57) How do these verses relate to that?
11. Keller says, “Money is one of the most common counterfeit gods there is. When it takes hold of your heart it blinds you to what is happening, it controls you through your anxieties and lusts, and it brings you to put it ahead of all other things.” (p. 58) Read Luke 18:18-30. Do you agree? Since the
story of Zacchaeus is related to this (Luke 19), how can we help the greedy (ourselves and others) change?

12. Keller talks about the difference between surface idols and deep idols. (p. 64) If money were to become a problem for you, what deep idol could it be shielding - power, approval, comfort, or control? Do you ever feel superior to others in the way you use money? How can you keep a proper perspective?

13. Keller writes, “To the degree that you grasp the Gospel, money will have no dominion over you. Think on his costly grace until it changes you into a generous people.” (pp. 67-68) What do you think of this statement? On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the sacrifice of Jesus), where would you place your generosity? How can you grow in your generosity and grace? How do we maintain a culture of grace and not allow legalism to rule over us, especially in the area of personal finance?

14. Read page 71 again. What does Keller mean when he argues that idols “can’t be removed; only replaced?” How does that idea change the way we need to tackle our issues?

15. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. How do we root out and replace the love of money in our lives with the gospel? How does living a generous lifestyle demonstrate the gospel to others? In what ways are you challenged to be more generous?

Toppling Your Idols

Read and reflect on Luke 19. Zacchaeus approached Jesus with humility and, setting aside his status and wealth, his entire life changed. What is blocking you from experiencing a life-changing moment right now? What do you need to give up in order to see God work through your life in a mighty way? In what area do you most need to see God work? If life change comes from an encounter with God, when was the last time you truly encountered God?

Memorize

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

2 Corinthians 8:10 (NIV)

Renewing Through Prayer

What breaks the power of money over us is not the redoubled effort to follow the example of Christ. Rather, it is deepening our understanding of the salvation of Christ, what we have in Him, what he has given to us, and then living out the changes which that understanding makes in our heart (the seat of our mind, will, and emotions). Ask the Holy Spirit to expose areas of your life where you may be relying too heavily on wealth and money. Reflect on your own anxieties and lusts (daydreams). Pray that these would become holy ambitions for Him rather than self-service to a deep idol.
Counterfeit Gods Group Study Guide
Chapter 4: The Seduction of Success

Preparing

As you read and reflect on Chapter 4, try to identify areas of your life in which success is a significant motivating factor. Keep in mind that most men tend to think of success in financial, career-related terms. While this kind of success-idolatry is important to address, we must remember to examine other areas where success may be a goal, such as relationships (particularly within the family), self-image, and even ministry. What does success look like to you? What does failure look like? How would failure in these areas impact you? Try to identify when you have experienced failure and reflect on how this affected you.

Breaking the Ice

1. In what ways do you consider yourself a success? In what ways is it important for you to be successful?
2. What would happen if you experienced failure in areas where you see yourself as successful?
3. Sometimes the drive to be successful can be very costly. How has your drive for success affected you and those close to you?

Going Deeper

4. Keller likens obsession with success to a drug addiction, in which the addict feels the constant need to prove oneself. (p. 73) To whom do you feel the need to prove yourself?
5. On page 73, Keller describes how a character from Chariots of Fire laments his lack of contentment. What kind of contentment is this character talking about? What reasons do we all have for feeling this kind of contentment, and can you think of a time when you experienced it?
6. In what ways does the idol of success run contrary to the gospel? (p. 75)
7. Keller notes that the idol of success distorts the way in which we see ourselves. In particular, he points out that success in one area of life tends to create the illusion that we possess “expertise in all areas.” (p. 76) Can you perhaps see this as being true in your life? How can you guard against this illusion?
8. We often use success as an attempt to assure ourselves that others will regard us highly. (p. 77) Is it ever appropriate to be concerned with how others perceive us? If not, why? If so, how should we be perceived and how should we go about influencing that perception? Consider Romans 12:3 and 1 Timothy 3:7.
9. It isn’t very hard to imagine that avoidance of success (another form of this same idol) can become an excuse for spiritual slothfulness. How can we guard against this? Is there a balance to be reached? How do we reconcile the idea of balance with Keller’s repeated warning that you cannot root out idolatry but only replace it? See Colossians 3:23-24.
10. On page 79, Keller writes about the president of Wake Forest University’s concern about the type of career choices young people are making. What is his concern? If you are engaged in the kind of career and/or lifestyle that is particularly geared towards helping you, rather than others, what changes might you be able to make? Think about the example of Zacchaeus from Chapter 3 (see Luke 19:1-10).
11. Until now we’ve been thinking about our own struggle with this particular type of idolatry, but there are also ways in which we inadvertently foster “success idolatry” in those around us. How does this happen? If this has become a pattern in some of your relationships, how can you address it?

12. What is it like when other people are more successful than you in an area of life you are passionate about? What is the godly, appropriate way to view such people? Compare John the Baptist’s attitude towards Jesus’ ministry with the attitude of the religious leaders of his day.

13. Think about Naaman’s slave girl who is discussed by Keller on pages 89-91. This is a girl who was wronged by a successful person, and yet still sought his healing and salvation. Have you ever had any animosity or disdain towards successful people who have wronged you? How would you react if you were given the opportunity to help such a person?

14. Keller claims that “traditional religion always expects that the gods will be working through the successful, not the outsider and the failures.” (p. 84) Sometimes, Christians elevate “Christian superstars,” such as athletes and successful businessmen, at retreats, conferences, and in churches. In what ways do Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 inform this practice?

15. Are there any ways in which you find yourself feeling that God “owes” you for your success? How can we break our heart’s fixation on doing “some great things” in order to heal ourselves of our sense of inadequacy?

**Toppling Your Idols**

Read and reflect on Philippians 3:2-11. What was Paul’s attitude towards his successes? Yet, as a minister of the gospel, Paul was no slouch. If it wasn’t success that motivated him, what was it? What would your life and ministry look like if your motivation was the same as Paul’s? What steps can you take to make it so? As you reflect on this passage, replace Paul’s list of successes and replace them with your own.

**Memorize**

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

**Renewing Through Prayer**

Pray you will see Jesus as our great Suffering Servant. Pray you are reminded that what He has done for us does not require us to do “some great things.” We don’t have to do it, because Jesus has. Lord, remind us that our salvation is received not through our strength but through our admission of weakness and need. And Jesus’s salvation was achieved not through strength but through surrender, service, sacrifice, and death. Confess your weakness and need of a savior. Thank Jesus for humbling himself, even to death, for you.
Counterfeit Gods Group Study Guide  
Chapter 5: The Power and the Glory

Preparing

Chapter 5 confronts how we desire control over our lives and how this leads us to place ourselves, a political philosophy, or a guru where God belongs instead. As you read this chapter, try and expose your own heart to this wisdom and honestly identify areas in which your confidence rests. Is it on God, or human institutions? Remember that this is not about whether such institutions and philosophies are good or correct, but whether they are trying to secure what only God can truly provide. How do you feel when others who hold competing views gain the upper hand and you must live accordingly? Finally, try and think back to a time when you held different views other than the ones you hold now. If you now believe differently than you once did, the possibility exists that you may change your mind again in the future. What does this say about man’s ability to choose and develop ideologies that provide answers to life’s problems?

Breaking the Ice

1. “Power and glory” idolatry is obviously present in politics. Try and name other areas of life where this is also an issue.
2. What are some of the ideologies to which you subscribe, and how do they shape your day-to-day life? How do you react when your views are not in the majority?

Going Deeper

3. On page 98, Keller talks about the tendency we have to make our leaders into “messiahs” who have been anointed to deliver us from the sins of previous leaders. It is perhaps easiest to think of examples of this among our presidents. What are some other leadership positions or offices that make us susceptible to messiah or guru worship? If a leader is a good one, why is this bad?
4. On page 99, Keller notes that, these days, political “opponents are not considered to be simply mistaken, but to be evil.” Is he right? Note that he also makes the point that the extent to which this is true is a relatively recent development. If so, what might account for this?
5. According to the philosopher Al Wolters, the Bible teaches that man’s main problem is sin, and the only solution is God’s grace. However, our tendency is to replace both sin and grace with other things. (p. 100) What are some of these things? How are these other problems and solutions related to the true problem and the true solution?
6. Part of life is being able to relate appropriately with those whom we disagree. Think of someone at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, and consider seriously what kinds of thoughts and feelings you have towards them. What was Jesus’ response to those with whom he clashed? Consider Matthew 23, but also sayings such as in Luke 23:34.
7. Keller writes about W. E. Henley, who saw himself as the “master” of his own fate, and the “captain” of his soul. (pp. 110-11) Henley’s pride came about as he reflected on his own ability to overcome a disability. Do you have any accomplishments that have led you to a similar disillusionment?
8. On page 112, Keller states: “Idols of power, then, are not only for the powerful. You can pursue power in small, petty ways…” How have you experienced this in others? Have you done this in any way? What is the cure to asserting power?
9. One major point of Chapter 5 is that the desire to have power over our own lives stems from, and in some ways is the cause of, our alienation from God, and is therefore self-perpetuating. Can this
desire for power ever truly be met? Why or why not? What sort of things in life are out of your control? How valuable are these things to you?

10. Discussed in this chapter was a womanizer who sought power over women before he became a Christian. Afterwards, as a Christian, he remained power hungry through knowing he had the truth of the gospel. How might such thinking influence the manner in which we share Christ with others? This is a similar problem to the one addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:6-7. What is the context of this passage, and how does it speak to those who take pride in themselves because of their Christian knowledge?

11. Nebuchadnezzar was a man who came to acknowledge the Lord’s sovereignty over him, his kingdom, and his accomplishments through humiliation (Daniel 4:24-27). Has God ever used a form of humiliation to teach you the same lesson? Is he perhaps doing this right now in your life?

12. Read Jeremiah 18:1-6. How are we to respond to the Potter when He chooses to remold, bend and squeeze us? How does having a long-term perspective help us in this situation?

13. The surprising effect of acknowledging God as the one who is in sovereign control of our lives is that it brings peace, security, humility, and justice. (pp. 119-20) Why is this true?

14. Christian Smith observes a trend among young Christians is to frame their theology in terms of “moralistic, therapeutic deism.” (p. 115) What does he mean by this, and why is this a bad thing?

15. In what way does pride make us “less human?” (pp. 121-25)

Toppling Your Idols

Too often, while we trust in God for the salvation of our souls, we refuse to trust him with our lives. Who is in control of the most important aspects of your life? If it isn’t God, why?

Read and reflect on Psalm 146. What reasons does this passage give for God’s trustworthiness? What do verses 3 and 4 say about why earthly “princes” are untrustworthy? Toward which groups in this passage is God favorable? Toward which ones is he against?

Memorize

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the Lord, who remains faithful forever.

Psalm 146:5 (NIV)

Renewing Through Prayer

The normal response to our sense of powerlessness is to deny it, to find people we can dominate and control in order to live in that denial. Pray that we will fight this natural urge. Pray, that through the strength of Jesus, we will give up power and serve, Him. Confessing your sin, need, and powerlessness. Casting yourselves on His mercy, pray for security in his love, and pray He will keep you from oppressing others. Pray for humility, instead of living for your own glory. Then the death of your pride can lead to a resurrection. Finally you can emerge, fully human, with a tender heart instead of a hard heart.
Preparing

Read Chapter 6, and set some time aside to consider these questions before your group meets:
What am I finding hope in other than God? What can only God provide for me? Why do I look to other places? What narrow ambitions am I pursuing? What hidden idols in my life need to be dug up?

Breaking the Ice

1. Do you enjoy mysteries or suspense? Why or why not? What is it about the hunt for the unknown that is sometimes exhilarating? What makes it exhausting?
2. How much time do you take for reflection? Have you been setting time aside to reflect during this series? Why does reflection seem to take so much effort? What is the value of reflection, and then coupling that with journaling?

Going Deeper

3. Keller talks about doing what is “good and right ... in and of itself,” without ulterior motives. (p. 128) Why is this so hard for us? Are we capable of doing anything without a selfish motive?
4. Keller observes that honesty and integrity do not always make for good business. (p. 128) Why not? Do you agree or disagree with Keller’s assessment? What is it about business that makes us want to avoid honesty and integrity?
5. How can we make sure we maintain our integrity at work? How could this group help with that goal?
6. What is your definition of hope? Where does hope come from, and where should it be placed? (pp. 129-130) Where does our culture place its hope? How should Christian hope differ from cultural hope? How can we become less enslaved to our culture’s idols?
7. Look up Proverbs 14:6 and 21:24. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Why does knowledge lead to pride, but wisdom does not? Can you call yourself (or recognize yourself as being) wise, or can only someone else bestow that upon you?
8. Keller writes, “Scoffers always show contempt ... rather than graciousness.” (p. 131) When we know we are right, we are more likely to show contempt. How can we show grace and yet not compromise our beliefs? How can we speak in a kind and generous manner without becoming a people-pleaser? How do we disagree with others in a godly way? How are you at disagreeing yet showing grace?
9. How do we avoid “Making an idol out of doctrinal accuracy, ministry success, or moral rectitude,” especially since we should have these things in our lives? (p. 132)
10. To what mission has God called us, as Christians? How are you participating in it? How is this group playing a role in it?
11. Considering the story of Jonah, why was his mission needed? What made him a reluctant missionary? What were some of his idols? (p. 133ff.)
12. Like Jonah, we can learn much when we are in the depths of hopelessness. When was the last time you were there? What were the circumstances? What did you learn? Are you like the prophet in that some of the lessons were fleeting?
13. In the belly of the fish, Jonah recognized and repented of his idolatry. Yet those same idols reasserted themselves in his life. What does this reveal to us about the human heart? Have you ever
gone through the same experience, where idols continued to hold sway even after identification and attempted repentance?

14. Keller writes: “But while Jesus is our Savior in principle, other things still maintain functional title to our hearts. Jonah shows us that it is one thing to believe the gospel with our minds, and another to work it deep into our hearts so it affects everything we think, feel, and do.” (p. 145) How do we allow the gospel to work deep into our hearts? What practices can we cultivate that will aid this process? How does (or could) this group aid in that process? What obstacles will we face as we allow the gospel to penetrate deeper?

15. Keller points out that “You don’t lose your desire to live unless you have lost your meaning in life.” (p. 149) What are you living for right now? What meaning does your life have? Are you in danger of making that an idol? In what ways?

Toppling Your Idols

Read and reflect on Galatians 1:10. How can we please God and not offend man? How can I show grace to others yet be serving Christ? What role does wisdom play in allowing the Gospel to penetrate my life? What role do others play?

Memorize

*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Galatians 1:10 (NIV)

Renewing Through Prayer

Jonah ultimately obeyed God and responded to His grace. God is now posing the question to us: “Will you follow Me?” Are we, like Jonah, willing to change? If we are, then we must look to the “ultimate Jonah,” and to His sign, His death and resurrection.

Thank God for sending His Son for us. Ask Him to forgive you for when you have desired some good things more than you ought. Ask Him to continue to reveal hidden idols in your heart.
Counterfeit Gods Group Study Guide
Chapter 7: The End of Counterfeit Gods, and
Epilogue: Finding and Replacing Your Idols

Preparing

Read Chapter 7 and the Epilogue. Set some time aside to do some reflection before the group meets. Consider the fact that we are coming to the end of a 7-week series on idolatry. What have you learned about yourself? About God? Write these thoughts down. What has the Lord laid upon your heart to change? How will you do it? You will likely need other people to help you progress - how will you go about that? Write yourself a letter of encouragement about ridding yourself of your current biggest idol.

Breaking the Ice

1. When was the last time you truly felt God’s presence? Explain.
2. Tell us about your family relationships. What were the dynamics between you and your siblings?

Going Deeper

3. Have you ever read the booklet “My Heart, Christ’s Home?” What do you think of the concept of our heart being the home of Christ? Are all your rooms in order? Does any room have an idol that needs to be toppled?
4. Keller profoundly states, “... idols cannot simply be removed. They must be replaced.” (p. 155) Discuss this concept. What does it mean for us? How do we balance this with grace (i.e., not works)?
5. Read James 2:14-25. What is the difference between belief and actions? How do they interact with one another? Do you think people who profess belief but demonstrate no corresponding actions have ever truly encountered the Lord? Discuss.
6. Read Genesis 31:19. Keller offers some reasons why Rachel stole the idols. (p. 156) What do you think her reasoning was?
7. Do you ever view God as one more resource to help achieve your agenda? (p. 156) How can you make Him your whole (new) agenda?
8. What are some of your big fears? How could the Lord use those fears for His glory? How could He speak into them and take away your fears? What steps can you take to diminish those fears?
9. Keller concludes that “the only remedy against idolatry” is “the blessing through the Spirit that is ours through Christ.” However, “As with Jacob, we usually discover this only after a life of ‘looking for blessing in all the wrong places.’ It often takes an experience of crippling weakness for us to finally discover it.” (p. 164) Has this been true in your life? In what ways do you still limp from that crippling?
10. Keller asks some penetrating questions on pages 163-164. Discuss as a group: “Have you heard God’s blessing in your inmost being? Are the words ‘You are my beloved child, in whom I delight’ an endless source of joy and strength? Have you sensed, through the Holy Spirit, God speaking them to you?” Let me add one more: If so how can you better live out this reality?
11. Read Romans 1:21, 25. How can you better discern idols in your own heart? What disciplines can you adopt in order to check your motives and desires consistently? How can this group play a role in those disciplines?
12. All sin is rooted in your happiness (or comfort) over your love for God. If you sin, you love something more than God (see page 166). Yet, we cannot stop sinning. Do you agree or disagree? What can we do? Are we hopeless? Is this a cruel joke played on us by God? Discuss.

13. What do you habitually think about in order to get joy and comfort in the privacy of your own heart? How can you replace that idol with the joy of the Lord?

14. Keller says, “… it is worship that is the final way to replace the idols of your heart.” (p. 175) In what ways do you need to daily worship more? What roles will spiritual disciplines play in your continued worship?

15. Read on page 176 the paragraph beginning with: “Our hearts are like that.” Keller says mature Christians are “people who know how to keep drilling” in their hearts. How can we continually drill deeper into the depths of our hearts? How can this group help?

**Toppling your Idols**

Read and reflect on Romans 1:16-2:16 and 5:1-11. Consider Keller’s four discernments of idols on pages 168-169:

1) Look at your imagination; what do you daydream about?
2) Where are you spending your money?
3) What is your real, daily functional salvation? What are you really living for?
4) What are your uncontrollable emotions, and what is behind them?

Journal your responses and put together an action plan for change.

**Memorize**

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*  
*Colossians 3:1-4 (NIV)*

**Renewing Through Prayer**

Spend some time rejoicing in Christ. When we rejoice most fully over Christ’s sacrificial love for us, we are most truly convicted of our sin. Rejoicing and repentance must go together.

When we realize the difference between setting our hearts on Christ rather than obeying rules of outward conduct, we are on the road to freedom from the counterfeit gods that control us.
This is a simple guide to help us expose our idols and replace them with Christ. If you are still struggling with identifying your idols and what to do with them once you know them, this guide should help.

**REMEMBER THE GOAL**

*Colossians 3:1-4 (NIV)*  
1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.  
2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.  
3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.  
4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

**DISCERN YOUR IDOLS**

Here is a brief list of idol categories. The list may help us see the broad scope of idolatry in order to better recognize our own:

- **Theological idols**—doctrinal errors that produce such distorted views of God that we end up worshipping a false god
- **Sexual idols**—addictions such as pornography and fetishisms that promise but don’t deliver a sense of intimacy and acceptance; ideals of physical beauty in yourself and/or your partner; romantic idealism
- **Magic/ritual idols**—witchcraft and the occult; All idolatry is in the end a form of magic that seeks to rebel against the order of transcendent reality rather than submitting to it in love and wisdom.
- **Political/economic idols**—ideologies of the left, right, and libertarian that absolutize some aspect of political order and make it the solution (deifying or demonizing free markets, for example)
- **Racial/national idols**—racism, militarism, nationalism, or ethnic pride that turns bitter or oppressive
- **Relational idols**—dysfunctional family systems of codependency; “fatal attractions”; living your life through your children
- **Religious idols**—moralism and legalism; idolatry of success and gifts; religion as a pretext for abuse of power
- **Philosophical idols**—systems of thought that make some created thing the problem with life (instead of sin) and some human product or enterprise the solution to our problems (instead of God’s grace)
- **Cultural idols**—radical individualism, as in the West, that makes an idol out of individual happiness at the expense of community; shame cultures that make an idol out of family and clan at the expense of individual rights
- **Deep idols**—motivational drives and temperaments made into absolutes:
  a) Power idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I have power and influence over others.”
  b) Approval idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am loved and respected by __________.”
  c) Comfort idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.”
  d) Control idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of __________.”
Considering the categories above, journal your responses to these questions and put together an action plan for change:

5) Look at your imagination; what do you daydream about?
6) Where are you spending your money?
7) What is your real, daily functional salvation? What are you really living for?
8) What are your uncontrollable emotions, and what is behind them?

REPLACE YOUR IDOLS

On page 175, Keller says:

How can we put the gospel truths “on video” in our lives so that they shape all we feel and do? This takes what are called “the spiritual disciplines,” such as private prayer, corporate worship, and meditation. The disciplines take cognitive knowledge and make it a life-shaping reality in our hearts and imaginations. Spiritual disciplines are basically forms of worship, and it is worship that is the final way to replace the idols of your heart. You cannot get relief simply by figuring out your idols intellectually. You have to actually get the peace that Jesus gives, and that only comes as you worship. Analysis can help you discover truths, but then you need to “pray them in” to your heart. That takes time. It is a process about which there is much to say, but we cannot take it up in this book.

Here is a list of disciplines that might help you replace your idols. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list or a formula, but consider how each act of worship might specifically help you replace your specific idols:

1. Meditation - filling your mind with Christ and His Word
2. Simplicity and Giving - releasing your grip on things
3. Fasting - participating in the sufferings of Christ
4. Praying - seeking dependence and answers
5. Solitude and Silence - being alone in order to break dependence on people
6. Study - gaining more tools to dig deeper
7. Confession - not letting your idol live in the dark
8. Celebration - creating a thankful heart
9. Service and Sacrifice - loving others through actions
10. Journaling - capturing your thoughts for His glory

START TODAY

The book of Galatians gives us a glimpse on how to replace our idols with a pure devotion to Christ without falling into the works theology trap. The fruit of the Spirit will help us replace our idols with worship.
Read Galatians 5:16-21. What does NOT living by the Spirit look like in your life? In other words, how are you living that is contrary to allowing the Spirit to make you more like Christ?

Read Galatians 5:22-25. What one fruit of the Spirit would you like to see in increasing measures in your life? How can you keep in step with the Spirit in this specific area? Try to fully understand this character quality, in order to truly grasp what it means, what it looks like, and how to live it out. Study the Scriptures pertaining to that quality to view it in context. Consider examples of people who displayed this quality in the Bible. Who would be a good example of that quality? Is there a specific narrative story that could be studied to help grasp this idea? How did Jesus specifically portray this quality? How can I imitate this in my life?

Here is one example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUALITY</th>
<th>3 VERSES</th>
<th>NARRATIVE</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Based on your study of the passages, on a 3x5 card write a short description or definition of your character quality. After reviewing your specific Scriptures, you want to ask these questions: What can I do to experience more of this in my life? What would this character quality look like in my life if I had it in abundance? How would it change me as a person? How would it change my decisions? How do I become an example of it? Is there anything holding me back from experiencing it?

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