

# Idol Talk

Growth Group Study Guide



## Identifying your idols

What is an idol? Tim Keller wrote that an idol “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.”

In his book [The Gospel of the Heart](#), he points out that the first of the Ten Commandments is against idolatry. It says: *I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me*. The command asserts that we will either worship God or other things. Notice, it does not envision any third option – there is no possibility of our worshipping nothing. Since we need to worship something, because of how we are created, we cannot eliminate God without creating God-substitutes.

Our faith is one of redemption and rescue, and one of the ways we can find both of those is to be able to identify and then predict where our specific pitfalls may lie. Our prayer is that as we identify and define the idols of Power, Control, Comfort and Approval, that we can then humbly give those areas over to Jesus and allow His healing and redemptive power to bring us to a clearer understanding regarding His plan for us in thought, word and deed.

October 29, 2023

## Session 1 | The Idol of Power

**Before you begin** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5EA\\_LVRsr0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5EA_LVRsr0)



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*



At times, we have heard the phrases, “power hungry, throwing his/her weight around, or even, who died and made you king?” These are all terms we use when we talk or think about someone who is using their power to influence or control others. This can become an idol if we are constantly seeking it.

What is an idol? An idol can be anything that takes the place of God as the most important focus and priority in our life. What specifically is the Idol of Power?

According to Pastor Shayne Looper it is when, “a non-divine power subverts human worship for itself and usurps humanity’s God-given authority to exercise dominion over the world.”

When we trust some power, other than God, to make our lives or the world better and offer our devotion to it, it quickly begins to take over God’s rightful place in our lives. We become dependent on it. Power can lead us to feeling burdened and responsible. It can be humiliating to fail, making us feel angry and frustrated with ourselves and others. It can make others feel used. An intelligent, informed worship of God brings the worshiper peace and self-control, but the worship of an idol always brings fear and agitation.

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.*

Romans 1:21-23

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:11, Proverbs 3:5-6, Exodus 20:1-4, Romans 1:21-23

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?

2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. Can you name someone from the Bible who struggled with the Idol of Power? Feel free to name several.
2. Proverbs 3:5 tells us to trust in the LORD with all our heart. Who do you think of in the Bible when you think of trusting in the LORD?
3. In Proverbs 3:6 we read;  
“... *in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”  
Does this mean that God will make our lives easy?
4. In 1 Samuel chapter 15, Saul, the newly appointed first king of the Israelites, is disobeying God and underperforming his way out of his appointment. He won a victory over the Amalekites, but instead of encouraging the people to praise and thank God for their victory, verse 12 tells us that, “*Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his honor...*” In verse 24 Saul says to Samuel, “*I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.*” Can you think of an instance when you forfeited your power to another person, or to a group of people?
5. Read Matthew 26:3-4. Why were the chief priests and elders so keen on having Jesus killed? What role might “power” have played as a motivator?

## Questions for Application:

1. What is your greatest nightmare associated with the Idol of Power and what does it look like?
2. How does it make you feel when you're around people who worship the Idol of Power?
3. What emotions are people feeling when they resort to worshipping the Idol of Power?
4. How we spend our time and money helps to identify what we value and cherish the most. When you look at how you spend your time and money, does it seem to indicate that you're worshipping the Idol of Power? If so, why?
5. What prevents you from putting all of your trust in God?
6. Are you struggling with the Idol of Power? How are you going to overcome it?
7. What can you do when others use their power to make you do something that you're not comfortable with?

8. Can you think of someone in your life who uses their position to exert power over you? How does that make you feel? Is there anyone in your life over whom you use your position to exert power in a manner that God would find offensive? How might you change your behavior?
  
9. Consider the “*lean not on your own understanding*” and the “*in all your ways submit to him,*” portions of Proverbs 3:5-6. How might “understanding” and “submission” relate to our trusting of God’s power?
  
10. Seeking the approval and acceptance of others can be exhausting. We should consciously seek to please God and not man. Discuss. What does this type of life look like? How do we know if we are on the right track? How do we take steps to change if we are seeking man’s acceptance and not seeking God’s.

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

Surrender Control//Learning to relax 5-day plan

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/15306-surrender-control-learning-to-relax>



Surrender Control

Jesus, I surrender 4-day plan <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/36849-jesus-i-surrender-all>



Jesus, I Surrender

**Additional Resource Article:**

Idol of Power <https://deliveredfromdarkness.com/2014/07/14/the-idol-of-power/>



The Idol of Power

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?

2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

**Growth Challenge:**

As you give up your power this week ask God to replace your power with His power.

# NOTES

November 5, 2023

## Session 2 | The Idol of Control

**Before you begin** this growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video:

Put God First [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxY\\_eJLBflk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxY_eJLBflk)



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

As humans, we want to feel like we have control of our lives. After all, without control we would feel helplessness, right? This leads to uncertainty, which then leads to worry. But we learn in the Bible that God is in control:

*"Faith is believing that God is going to take you places before you even get there."*  
Matthew Barnett

*"... for I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. . ."*

Jeremiah 29:11

If we take control and organize things, society perceives us as being competent. So, is it wrong for us to organize and plan our lives? If we didn't it would be chaotic and tumultuous. But can we take control too far? Certainly. That is

when our idol becomes control, when we are so obsessed with control that everything must go according to our plan. We need to remember who is ultimately in control of our lives. Proverbs 16:9 tells us:

*We should make plans—counting on God to direct us.*  
(The Living Bible)

*"We should make plans – counting on God to direct us.*  
Proverbs 16:9 (The Living Bible)

Ultimately, to destroy the Idol of Control, we need to have faith that God will guide us.

**Scripture:** Proverbs 19:21, Philippians 4:6

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?



2. What challenged you about this sermon?
  
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. Name someone from the Bible who struggled with control. How so?
  
2. Philippians 4:6 tells us to pray to God about how we are feeling. Why is it important to take everything to Him in prayer if He already knows everything that we're going through?
  
3. God tells us that we should give all of our anxieties to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6), so why do we so often insist on dealing with them on our own?
  
4. Proverbs 19:21 tells us:  
*"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails."*  
Describe the meaning of this verse in your own words. If you feel out of control, what does this verse tell us?
  
5. In Revelation 22:13 Jesus tells us that:  
*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."*  
What, if anything, does this verse tell us about control? Does this bring you comfort or make you anxious? Explain.

## Questions for Application:

1. What is your greatest nightmare associated with the Idol of Control and what does it look like?
2. How does it make you feel when you're around people who worship the Idol of Control?
3. What emotions are people feeling when they resort to worshipping the Idol of Control?
4. How we spend our time and money helps to identify what we value and cherish the most. When you look at how you spend your time and money, does it seem to indicate that you're worshipping the Idol of Control? If so, why?
5. What controls you? Is this an idol? How do you deal with it?
6. In what area of your life have you refused to give God control of your decision making?
7. Describe a time when, despite your best efforts to control a situation or bring about a certain result, things did not go as planned. Ultimately, how did things turn out? Was the outcome better or worse than you had hoped?

8. Describe a time when you found yourself in a situation where you were afraid, out of your element, or totally overwhelmed and you gave the situation to God. What happened? Did this change your relationship with God?
  
9. In Philippians 4:6 we read that “in every situation” we should go to God with thanksgiving. Have there been times in your life that it has been difficult for you to go to God with thanksgiving?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

Winning the War in Your Mind 7 day reading plan

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/24127-winning-the-war-in-your-mind>



Winning the War in Your Mind

Who Controls Your Thoughts 3 day reading plan

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/26468-who-controls-your-thoughts>



Who Controls Your Thoughts

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge:

This week, trust God to guide you concerning a persistent issue that has been nagging you.

# NOTES

November 12, 2023  
Session 3 | The Idol of Comfort

*Before you begin* this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video.

The Idol of Comfort <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuGXObuY9LE>



 Session 3

### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

According to pastor and author, Tim Keller, “An ‘idol’ is anything more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity. Idolatry is not so much wanting bad things, but it is turning good things into ultimate things. This means anything can become an idol, including good things.”

*“When the gift replaces the Giver or the created replaces the Creator in our lives, we have fallen into idolatry.”*

“Idolatry is not so much wanting bad things, but it is turning good things into ultimate things”

In the United States, “comfort” is a “good thing” enjoyed by the vast majority of Americans. The US Census Bureau reported in 2022 that 11.5 percent of the US population lives in poverty (meaning 88.5% of us live in comparative comfort). We know from Jesus’ brother James, that, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17 NIV) “The good things of this world are gifts from God, meant to be enjoyed with a thankful heart, in submission to Him and for His glory. But when the gift replaces the Giver or the created replaces the Creator in our lives, we have fallen into idolatry.” (gotquestions.org)

With regard to life’s comforts, we like what we like; we want what we want; and we are often guilty of considering these blessings to be the fruits of our labor, rather than gifts from God to be used to bless others. Do you enjoy any of these comforts: family, shelter, food, free time, income, hobbies? Do you acknowledge them as blessings? Here are four questions by Jeffrey Curtis Poor to ask yourself that may help identify idols in your life:

- Where do I spend my time?
- Where do I spend my money?
- Where do I get my joy?
- What’s always on my mind?

**Scripture:** Joshua 1:9, Matthew 25:14-30

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

## **Sermon Reflection:**

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

## **Questions from the Bible:**

1. Which of the Ten Commandments have idolatry at their core? (Deut.5:6-21)
2. How do you think today's scripture readings address comfort as a form of idolatry?
3. Where in the Bible does God promise us that we will have a comfortable life?
4. As believers in Christ, we read in Acts 1:8 that God has given us the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit help us according to this scripture? Does it tell us that the Holy Spirit will make us comfortable?
5. In Matthew 25:25-26 what kind of person does the "lazy" servant represent?

6. God chose Moses to lead the Israelites. This was out of Moses' comfort zone. How did God use Moses?

### Questions for Application:

1. What is your greatest nightmare associated with the Idol of Comfort and what does it look like?
2. How does it make you feel when you're around people who worship the Idol of Comfort?
3. What emotions are people feeling when they resort to worshipping the Idol of Comfort?
4. How we spend our time and money helps to identify what we value and cherish the most. When you look at how you spend your time and money, does it seem to indicate that you're worshipping the Idol of Comfort? If so, why?
5. Why does God hate idolatry? What are some of the dangers that idolatry poses for the people of God?
6. Tim Challies has said, "God created human beings to be worshippers. The question is not 'will we worship?' but '*what* will we worship?' We will all pursue something as the antidote to our emptiness, our insufficiency." What potential idols is the Holy Spirit calling to your attention through this series?
7. When others are in need, do you choose to do only those things that make you feel good or make you look good to others? Why? Do you avoid opportunities to serve others so that your desires can be met?

8. In Joshua 1:9, the LORD tells Joshua to be strong and courageous “*for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*” Knowing that this promise is also true for you (Matthew 28:20), how does it make you feel?
  
9. Do you obsess about your future, trying to control any potential outcomes so that you can feel secure and safe?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic.

Idols of the Heart 6 day reading plan

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/37013-idols-of-the-heart>



Idols for the Heart

### Question for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, and service?

### Growth Challenge:

Each day this week, pray Psalm 139:23-24 with the Psalmist, David:

*“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

When you pray this prayer, expect the Holy Spirit to reveal some things to you. Commit to exploring and addressing these with God.



# NOTES

# November 19, 2023

## Session 4 | The Idol of Approval



**Before you begin** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video.

Identity in Christ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJfwUt-UjYk>



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Have you heard of PewDiePie? According to Influencer Marketing Hub, PewDiePie is Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg,

born in Sweden on October 24, 1989. He is a professional YouTuber/Social Media Personality. In August of 2023, IMH, reported that PewDiePie's YouTube channel had 111 million global subscribers and more than 29 billion views since its 2010 inception. PewDiePie has created 4,700 videos. The "likes," "shares," and "subscribes" of his global followers have made him a millionaire 64 times over.

*"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?"*

Galatians 1:10a NIV

Influencer Marketing Hub reported in August 2023 that there are over 200 million people who consider themselves social media content creators. They also reported

that one in four American kids plan to become social media influencers. Most of us don't make money based on whether or not others "like" us, but that doesn't mean we are immune to the opinions of others. It is natural to care about others' opinions. However, when those opinions become the motivation behind our decisions, our behaviors, or our goals, then we may have elevated the approval of others to idol status.

A sign of our present age is that many live in such a way as to present to the world a carefully crafted version of themselves. Maybe you live where you live, drive what you drive, dress as you dress, or do what you do, because of others' opinions. If Approval is your idol, it is quite likely you know that it is. But if you are not sure, and wonder whether it may be something you need to address with God, then you can ask yourself the questions Paul poses in Galatians 1:10a NIV: "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?"

WE MUST NOT  
*confuse* THE  
COMMAND TO *love*  
WITH THE DISEASE  
TO *please*.

LISA TERRELL

P31

**Scripture:** Galatians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

## Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

## Questions from the Bible:

1. Consider today's scripture verse, Galatians 1:10, and your decision-making process. How do your choices regarding life, family, finances, work, pastimes, etc., "answer" these questions for you? What does this verse say it looks like when people are seeking the approval of others?
2. "*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them.*" Genesis 1:27 NIV Does your "social" image reflect this truth? What tweaks might you make that would better align your social image with the image of God?
3. What happened when God gave approval to Abel for his sacrifice and not Cain? (Genesis 4)
4. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Thessalonians that, as believers, we have been entrusted with the gospel. What responsibility comes with this trust?

5. Jesus was hated by many, and He told His disciples they too would be hated by some. How have you experienced this lack of approval from others?

### Questions for Application:

1. What is your greatest nightmare associated with the Idol of Approval and what does it look like?
2. How does it make you feel when you're around people who worship the Idol of Approval?
3. What emotions are people feeling when they resort to worshipping the Idol of Approval?
4. How we spend our time and money helps to identify what we value and cherish the most. When you look at how you spend your time and money, does it seem to indicate that you're worshipping the Idol of Approval? If so, why?
5. Pastor and author Tim Keller has said, "If your god never disagrees with you, then you might be worshipping an idealized version of yourself." How so?
6. Grace Fox, in an article entitled, "3 Signs We Are Bowing to the Idol of Approval," has listed the signs as: Perfectionism, Control and Busyness. How do you think these three qualities reflect the Idol of Approval? Do you consider that you have any of these qualities? How would those close to you answer?

7. We must be careful when we seek the praise of other people. What does Jesus teach us about motivation in John 8:29?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Whose approval do you seek? Why is it important to you? What does it look like when people are seeking the approval of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Share a time when you have looked to acceptance from others to find your value.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Jesus was hated by many, and He told His disciples they too would be hated by some. How have you experienced this lack of approval from others?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

The Idol of Approval 4-day plan <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/26311-the-idol-of-approval>



The Idol of Approval

Discover Your Identity in Christ 4-day plan <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/32668-accepted-discover-your-identity-in-christ>



Discover Your Identity in Christ

To Know and Be Known 6-day plan <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/15491-to-know-and-be-known>



To Know & Be Known

Seeking Approval 3-day plan <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/11798-seeking-approval>



Seeking Approval

## Questions for Discussion:

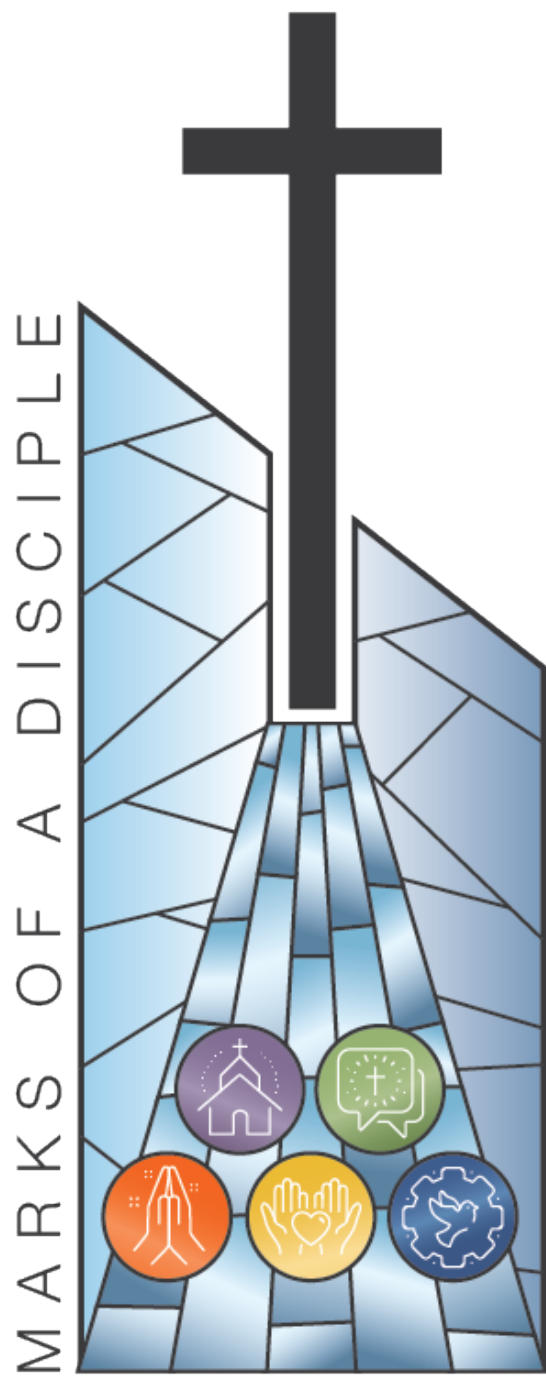
1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

## Growth Challenge:

Spend some time this week considering what influences affect your actions and decision making. If it seems that the Idol of Approval is trying to be your influencer, ask God to help you replace people's approval with His approval.

# NOTES





MARKS OF A DISCIPLE



[www.MarionMethodist.org](http://www.MarionMethodist.org)