

## THE IDOL FACTORY – Part 1

### OVERVIEW:

What comes to mind when you think of an idol? Maybe you picture a meticulously-carved statue in a foreign temple or the golden calf the Israelites worshipped in the Old Testament. Idols may seem far-removed from our professional lives, yet idolatry is alive and well in most workplaces and industries today. In fact, identifying and knowing how to respond to workplace idols is key to living a Christ-centered life on the job. This three-part series explores forms of idolatry and its consequences, and presents a gospel-based response to these temptations.

**Session 1:** Idolatry in Scripture

**Session 2:** Individual and Institutional Idols

**Session 3:** Engaging Idols with the Gospel

**Session 4:** Responding to Idols in Your Workplace

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

“The human heart is an idol factory.”

- Tim Keller

**WHAT IS AN IDOL?** As a group, define idolatry in your own words, then discuss the bullet points below:

- Idols are self-made; they are gods we can control
- Anything we make more important than God can become an idol. It can be a physical object, property, person, activity, role, institution, hope, image, idea, pleasure, or hero
- An idol is anything that absorbs our hearts and minds more than God
- It's anything we seek to give us what only God can give (meaning, value, significance, etc.)
- An idol becomes so central and essential to life that if we lose it, life no longer feels worth living
- Idols are often almost invisible; they may even *seem* to do good. Author Tim Keller observes, “We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes.”
- Idols vary in their scope. Some are highly personal, such as the need for approval, while others affect entire industries, denominations, or cultures.
- o Why do you think we create idols? What might Tim Keller mean when he says our hearts are “idol factories?”

### IDOLATRY IN SCRIPTURE:

As you examine the following Scripture passages, look for ways these principles are as relevant to modern life.

**Exodus 20:1-6** – Encourage the group to observe these verses carefully. What stands out to you?

- Notice that this is the first of the Ten Commandments. Its place in the list of God’s rules for humanity reflect its importance and prevalence. Idolatry addresses issues at the core of who we are.
- These verses caution us not to worship anything other than God, but they also warn us not to worship God in an idolatrous manner (i.e. in the way we want him to be, rather than who he actually is).

**Psalm 24:3-4**

**Romans 1:20-25**

**Galatians 4:8-9**

Note: in the New Testament, a synonym for idolatry is “desires”

- How do these verses shed light on the reason for idolatry?
- What are the consequences of idolatry in our lives?
- How do you see these biblical explanations of idolatry at work in modern life? In the workplace?

“Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the power he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life.”

- Rebecca Manley Pippert<sup>i</sup>

## **IDENTIFYING YOUR IDOLS**

Every person has their own unique idols—the things we turn to find comfort, significance, or security in life.

At its core, idolatry is an issue of **TRUST** and **DEVOTION**. So, how do your attitudes or actions reveal what you turn to instead of God?

Give members a few minutes to independently reflect on the following questions and then discuss them as a group. The chart on the following page teases out the nuances of various forms of idolatry

- What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?
- What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things become difficult?

- What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?

**PREPARING FOR YOUR NEXT DISCUSSION:**

Idolatry is not only a personal problem—it affects specific workplaces, industries, communities, and entire cultures. As Tim Keller explains in *The Gospel in Real Life*, “Every human personality, every human community, and every human thought-form will be based on some ultimate concern or some ultimate allegiance to something.”<sup>ii</sup>

Our conversation started at the heart level, but next session we’ll begin to think more broadly as we look at idols within our fields. Before our next meeting spend a few minutes considering what might be idols in your workplace or industry.

**COMMON FORMS OF IDOLATRY – CAUSES, FEARS AND CONSEQUENCES**

| <b>If You Seek</b>                               | <b>Your Greatest Nightmare</b> | <b>People Around You Often Feel</b> | <b>Your Problem Emotion</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| POWER (Winning, success, influence)              | Humiliation                    | Used                                | Anger                       |
| APPROVAL (Affirmation, love, relationships)      | Rejection                      | Smothered                           | Cowardice                   |
| COMFORT (Privacy, lack of stress, freedom)       | Stress, Demands                | Neglected                           | Boredom                     |
| CONTROL (Self-disciplined, certainty, standards) | Uncertainty                    | Condemned                           | Worry                       |

<sup>i</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert. *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*, p 52.

<sup>ii</sup> Tim Keller, *The Gospel in Life Study Guide: Grace Changes Everything*, p 37.