

SESSION NOTES

GOSPEL TREASON

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE
GIVE OUR HEARTS TO IDOLS

Pastor Brad Bigney

SESSION #1:

WHAT DOES GOD KNOW ABOUT MY HEART?

Pastor Brad Bigney

Jeremiah 2:11-13 *“‘Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate,’ says the LORD. ‘For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn for themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.’”*

Because of our sin nature that relentlessly drives us away from God and towards everything else but God, most of us have spent a lifetime digging other cisterns – places we hope will sustain us... fulfill us... satisfy us... and bring us peace and joy.

I. IDOLATRY IS A CONSTANT THREAT BECAUSE WE'RE SO PRONE TO GOSPEL DRIFT

The problem that we have with idolatry is not just a fringe issue. It's central to all that's going on in your life. You don't want to treat idolatry like some footnote or addendum that you might or might not get around to addressing as it relates to the bigger issues you're facing and struggling with in life.

Gospel drift away from your Savior is what kick-starts idolatry and throws it into gear because we were made to worship – so we will worship something. If not Jesus, then something else!

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 *“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”*

Idols thrive when the Gospel dies.

II. IDOLATRY IS ALIVE & WELL TODAY EVEN THOUGH IT'S RARELY SPOKEN OF IN CHRISTIAN CIRCLES

Idolatry is so often what's lurking deep beneath the surface of our sins that we just can't seem to shake. It's what drives your strongest emotions when you can't figure out why something makes you so angry, sad or so anxious and fearful.

“Idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Scriptures...the relevance of massive chunks of Scripture hangs on our understanding of idolatry.” (David Powlison *Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair*)

Idolatry is the most comprehensive description of what unbelief looks like. If we misunderstand idolatry or push it out to the extreme margins of our life, we're cutting ourselves off from one of the most comprehensive descriptions of unbelief that the biblical writers give us.

1 John 5:21 *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”*

John - the Apostle of love - wrote 105 verses about the importance of living in close, vital relationship with Jesus Christ - and then he makes this statement the final word of his letter! It leaves us asking ourselves the most basic of all questions:

- *Has something or someone else besides Jesus Christ taken hold of the title deed of your heart?*
- *Is there something else that grips you, owns you, and moves you to take action?*

Even something good can be an idol when that thing has usurped the rightful place of Jesus Christ in your heart! That's the constant danger! You can confess with your lips all day long that “Jesus is Lord,” but if your choices, thoughts and actions are dominated by anything else, you're just fooling yourself.

III. THE REASON IDOLATRY IS SO PERVASIVE IS BECAUSE IT'S SO ILLUSIVE - IT FLIES UNDER THE RADAR

Idolatry doesn't operate out in the open, so that's why you can struggle to even know your own heart...because the human heart is so deceptive.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.'"*

Idolatry doesn't just alienate you from the God of the universe. It also sucks the very life out of human relationships around you and crushes them. In your idolatrous craving, you end up placing demands on other people around you that they simply cannot bear because they are sinful, finite, and in most cases, busy chasing their own idols! You've turned from God to the created being. No wonder you're so disappointed, bitter and disillusioned.

Romans 1:21-23, 25-26 *"Because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature."*

Anything you exchange for God is a lie because it promises more than it can deliver. Two Things inevitably start to happen whenever idolatry kicks into gear:

#1 Your human relationships start to heat up in a most unhealthy way because of all the friction created by your unspoken demands and expectations that you're heaping onto the people around you.

#2 Your most important relationship with the God of the universe gets pushed over into deep freeze. All the while, you're praying and begging God to make this human relationship what you need it to be – and you keep wondering why He's not answering!

God won't help you chase your idols.

Isaiah 42:8 *"I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images."*

An idol is anything or anyone that begins to capture our hearts and minds and affections more than God.

IV. IF YOU'LL DIG DEEP ENOUGH IDOLATRY IS ALMOST ALWAYS THE SIN BENEATH THE SIN

Idolatry is at the hub of our sin! Picture a bicycle wheel with a central hub and spokes running out from it all the way around. The hub is where your idols live – and every one of those spokes are specific sins.

Our specific sins – if you would take the time and do the hard work to check into it – can usually be traced back to one of our "idols" almost every time!

"Sin is what we do when we're not satisfied in God."
John Piper

ASSIGNMENT:

Read through the list of idols on the following pages and check 3 boxes that you suspect may be idols in your life. List those idols below with one example of accompanying sin for each idol.

IDOLS	SPECIFIC ACCOMPANYING SIN

IDENTIFYING PERSONAL "IDOLS"

Ask Yourself:

- Am I willing to sin to get this?
- Am I willing to sin if I think I'm going to lose this?
- Do I turn to this as a 'Refuge' and comfort instead of going to God?

Jonah 2:8 (NIV) *"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs."*

Proverbs 4:23 *"Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it flows the issues of life."*

Psalms 139:23-24 *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF *as you search your own heart*

- What do you want, desire, seek, aim for, pursue, hope for?
- What are your goals, expectations, intentions?
- What do you feel like doing? Do you want what you want, or do you want Christ's lordship over your life?
- Where do you look for security, meaning, happiness, fulfillment, joy, or comfort? Where do you put your "basic trust"?
- What would make you happy?
- What do you fear? What do you tend to worry about?
- What do you love and hate most of all?
- How do you define success or failure in a particular situation?
- What image do you have of who you are? Ought to be or want to be?
- At your deathbed what would you sum up your life as worthwhile?
- What do you see as your "rights"?
- When you are pressured or tense, where do you turn? What do you think about?
- What do you pray for?

Place a next to the issues that you think might be potential 'idols' in your life:

- Performance, especially for significant others:** You try to please in order to get or to keep acceptance or approval. Example for parents or spouse: When you seek to please a person rather than God, this is idolatry. If this is the case, then you are worshiping that person rather than God. Being fearful of what others think rather than obeying God is a problem.
- Performance of self (perfectionism):** You try to perform to standards that you have set. Becoming a Pharisee is a danger. When you meet the standard, you feel good; when you don't, you feel bad. You have made a personal list for yourself to follow that is higher than what God says.
- Performance of others:** You make a list of what others should do. Example: "For my spouse to be a good husband/wife, he/she must ____." If your spouse doesn't do these things, you become judgmental and unloving.
- Good health:** This shouldn't be your goal, except to glorify God. It's okay to pray for healing, but getting healed should not become an idol. God may want you to be sick in order to glorify himself (see John 9).
- Love of money:** You take a promotion just to get more money.
- Success:** What's a good day to you? What made it a good day in your mind? Usually it's along these lines: "I got a lot accomplished/done." Or "I pleased significant others." Or "I got my way. Others did for me what I wanted them to do."
- Fairness:** Life has to be fair (Ps. 73)! "I've been trying to please God; others aren't even trying, yet they prosper." This can cause you to almost forsake the faith (Ps. 73:2).
- Hurt-free/pain-free life:** "I don't want to deal with problems. There shouldn't be any difficulties. I shouldn't have to go through anything unsettling . . . because I just want peace."
- Christian marriage and home:** "I want people to look at our marriage and think we have the best marriage in the world." Or "I cannot serve God and have joy until my spouse changes and starts doing ____." Or "I'll be successful if my children turn out right."
- Physical appearance**

SESSION # 2 :

HOW DO I LOOK FOR IDOLS IN MY HEART?

Pastor Brad Bigney

An Idol is:

Anything or Anyone that begins to Capture our Hearts and Minds and affections more than God. It's living on substitutes. It's exchanging the one true living God for a counterfeit.

Romans 1:21-23, 25 *"Because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator..."*

Idolatry is really false worship. It's misplaced and misdirected worship.

"At the most basic level, idols are what we make out of the evidence for God within ourselves and in the world - if we do not want to face the face of God Himself in His majesty and holiness. Rather than look to the Creator and have to deal with His lordship, we orient our lives toward the creation, where we can be more free to control and shape our lives in our desired directions...However, since we were made to relate to God, but do not want to face Him, we forever inflate things in this world to religious proportions to fill the vacuum left by God's exclusion." (Richard Keye, No God But God, p. 31-32)

Idolatry is not so much wanting the wrong thing, but wanting even good things too much.

4 WAYS TO TRACK DOWN IDOLS IN YOUR LIFE

I FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF YOUR TIME, MONEY, AND AFFECTION

Some of us attend the church on the corner, professing to worship the living God above all. Others, who rarely darken the church doors, would say worship isn't a part of their lives because they aren't 'religious.' But everybody has an altar. And every altar has a throne. So how do you know where and what you worship? It's easy. You simply follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money, and your allegiance. At the end of that trail you'll find a throne; and whatever, or whomever, is on that throne is what's of highest value to you. On that throne is what you worship. Sure, not too many of us walk around saying, 'I worship my stuff. I worship my job. I worship this pleasure. I worship her. I worship my body. I worship me!' But the trail never lies. We may say we value this thing or that thing more than any other, but the volume of our actions speaks louder than our words. In the end, our worship is more about what we do than what we say." (Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe*)

Whenever a legitimate desire begins to morph into an idolatrous demand you'll start doing a number of the following things:

- A. Sacrifice for it
- B. Spend Time on it
- C. Spend Money on it
- D. Talk about it (Matt. 12:34 "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks")
- E. Serve it
- F. Protect it / defend it
- G. Perfect it
- H. Think about it
- I. Build your schedule around it
- J. Worry about it
- K. Get Angry when someone blocks you from it
- L. Live in Fear that you might lose it

One of the biggest indicators that a person or object is functioning as an idol in your life is that fear becomes one of the chief characteristics of your life.

II. TAKE NOTE OF YOUR HEART DURING SUFFERING

Suffering exposes our idols.

No matter how long you've walked with the Lord, when you face deep disappointment and suffering, it pushes to the surface what's really going on in the heart.

You find out:

- A. What you really love
- B. What you really believe – not just what you say you believe
- C. What you really run to as your ultimate security and greatest treasure

2 Corinthians 1:8–10 *“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us”*

Don't just push through the pain when suffering, ask God to show you the idols that are squirming and screaming and being forced out of hiding.

III. LOOK FOR CHAOS!

... because chaos and idolatry run hand in hand.

James 3:16 *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.”*

If you have idols in the heart, you have chaos to some degree or another, but it doesn't jump right out at you. We don't usually make that connection. Our sights are set somewhere else. Our first thought is that the people around us are just getting in our way and being so difficult and unreasonable.

“It’s a serious mistake to engage in introspective ‘idol hunts,’ attempting to dig out and weigh every kink in the human soul. The Bible calls for a more straightforward form of self-examination: an outburst of anger invites reflection on what craving ruled the heart so that our repentance can be intelligent. The Bible’s purposes are ‘extrospective,’ not introspective: to move toward God in repentant faith...” (Dave Powlison)

IV. ASK SOME HEART DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

1. Am I willing to sin to get it?
2. Am I willing to sin if I think I’m going to Lose it?
3. Do I run to it for ‘Refuge’ instead of turning to God?

V. REPENTING AND REJOICING IS THE WAY TO GET FREE!

Colossians 3:1–5 NIV *“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. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”*

Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it’s actually setting your whole heart on something besides God. The solution has to be MORE than just repenting of your idol and using more willpower to try to live differently.

Satisfaction in Christ, delighting in Christ, and rejoicing in Christ is what keeps idols from taking root in your heart.

Rejoicing and repentance have to go together. Repentance without rejoicing just leads to despair. Rejoicing without repentance will just give you some shallow inspiration that’ll never lead to lasting change.

ASSIGNMENT:

How can you find more satisfaction, delight, and rejoicing in Christ? List at 3 specific things you can do more regularly:

#1
#2
#3

SESSION # 3 :

HOW DO IDOLS WRECK MY RELATIONSHIPS?

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Proverbs 4:23 *"Guard your heart with all diligence for out of it flows the issues of life."*

An idol is

Anything or Anyone that begins to Capture our Hearts and Minds and Affections more than God.

Psalms 139:23-24 *"Search me, O 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."*

"If you don't surrender to Christ, you surrender to chaos."

E. Stanley Jones

Your relationships take some of the biggest hits because of your idols. It's the people closest to us – husbands, wives, kids, parents, co-workers – that are bearing the brunt of so much of our idolatry every day, while we go on thinking that it's all because of these other people that we've got so many problems and frustrations.

"Do you have any conflict in your life? Do you experience moments of extreme irritation toward someone you otherwise love? Are there people who simply push your buttons more than others? Do certain things drive you crazy on a daily basis? Why does it seem that people, things, and situations are in our way? Why do we seldom go through a day without some experience of conflict? The answer to all of these questions is that we think of our lives as our own, and we are more committed to the purposes of our own kingdom than we are to God's. We need to recognize that the people in our way have been sent to us by a wise and sovereign King. He never gets a wrong address and always chooses just the right moment to expose our hearts and realign them to His." (Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*)

Romans 8:28 *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*

Ecclesiastes 7:14 *“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other...”*

God is using your circumstances and the people in your life to expose your heart!

“After I was saved, and before I was married, I lived under the mad, undaunted delusion that I was spiritually mature. Mine was a rich and largely imaginary kind of holiness. If ignorance is bliss, I was in permanent ecstasy. The infrequent examinations of my seemingly innocent heart revealed little need for improvement... then it happened. I got married and became a blame-shifter.

John Bettler has said, ‘Your spouse always hooks your idol.’ But marriage didn’t simply hook my idols; it hoisted them six feet in the air and towed them around the house. I can’t tell you how many times I thought, ‘I never had these problems before. This must be my wife’s fault.’ The truth is, I’d always been a blame-shifter it’s just that after getting married there were so many more good opportunities to express this fault!” (David Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”*)

3 REASONS FOR SO MUCH OF THE CONFLICT & CONFUSION IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

I. YOUR IDOLS HAVE DECLARED WAR ON EVERYONE ELSE AROUND YOU

When idols set up camp on the throne of your heart, so much of your day will be spent promoting your own agenda and your own kingdom at all costs.

James 4:1-3 *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don’t get it.*

You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

The real problem under the surface of all our conflicts is that two kingdoms are colliding. What's ruling your heart and what's ruling my heart are meeting head on... and we both can't be "King" at the same time.

"I just feel rage,' Steve said, looking like an overheated car. 'Every time the guy in the next office walks by me, he shoots me a condescending look. I can understand why people murder.' Steve is angry and controlled by this other person. That's obvious. But why is he angry? Chances are that Steve's anger has something to do with his worship. Perhaps he worships at the altar of respect, and he has not been given the respect he demands. As a result, he is against his co-worker. He has declared war! But even more, he is against God, resisting the fact that God uses difficult people to refine us. Instead of submitting to God's sovereign decisions and learning to forgive and love, Steve is saying, 'I will be God, at least in this case.' His desires rule. Here is a general principle: your attitude toward God will be revealed in your worst human relationship. If you hate someone, you are ultimately hating God. If you don't forgive, you are usurping God's authority to act as judge." (Ed Welch, *Motives: Why Do I Do the Things I Do?*)

II. YOUR IDOLS CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE & TREAT EVERYONE ELSE AROUND YOU

If my heart is ruled by a certain desire, there are only two ways I can respond to you:

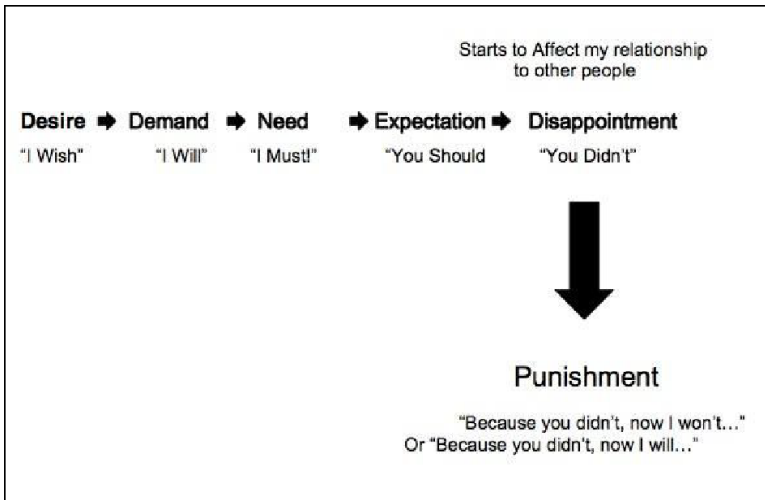
1. If you're helping me get what I want, I'll be happy with you, treat you well, allow you into my world.
2. But if you stand in my way, I will be angry, frustrated, and testy when I am with you. There will be times when I wish you weren't even in my life because you stand in the way of what I crave so I lash out at you or I push you away...or shut you out.

Instead of loving people, you start using people, avoiding people, and attacking people who get in your way.

“I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility (and the accompanying fear, self-pity, hurt, self-righteousness) who really understood and reckoned with their motives. James 4:1-3 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts. Why do you fight? It’s not ‘because my wife/husband...’ - it’s because of something about you. Couples who see what rules them - cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life - can repent and find God’s grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace.”
(David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes*)

Think about where you have the most conflict in your life right now. The two are not unrelated. Cravings underlie conflicts.

III. YOUR IDOLS ULTIMATELY HIJACK LEGITIMATE DESIRES AND TURN THEM INTO UGLY DEMANDS



John 4:10, 3-14 “Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and

drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The satisfaction you’re looking for starts with Jesus Christ, when you turn away from the things in this world that you keep trying to inflate to religious proportions to make up for the absence of God in your life.

“If you get married as Jacob did, putting the weight of all your deepest hopes and longings on the person you are marrying, you are going to crush him or her with your expectations. It will distort your life and your spouse’s life in a hundred ways. No person, not even the best one, can give your soul all it needs. You are going to think you have gone to bed with Rachel, and you will get up and it will always be Leah. This cosmic disappointment and disillusionment is there in all of life, but we especially feel it in the things upon which we most set our hopes.” (Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*)

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world [something supernatural and eternal].” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

ASSIGNMENT:

Who are you punishing with your idolatry? Write a short letter below to him/her in which you apologize for your demands and punishments (be specific), ask for forgiveness, and describe how you will change by God’s grace.

A letter to a friend:
