Idols of the Heart: Week 1

Truth

Romans 1:25 tells us that idols are not necessarily sinful things, but good and basic things elevated into being ultimate things (v.25-worshipped...created things rather than the Creator). We look to them for meaning in life, for covering our sense of insignificance, for developing a “righteousness” or worth.

“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. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving ‘face’ and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry. An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure’” (Timothy Keller, Counterfeit Gods, xvii-xviii).

Paul Tripp addresses idols of the heart by asking, “What Is Your One Thing?”

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.
Psalm 27:4

It’s an incredible statement, one that I’m not sure I could honestly make. It’s made even more powerful when you realize that it was written by a man who is under attack. His “one thing” isn’t safety, or vindication, or victory. His one thing isn’t power, control, or retribution. No, even under personal duress, the one thing that David wishes for is to be in God’s house taking in the grandeur and glory of the beauty of the Lord. This desire was designed to be the central motivating desire of every person created by God and made in his image. And yet, on this side of the garden, it seems like a statement that could only ever be made by a deeply devout human being.

It does beg the question, “What’s your one thing?” What is the one thing that your heart craves? What is the one thing that you think would change your life? What is the one thing that you look to for satisfaction, contentment, or peace? What is the one thing that you mourn having to live without? What is the one thing that fills your daydreams and commands your sleepy meditations? What is your one thing?

The spiritual reality for many of us is that the one thing is not the Lord. And the danger in that reality is this: your one thing will control your heart, and whatever controls your heart will exercise inescapable influence over your words, choices, and actions. Your
one thing will become that which shapes and directs your responses to the situations and relationships of your daily life. If the Lord isn’t your one thing, the thing that is your one thing will be your functional lord. Here is what you say to yourself when something is your one thing: “Life has meaning and I have worth only if I have ___________ in my life.” The problem is that the one-thing catalog is virtually endless:

- Power. Life has meaning or I have worth only if I have power and influence over others.
- Approval. If I am loved and respected by________
- Comfort. If I have a certain kind of pleasure or experience.
- Image. If I have a certain look or body image.
- Control. If I am able to have mastery over a particular area of my life.
- Independence. If someone is there to keep me safe.
- Inclusion: If a particular social or professional group lets me into their inner ring.
- Achievement. If I am recognized for my accomplishments.
- Prosperity. If I have a certain level of wealth, finance, nice possessions.
- Work. If I am highly productive and get a lot done.
- Religion. If I am adhering to my religion’s codes and accomplished in its activities.
- Irreligion. If I am totally independent of organized religion and have a self-made morality.
- Race or culture. If my race and culture are ascendant and recognized as superior.
- A person. If this one person is happy to be in my life and happy with me.
- Family. If my children/parents are happy and happy with me.
- Helping. If people are dependent on me and need me.
- Suffering. If I am hurting or having a problem, only then do I feel noble, worthy of love, or free of guilt.

You see, in every situation and relationship of your everyday life, there is a one-thing war being fought on the turf of your heart. You and I are safe only when the Lord really is the one thing that commands our hearts and controls our actions. Yet there are many things that compete with him as the one thing that your heart craves, a shelter in the time of storm (http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/onething.html).
Identifying Idols of Our Heart

Where are you looking for meaning and worth? What is the beauty that you wish you had in your life? What is your one thing?

We need to examine our own hearts for the persuasive and stubborn idols that are reluctant to let go. Idols can be revealed by answering the following: “My life only has meaning/I only have worth if…” So, before you discount the need for us to turn from idols, consider the list of idols of the heart by Timothy Keller. Then consider which ones we are currently struggling with. Throughout Keller’s book *Counterfeit Gods*, he shares the following twenty questions that will help you diagnose the idols of your heart.

20 Questions on Idols of the Heart: Check the idols you are currently struggling with. Jot down notes of how the idols are demonstrated in your life.

“Life only has meaning/I only have worth if…

- I have power and influence over others.” (Power Idolatry)
- I am loved and respected by _____.” (Approval Idolatry)
- “I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.” (Comfort idolatry)
- “I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____.” (Control idolatry)
- “People are dependent on me and need me.” (Helping Idolatry)
- “Someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.” (Dependence idolatry)
- “I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.” (Independence idolatry)
- “I am highly productive and getting a lot done.” (Work idolatry)
- “I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work.” (Achievement idolatry)
- “I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.” (Materialism idolatry)
- “I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in its activities.” (Religion Idolatry)
- “This one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me.” (Individual person idolatry)
“I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality.” (Irreligion idolatry)

“My race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.” (Racial/cultural idolatry)

“A particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in.” (Inner ring idolatry)

“My children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me.” (Family idolatry)

“Mr. or Ms. “Right” is in love with me.” (Relationship Idolatry)

“I am hurting, in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt.” (Suffering idolatry)

“My political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power.” (Ideology idolatry)

“I have a particular kind of look or body image.” (Image idolatry)

List the three idols of the heart that you believe are the most prominent in your life and explain how they manifest in your life.

1. __________________________ 
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   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________

2. __________________________ 
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________

3. __________________________ 
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
Accountability

Share your top three idols of the heart with the group and explain how they manifest in your life.
Mission

Share briefly an update on how the relationship is going with the three people on your prayer tags.

What would the next step in one of these relationships look like? Each of you help brainstorm ways to further the relationship or take steps towards sharing the gospel.

How can sharing your *idols of the heart* with those outside the church, and exploring *idols of their heart*, open up a door for the gospel of grace?
Supplication

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

Share your prayer requests with one another. Space is provided below to write them down. Use this to help remind you what to pray for each other during the week.

What are your prayer requests regarding the truth this week?

In light of the discussion this week what do you need to pray for?

What are your prayer requests regarding any situations in your life this week?

Prayer requests from others in the group this week.