

Summer 2013

Southside Community Church

Our summer study guide is organized in a different way than usual. We have a longer introduction to the whole series rather than shorter introductions to each week. Take some time (you may need to spread it out over a couple days) to read the following introduction for the whole series. It lays the biblical groundwork for what we will be doing all summer.

What is Idolatry? And Why is it dangerous?

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (who, by the way, was born in Saint Paul, MN.) is one of the great works of American fiction. I'm not a literary expert, but my sense is that it is an ironic title. As the story begins, Jay Gatsby's "greatness" appears obvious. He lives in a massive mansion that dwarfs the houses on either side. He throws lavish parties for the elite upper classes of Long Island. Gatsby hovers mysteriously over his own parties, making subtle appearances that fuel both reverence and suspicion. People do not know what to make of Gatsby. He seems "great" as both a powerful and mysterious figure.



As the story unfolds, we see that Gatsby's "greatness" is really a thin veneer masking a hollow and vulnerable man. Gatsby grew up in poverty and left his home in Minnesota at a young age to make something of himself. Before going to war, Gatsby had a vision of beauty which oriented and transformed his life. While a poor soldier, he fell in love with a wealthy woman named Daisy. The weeks with Daisy were magical and Gatsby left for war having been conformed to the image of Daisy: he would either die or become a wealthy man so that he could take Daisy as his wife. After the war and before Gatsby could earn his fortune, Daisy married a wealthy man. But, Gatsby remains compelled and driven by this vision of Daisy. The "Great" Gatsby - his appearance of fortune, his lavish parties, his mysterious persona

is an elaborate plot designed to curry favour with the elites and to win Daisy back. His whole life has conformed to this desire win Daisy. He has learned to play the game of the wealthy, leisure class of New York for the sake of this woman that he loves. But, it is inauthentic. It is also disastrous.

Gatsby is a picture of what biblical writers refer to when they talk about idolatry in at least two ways. First, Gatsby gives us a picture of worship in that he gives his whole life to a particular dream. He orchestrates his entire life for the sake of life with Daisy. This single-minded pursuit is what the Bible considers worship, for worship is an act of ascribing ultimate worth or value. Often, we worship and consider supremely valuable the desires of our heart - whether it is a vision of wealth, love, achievement or a Canuck's Stanley Cup. Second, Gatsby's worship leads to his demise. He becomes what he worships in that his single-minded pursuit of this dream eventually makes him as false and hollow as his dream. Fitzgerald seems to say to us "be careful what you wish for...because you just might get it." Gatsby's story is not a happy one. Our lives eventually conform to the object or person of our worship. Similarly, the Bible warns us to be careful what we wish for, because we eventually become the focus of our desire. As the biblical scholar G.K. Beale says, "we become what we worship."

Idolatry is any act that confuses God and God's creation.

It is false worship, since God alone is worthy of our worship. The most infamous incident of idolatry in the Bible happens in Exodus 32 when Israel melted down their gold and made a statue of a calf. They had just been rescued from Egypt. Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Law from God, but Israel grew tired of waiting. Aaron directed them to make a calf. They bowed down to it and said, "behold, our god who brought us out of Egypt." They confused God and God's creation; they ascribed ultimate worth or value to an image of gold rather than the Creator God. This is a sin that Israel - and humanity - comes back to again and again. We continue to confuse God and his creation. Psalm 106:20 refers to this incident in this way: "They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass." The irony, here, is intended. Foolish Israel! They *exchanged* the almighty, eternal, terrifying, creator God for a dumb domesticated animal that is so passive *it eats grass*. They could have at least made a golden image of a lion!



When Psalm 106 puts it this way, we find Israel's act far fetched and fantastic. I'm pretty sure that nobody at Southside has ever felt a strong inclination toward worshipping a golden statue of a calf - or any other animal figure for that matter. But, Israel could *see* a golden calf. It was immediate to them and at their disposal. It was beautiful to look at and it is what their neighbours did (they just left Egypt, where one of the primary gods took the form of a calf). Now, a cow *can* be a glorious animal - so I'm told. Like all living things, there is a beauty and power in their lives. But since they are *creatures* and thus *created*, that beauty is only a reflection or a demonstration of *the Creator*.

As with Gatsby, the Exodus story shows us how Israel does not just confuse God with a cow, but that they begin to take on the characteristics of their object of worship. Exodus 32 begins to describe Israel in language that resembles an unruly cow: Israel is "stiff-necked" (Ex. 32:9), and had "quickly turned aside from the way" (32:8), and so they had to be "let loose" (32:25), and then "gathered together" again "in the gate" (Ex. 32:26) so that Moses could "lead the people" in the path that God had said (32:34). When Israel confuses the creature with the Creator, they begin to take on the characteristics of the creature and so they become less human, less beautiful and less powerful. Idolatry is not only about sinning against God, it also makes us less human, less powerful and less whole. We become what we worship.

Similarly, in other places in the Bible, idolatry creates a spiritual stupor where the idolator is unable to see, hear, speak, or walk. Our power - our very life - comes from God. When we worship powerless and false idols, we become powerless and false:

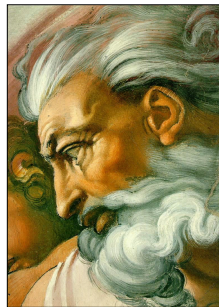
*"Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. **Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.**"* (Psalms 115:3-8 NRSV)

Israel made the work of their own hands an object of adoration and reverence. They *exchanged* the glory of God for the glory of a domesticated animal and then they began to behave as though they were an unruly cow. We may not be tempted to worship a cow, but we should see in this incident something universal and aimed at us. Whatever we bow down to and adore, whatever dream or vision we pursue with all our heart, whatever we place

absolute value in - this will become an idol in our life. Like Gatsby, if we orient our lives around a vision or a person or a goal, we will eventually discover that our lives are thin, wispy, even banal. Why? Because created things - bodies, families, sports, work, money - are only beautiful and meaningful because they *reflect* something of the beauty and glory of their Creator. We may not be tempted to bow down to a golden calf. But, we still exchange the glory of the creator for the refracted or reflected glory of family life, bodily well-being, significance in the workplace, sports and entertainment, etc. These are all good things and yet their goodness comes as a gift from God. If we make life about any one of these things, we are like Israel exchanging true glory for what is hollow and powerless on its own. Like Gatsby and Israel, we become what we worship: *either* reflecting the glory of the *living* God of Abraham, Isaac, Mary and Jesus *or* the hollow frame of an object without life.

What Idols?

We become *like* what we worship. This is the problem of idolatry in the Scriptures. *Why* is this? And, *why* do we do this in the first place? Why are we so tempted to exchange the glory of God for the glory of a cow? The Scriptures consistently provide two themes to answer these questions: (1) We become what we worship because God made us to *reflect* his image or his glory. God did not make us to stand alone, but to take on the shape of that which we revere. This is what the *image of God* means. (2) In the end, idolatry is about entrusting ourselves to the work of our hands, and so it is an attempt for control in our lives. God invites us to trust him, but we insist on entrusting ourselves to the work of our hands or the brilliance of our minds. We are tempted toward idolatry because we want to somehow become masters of our own lives - or at the very least we are uncertain about entrusting our lives to the living God. Let's look at each Scriptural theme in turn.



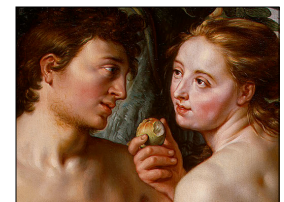
We are image-bearers

Genesis 1:28-29 tells us that we are created in God's image. This is a wonderful and rich concept in our Scriptures. It expresses a profound truth about humanity - that we bear the image of our Creator. But what does it mean? In the book of Genesis, God reveals himself as the Creator and Ruler of all things. He speaks and it comes into being. Our Creator God has no rivals - there is nothing that exists apart from his power and presence. Even the forces of chaos ("the waters" in Genesis 1:1-2) and the rebellious serpent (in Genesis 3) exist in some way as under God.

The ancient world understood an *image* as something that participated in or represented the power of something else. For example, when an emperor conquered new territory, he would set up statues of himself in the territory. These *images* of the emperor were seen as representative of his power and authority. The statue was not the *same thing* as the emperor, but rather *reflected* and *demonstrated* the emperor's authority. It was a serious offense to knock down or deface such a statue. In the United States, a similar perspective is taken with the American flag. The flag is a kind of image or representative of American power. To deface the flag (or even to let it touch the ground) is seen as an act against the state in some way. The statue or the flag is never confused with the one or the thing that stands behind it. It's power as an image is only the power to *reflect* or to *bear* the glory, authority, strength, etc. of the one that created it. Similarly, we can say that human beings are image bearers of God in this sense. We are creatures that point to or reflect God's glory and authority over all creation in some way. We are made to "image" something of God's power and authority within God's creation through our work of filling, subduing and tilling the earth in partnership with God (see Gen. 1:28-29; 2:15). That is, the image of God is a *vocation* or a calling given to us that directs us to care for the earth and one another in a way that reflects or participates in God's rule over all things.

But this does not mean that we have some power or authority *on our own*. We are always and everywhere *image bearers*, which means that we reflect the glory, authority, and power given by God. It is not our own in the same way that the light reflected off a mirror is not its own. To be human is to bear an image. Our glory is always a reflected glory, always dependent upon the glory of our Creator. Our beauty is always a reflected beauty, always dependent upon the beauty of our Creator. But our sin is our own creation, it is our attempt to become our own creators, to manufacture our own beauty or glory.

Thus, when Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, they begin to question the wisdom of God's rule and they see that the fruit is pleasing to the eye. In grasping it they seek to find their own way apart from God's rule. We know where this goes: suspicion, fear, murder. We are made to reflect God's goodness, not to try and create our own. Because of sin, the image of God is distorted in us, it is like we have layers of soot over us so that God's light and glory are only dimly reflected. And instead of reflecting *God*, we begin to reflect other objects of worth or desire in our life - self, sports, nation, etc.



We turn again to worship. Because we are created as image-bearers, we reflect or bear the image of whatever it is that we desire and value. We become like what we worship. When we learn again to trust and worship God, we begin to bear God's image in a more holistic way. To worship God is to learn to become human again. To worship God is to share in the glory, grace, and love of God. So *why* are we so tempted to exchange the glory of God for a lie?

We are afraid and vulnerable

The movie, *The Impossible*, tells the story of a family caught in the devastating 2004 Tsunami. The movie alternates between moments of human triumph and a stark awareness of creaturely limitation. The forces of nature can devastate all that we build and plan. We are more naked and alone before the elements than we think.



In the ancient world, this awareness of human vulnerability before the elements of nature led to many different rituals meant to appease the gods that they imagined were behind the rain, wind, ocean, etc. Israel was not immune to this. Because of their sense of vulnerability before nature, the ancient Israelites were always tempted to offer sacrifices to Baal - a Canaanite fertility god - just in case Yahweh-God didn't come through for them and bring rain at the proper times. In a dangerous world, Israel's worship of Yahweh-God required total trust. Yahweh didn't *need* anything from Israel. Yahweh already ruled over all things. Worship of Yahweh emphasized Yahweh's grace and the ongoing gift of life and love. As such, it was almost completely one-sided. Like Paul says in Romans 11, "who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" Yahweh-God invites Israel to depend upon and trust in him completely in any and all circumstances.

Baal was different. Baal promised Israel some control in managing risk and vulnerability. Baal-worship told Israel that if they performed the proper rites at the proper time, if they offered Baal the right foods, sex and sacrifices, then Baal would hold up his end of the bargain and give rain and children at the proper time. Baal promised some control in a fearful world. Yahweh offered only *hesed* or covenant faithfulness and love.

We do the same today. We are aware of how vulnerable we are. We know that happiness is contingent and unsteady. We know that life is frail. And

so we find all kinds of ways to manage our risk by trusting in things other than God: we bow down to the gods of financial security, self-achievement, family values or sports and entertainment. We do this because we don't completely trust God for our well-being. We do this because we seek some level of mastery over our frail lives. These things promise security in a dangerous world, and yet, they almost always create an amplified sense of *insecurity*. Families, work, sports, self, money...they all make poor gods.

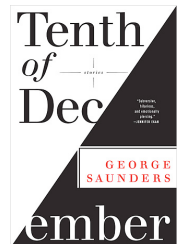
Often, the things that we are tempted to worship are not bad in and of themselves. In fact, nothing that we will explore this summer is a bad thing. We *should* enjoy sports or entertainment, our families and work. Similarly, money is not an evil in and of itself and our bodies are a *good gift* that God gives. But *all* these things make poor gods. They each depend upon God and God's kingdom to be good. Our family is a gift, but if we do not entrust our family to God we will undoubtedly expect more from our family than they can give. Families, like anything else created, are destined to decompose. We are under the mercy of the living God.

Hebrews 10:31 says, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the *living God*." Yes, it *is* fearful. And yet, this is the only option available to us. We will learn to trust the living God, or to trust the works of our hands. One is the author of life. The other is destined for death. So how do we identify and address our idolatry?

Freedom from Idols.

The short story, "The Tenth of December," by George Saunders features an old man and a young boy. The old man has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. He has decided that it is best for him to die quickly than to put his wife and family through the pain of watching him die. He wants control of the indignity of death, and so he sneaks out of his house while his wife is away to wander through a nearby forest. After he gets some distance into the park he sheds his jacket while continuing to walk in the snow. He is determined to take control of his life by determining when and how nature will take it.

The little boy has also wandered away from home. While the old man is resigned to death, the boy is absorbed in an imaginative world, where he plays the role of hero and defender of his family. After some time, the boy sees clothing on the ground and a half-naked old man wandering in the snow. The boy knows instinctually that if the man does not get clothing he will die. So the young hero picks up the jacket and decides to cut the corner to the old man by running across an ice-covered lake.



You can see where this is going. Just as the old man realizes that his life is *not* his own to take, he sees a boy running with his jacket fall through the ice. The young hero and the old stoic are suddenly bound together in an intimate and profound way. Both must let go of their illusions of control/mastery while receiving life as a gift. The old man needs to live in order to save the boy and so he struggles to keep himself alive in the cold in order to rescue the boy and get him to safety. And the boy's heroism in saving the man comes through his own vulnerability in nearly freezing to death.

Neither, it turns out, are as powerful as they imagine. This story encapsulates the fragile wonder of the human creature. We are both heroic and dependent, powerful and vulnerable. We are not owners even of our own life, but rather our lives depend upon the lives of others; ultimately, we are each sustained by the very breath of God.

When we recognize our dependence upon others and God, we take the first step away from idolatry because we remember the distance between *creature* and *Creator*. We are not God. Our ideas about God are not the same thing as God. The things we create cannot supplant God. This is what Paul reminds us of in Romans 11:

"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."
(Romans 11:33–36 NRSV)

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who created all things and who raised Jesus from the dead is beyond our understanding. Who has known his mind? Who can give God advice about how to rule the world? Who has given a gift to God such that he or she can expect God to be obligated to repay? The answer is obvious: no one. We are image bearers of God, but we ourselves are not God.

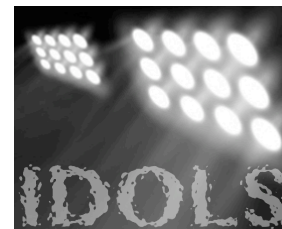
When we recognize the difference between creature and created, we are ready to learn the *posture* of the worshipper of the one true God: the open offering of our selves to God and one another. For if all things come *from* God and go *through* God and are directed *to* God, then what do we have left to do but offer ourselves to his care and purpose? This is the nature and point of faith: to trust God enough to offer ourselves to him and to his world. Like the boy and old man - we have little choice in the matter. This is the way things are.

We become free to trust the living God by offering ourselves to him.

Jesus came and announced the Kingdom or rule of God. In response, he did not invite us to 'build' God's kingdom or to fight on behalf of it. No, he invited us to *receive* the Kingdom and to *enter* it. Similarly, Psalm 119:133 prays for God to "direct my footsteps according to your Word." And Paul continues his reflection on the greatness of God by describing for us the posture of God-worship as offering:

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present [offer] your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."
(Romans 12:1–2 NRSV)

This summer, is all about remembering the difference between creature and Creator. We are created to reflect the ultimate glory of God, and not the penultimate glory of created things. Let us explore what it means to confront the idols in our lives by learning to offer ourselves as a "living sacrifice" to God.



Our Idols Today

To summarize so far:

- (1) Idolatry is a major concern throughout the Scriptures because we become what we worship. If we worship or desire above all things the works of our hands or a human project, our lives will be formed accordingly. What begins as an act of power ends up taking life from us.
- (2) We become what we worship because this is how God created us. We are image-bearers, made to reflect God's goodness, dominion, and care for creation. However, we have rejected the rule of God in our sin and now bear the image of something other than God and so distort our humanity. At stake in idol-worship is our created role as image bearers.
- (3) We are tempted to worship idols because we want to be our own gods, we know that we are frail and vulnerable and so desire control over our own lives. We want to make God 'owe' us something, or to somehow be the master of our own universe. But this always ends up making us feel more alone, and more vulnerable.
- (4) God offers us freedom from the cycle of idolatry and sin through the invitation to offer ourselves to him. When we remember that we are not God, but that God is God, we can "offer our bodies as living sacrifices." We *receive* life *from* God. Thus begins our posture of worship.

In light of these four big ideas, we are going to work through each week with an eye for the idols in our lives and how we give these things back to God. In our era, the idols we worship are not Baal or a golden calf, but rather relationships, things, and activities in our life that give our lives meaning and purpose.

These potential idols are good things - family, work, sport, bodies - that come as a gift from God. However, they are not meant to be the focal point of our lives. They are gifts, not the gift-giver. When we confuse these gifts for the gift-giver, we distort them, swell them, and crush them under the weight of our expectations. Families, bodies, work - these things all make poor gods.

There are several unique features of the study guide for this summer:

Idol of the Week

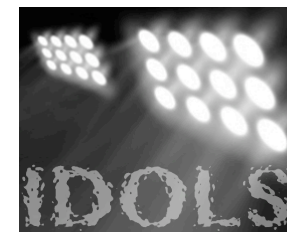
Stuart Murray Williams talks about how his congregation picks an "idol of the week" for their Sunday worship. The point of this exercise is to become aware of all the different things we are tempted to desire and worship. Often, we meet our 'idols' through advertisements. I will provide a link every week to a different advertisement that puts an idol on display for us as a way of thinking about how we are seduced into worshipping, desiring, hoping for things other than God. I also want to encourage you - as an exercise in awareness - to find an 'idol of the week' each week as well. What forms of idolatry do we see? What does it look like to place that object, person, or desire under the lordship of Jesus?

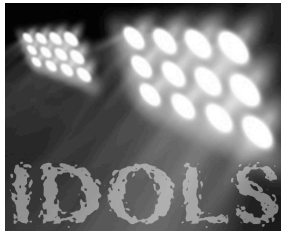
Practices and Romans 12

We will use Romans 12 as a backbone for our series. I want to encourage us as a church to not only memorize the chapter this summer, but also to find ways of practicing some of the basic things that Paul encourages us to do. Indeed, the entire passage can be read as a way of "offering" ourselves in faith, hope, and love to God in many of the areas we are talking about. Each week, we will pull a practice out of Romans 12 and encourage each of us to engage it as a way of repenting from our idolatry and offering ourselves back to God.

Prayer and Scripture

This is not unique, but it *is* a part of each week.





No Other Gods

Week 1: Exodus 20:1-17

We think of the Ten Commandments as a set of discreet rules, but there is a way in which it is one long statement about how to respond to the gift of God's salvation. This is a text about worship *and* ethics; for we will not have a well-ordered life unless we have a well-ordered heart. It is no mistake that the first four commandments deal with our worship and the next six deal with our relationships with one another. We become what we worship. Responding in worship and faith to the God who rescued Israel from Egypt (vs. 2-11) leads to a well-ordered life free *from* strife, and free *for* peace (vs. 12-17).



Idol of the Week

Watch the "No Words" NHL video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSd8CqBEbcY>

1. Often, the things we most deeply value are those that arrest our attention, that cause us to be silent or suddenly reverent. Why is the Stanley Cup treated this way? What is possibly good about this reverence? Where might something like the Stanley Cup move from worthy goal to a way in which we exchange the glory of God for the glory of Lord Stanley's Cup?

2. Often after winning a championship, athletes report elation and then depression. Why do you think that is?
3. What objects or experiences have left you without words? What other objects of reverence do we have in our society? Write a few down. Bring them to Mission Group evening.

Weekly Shared Practices



Sabbath - Strength

The practice of Sabbath flows immediately out of the first three commandments regarding God's worth as God. Read Romans 11:33-36 and Matthew 6:25-27, 33-34. Sabbath is the act of resting from our work for the sake of trusting God. How do these texts help us to practice Sabbath rest? How do you work - particularly on weekends - in a way that does not display trust in God? This week, plan to practice the Sabbath more intentionally from Saturday at 6pm to Sunday 6pm. What will you *stop* doing during that time? What will you *start* doing?

Hospitality - Neighbour

Part of our trust in God involves taking ourselves *less* seriously. Romans 12 encourages us to "associate with people of low position" (12:16). This week, practice hospitality by serving at one of our ministries that exist for people of "low position."

Blessing - One Another

Turn the "Do Not's" of the Ten Commandments into positive statements. If we were to avoid those things, what should we do positively for or toward one another? Pick one of the positive statements and then do that for another person. (For example, "do not covet" could be changed to either "be thankful in all things" or "rather than desire what others have, be genuinely happy for them, honouring and complimenting them.")

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

We confess that we are set this day in the midst of your awesome, awful work.

We will, because we have no alternative, be present this day to your dreadful work of termination

We watch while you pull down and dismantle that with which you are finished.

We will, because we have no alternative, be present this day to your dream-filled work of evoking, imagining, forming, and inviting.

We are double-minded in your presence, because we treasure what you end and we fear what you conjure - but we are your people and trust you all this day in your awesome, awful work.

Override our reluctance and take us with you in justice and mercy and peace.

Take us with you in your overriding, that our day may be a day of joy and well-being and newness from your very hand

In the name of your decisive newness even Jesus. Amen.

(From *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth* by Walter Brueggemann, page 27)

Evening Prayer

(From Isaiah 45)

You, oh God, are the Lord, and there is no other

Apart from you, there is no God.

Thank you, Father, for how you have strengthened me today

Even when I have failed to acknowledge you

[Reflect on how God has been present with you today]

From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting,

may all people come to know that there is no other God besides you.

For you are the Lord, and there is no other.

[Pray by name for those who do not know Jesus]

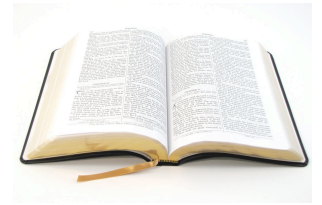
May your kingdom come, your will be done

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

[Silence]

Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Image Bearers of God

Read Genesis 1-2

1. Read Genesis 1-2 and the section of the study guide introduction that highlights our identity as “image-bearers.” Describe the relationship between God and creation. What picture of God emerges? What picture of humanity? Of other creatures?
2. How would you characterize Adam and Eve’s relationship with one another and the rest of creation?
3. In what ways does this whole picture rest on Adam and Eve’s *trust* in God? How is life in Eden dependent on worship - or *not* confusing the Creator and the created?

Friday

A Distorted Image

Read Exodus 20:1-17

1. What happens before the commandments are given (vs. 2)? Why do you think this context is important to remember?
2. Read Exodus 20 along with the section of the study guide introduction that highlights our freedom from idols. In what ways are the Ten Commandments about worship and the offering of our lives?
3. Compare and contrast Exodus 20 with the description of creation you gave from Thursday: in what ways do the commandments try to affirm elements of life in Eden?

Saturday

Scripture Memory

Begin memorizing Romans 11:33-12:21. Try to have the whole section committed to memory by August!

Monday

No Other Gods

Read Exodus 20:2-6; 32:1-10; Psalm 115

1. What do you think it means to have “other gods before God” and to “make for yourself an idol”?
2. Exodus 32 shows Israel breaking the first and second commandment. What is it that they claim about the calf? (see vs. 8) Read Psalm 115, what is the danger in worshipping what our hands make?
3. What ‘golden calves’ do we give credit when in actuality the credit should go to God? [see ‘idol of the week’]

Tuesday
The Name of God

Read Exodus 20:7; Exodus 3:1-17

1. What do you think it means to misuse the name of God? How is this a form of idolatry or exchanging the glory of God for something else?
2. If you think about it, a name is something we receive. It is a form of control or dependence where our parents give us a name. It is different with God. God has no parent, and God is not dependent on another. God 'is' what he 'is.' When we honour the name of God, we respect this power and 'otherness' of God. Read Exodus 3. Write down all the different ways that God reveals himself (or reveals his name to Moses). What do you think this means?
3. Turn the first three commandments into positive statements. What are we commanded to *do* in light of these prohibitions? What does that look like in your own life? Where do we do this as a church?

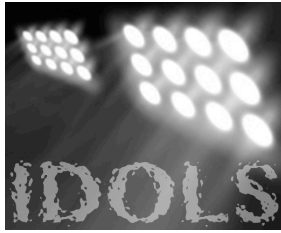
Wednesday
Summary

Read Exodus 20:1-17

1. Look back over the week. List one or two big ideas from the study that have stuck with you.
2. Reflect on God's presence with you this past week. Where has God met you?

Sermon Notes

Idols Week 1



Sports and Entertainment

Week 2: Jeremiah 2:1-13

Sports and entertainment fill a good portion of our lives. Compelling movies or music, cheering for the Canucks and supporting our kids' athletic achievements are all good and life-enriching activities. But they can also become activities that orient our lives rather than enrich them. Sometimes, we decide that entertainment is a primary way for us to achieve meaning - we define ourselves by social media, TV, movies, musical genre. Others of us see sports as a primary way to achieve glory and recognition. When we do this, we both forsake the One who gives meaning to our lives and seek a lesser, human-made significance for our lives. This week, we will reflect on Jeremiah's complaint that the Israelites exchanged God's glory for "worthless idols" and so have become "cracked cisterns."



Idol of the Week

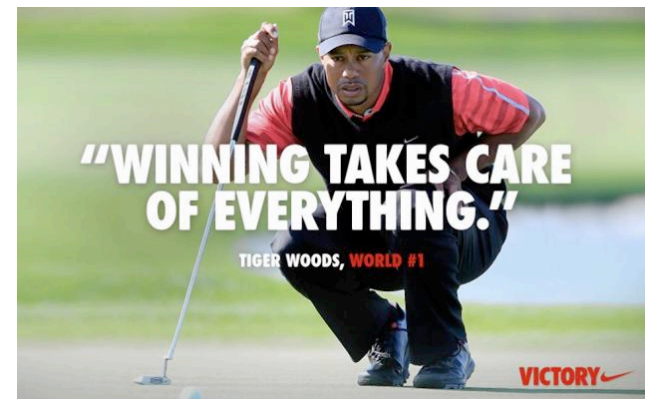
Watch the Windows7 Smartphone Commercial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdpQir1sqiQ>

1. What does the video say about the place of entertainment/screens in our lives? What do we need saving from?
2. Despite the fact that we need saving from our phones, what is the ultimate object of our worship? What is it that will save us from our phones?

3. How much time each week do you spend with a screen or being entertained? How do these practices shape your heart...or what do they say about what you ultimately value?
4. Look this week for another picture of how entertainment or screens can become an all-consuming focus for us. What do we become if we idolize entertainment and technology?

Reflect on this Nike ad, which came out after Tiger Woods was named the number one player in the world again. Remember, Tiger Woods has had a rough last couple of years - broken marriage due to marital infidelity.



1. What does this advertisement encourage us to value above all things? What happens to us if, "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing"?
2. In what ways is this a kind of idolatry? What other ways do sports encourage us to value or worship something other than God?
3. Also, where do you see sports done well, in a way that honours God? Look for examples of both this week.

Weekly Shared Practices



Sabbath - Strength

Do a time audit of your week. What do your activities say about what you value? Are there activities that you tend to form the rest of your life around? Which ones? Practice a Sabbath this week from one of these activities (whether it is TV, screens, sports, etc.). In place of this activity, participate in the blessing practice for this week.

Hospitality - Neighbour

Romans 12:3-8 tells us to receive the gifts of others. Our sports and entertainment culture tends to glorify a narrow set of skills and abilities and denigrate others. In such a culture, we have trouble recognizing the gifts and interests of others. But this is not the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is a multi-splendored holistic reign of *shalom*. This week, seek out a neighbour or a colleague to teach you something new: a new hobby, sport, interest, or specialization at work. Let them be the expert. Affirm them in their gifts.

Blessing - One Another

While you are on your screen-sabbath, touch in with your discipling partner or someone in your Mission Group. Be conscious of asking good questions and listening to the answers. Bless your friend with a listening ear and attentiveness.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

We confess that we are set this day in the midst of your awesome, awful work.

We will, because we have no alternative, be preset this day to your dreadful work of termination

We watch while you pull down and dismantle that with which you are finished.

We will, because we have no alternative, be present this day to your dream-filled work of evoking, imagining, forming, and inviting.

We are double-minded in your presence, because we treasure what you end and we fear what you conjure - but we are your people and trust you all this day in your awesome, awful work.

Override our reluctance and take us with you in justice and mercy and peace.

Take us with you in your overriding, that our day may be a day of joy and well-being and newness from your very hand

In the name of your decisive newness even Jesus. Amen.

(From *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth* by Walter Brueggemann, page 27)

Evening Prayer

(From Isaiah 45)

*You, oh God, are the Lord, and there is no other
Apart from you, there is no God.*

*Thank you, Father, for how you have strengthened me today
Even when I have failed to acknowledge you*

[Reflect on how God has been present with you today]

*From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting,
may all people come to know that there is no other God
besides you.*

For you are the Lord, and there is no other.

[Pray by name for those who do not know Jesus]

*May your kingdom come, your will be done
through Jesus Christ our Lord,*

[Silence]

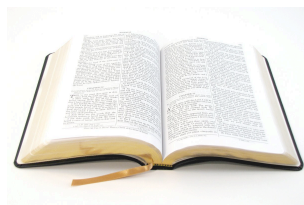
Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind

Thursday

Read Jeremiah 2:1-13

1. Sports and entertainment may not be idols equally for us all, but spend some time asking the Lord when and where you find meaning or purpose for your life apart from God. What things do you desire that are not from God? Give them over to him.
2. For some of us, sports is an avenue for glory or recognition. In what things do you seek glory and recognition for yourself?
3. Read Jeremiah 2:1-13. What moves you or stands out to you? Where do you see yourself in Israel's struggle? What questions does this text raise?



Friday

Read Jeremiah 2:1-13

1. Verses 2-3 recall a time when Israel found her purpose, hope, and glory in God. This was a time when Israel followed and obeyed God and so reflected God's image and glory, but then Israel turned away. Why? What things were they drawn to? Why do you think they "followed worthless idols and so became worthless"?
2. Verses 13 says that Israel committed two sins. What are they?
3. Jeremiah uses a really helpful metaphor in verse 13: He says that Israel has forsaken the "spring of living water" and has instead dug a cistern that is now cracked. In the arid climate of the Ancient Near East, cisterns were necessary to hold water for basic survival. A cracked cistern would lose the water and thus be useless. But even better than a cistern is a gushing spring of fresh water. Jeremiah is saying that they have rejected the obvious source of life, purpose, joy (even glory - see vs. 11) for the sake of digging their own cracked cistern. Where do we do this in our lives? What should we do about it?

Saturday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

Continue memorizing this text.

Monday

Read Romans 11:33-12:2

1. Read this text slowly. Chew on it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. What is God saying to you?
2. Reflect on the phrase: “in view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices...” What does this mean to you? How do we go about doing that?

Tuesday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. Read this text slowly. Chew on it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. What is God saying to you?
2. Reflect on the phrase: “in view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices...” What does this mean to you? How do we go about doing that?

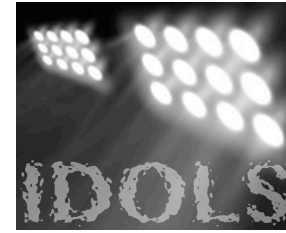
Wednesday

Read Jeremiah 2:1-13

1. The Jeremiah text warns us about seeking to find purpose in our lives apart from God, that it is like abandoning a life-giving spring for a futile cistern. Romans 12 shows us what it looks like to abandon our cracked cisterns and depend again on the “spring of living water.” Putting these two texts together with our practices from the week, what can you do on a continuing basis to help you remember God’s mercy?
2. Where has God met you this week?

Sermon Notes

Idols Week 2



Family

Week 3: John 15:1-17

Faith in Jesus both affirms and transforms the importance of family. It affirms the bonds of family in that the Bible uses the language of adoption to talk about our salvation. Because of Jesus, we have been “adopted” into the family of God. But this truth also *transforms* and even upsets the traditional picture of family. When we give our allegiance to Jesus, we receive a new family - not one of blood and genetics, but one of union with Jesus.



Idol of the Week

Watch this TD Ameritrade Commercial:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RR8VA2bRu0>

1. What is the object of desire or ultimate worth in this commercial? (There may be a couple).
2. What good things are they affirming? In what ways do these good things become destructive if they become the focus or aim of our life?
3. In what ways does this commercial tell us an outright lie? Why do “family values” make a poor god? Look for other ways that “family values” can be held up as an idol.

Weekly Shared Practices



Sabbath - Strength

We often *serve* our family during the week, but don't always *serve with* our family. The Kingdom of God invites us to think of our family in expansive ways - the whole people of God are now part of our family. Find one way this week to *serve others* with your nuclear family.

Hospitality - Neighbour

Practice opening up your family time in creative ways. Plan a games night or a BBQ with your MG in a park and invite a mix of people from your neighbourhood: singles, families, young, old.

Blessing - One Another

Romans 12:10 says "be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves." Practice this: find a way to honour another above yourself this week.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

We confess that we are set this day in the midst of your awesome, awful work.

We will, because we have no alternative, be preset this day to your dreadful work of termination

We watch while you pull down and dismantle that with which you are finished.

We will, because we have no alternative, be present this day to your dream-filled work of evoking, imagining, forming, and inviting.

We are double-minded in your presence, because we treasure what you end and we fear what you conjure - but we are your people and trust you all this day in your awesome, awful work.

Override our reluctance and take us with you in justice and mercy and peace.

Take us with you in your overriding, that our day may be a day of joy and well-being and newness from your very hand

In the name of your decisive newness even Jesus. Amen.

(From *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth* by Walter Brueggemann, page 27)

Evening Prayer

(From Isaiah 45)

*You, oh God, are the Lord, and there is no other
Apart from you, there is no God.*

*Thank you, Father, for how you have strengthened me today
Even when I have failed to acknowledge you*

[Reflect on how God has been present with you today]

*From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting,
may all people come to know that there is no other God
besides you.*

For you are the Lord, and there is no other.

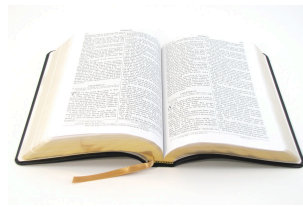
[Pray by name for those who do not know Jesus]

*May your kingdom come, your will be done
through Jesus Christ our Lord,*

[Silence]

Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Read Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:1-6; Genesis 34:1-31

1. In the NRSV, Genesis 12:3 reads “all the families on earth will be blessed.” Similarly, God’s promise to Abraham in both Genesis 12 and 15 are promises regarding family. The blessing of God for the whole world comes through the gift of a child. God’s plan for salvation comes through this family - the family is a good thing that God has created. And yet, families in Scripture are also capable of great evil. The story in Genesis 34 shows a disgusting act of violent retribution being committed by Abraham’s extended family. Family can be a place for blessing and also violence. In what ways is the family a source of blessing and God’s goodness?
2. In what ways might family life skew God’s goodness? Why do families make poor idols?

Friday

Read John 15:1-17

1. Jesus challenges our idea that the family is our primary place of belonging. Instead, Jesus says that we now belong primarily to God the Father through him, God the Son. What strikes you in this extended metaphor of the vine and the branches? What is important or meaningful for you?
2. What action does belonging to Jesus make possible? (vs. 9 and following)

Saturday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

Continue memorizing this text.

Monday

Read John 15:1-17; Acts 2:42-47

1. How does belonging to Jesus (John 15) express itself in the early church (Acts 2)?
2. Imagine what it would have been like for family units to participate in this early church community. How does this picture of belonging in Jesus and life in the church challenge our dominant ideas about family or family values?

Tuesday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. Dwell in this text for awhile. Where does your attention rest?
2. What insights or instructions does this text give us for loving and honouring our family in light of God’s kingdom?

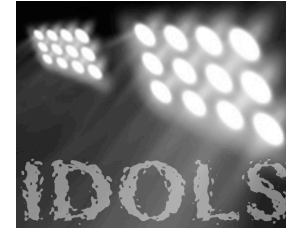
Wednesday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. What did you learn this week?
2. What has God been saying to you?

Sermon Notes

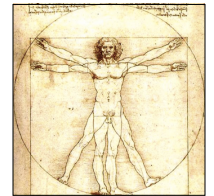
Idols Week 3



Body

Week 4: Philippians 3:1-4:1

Like all other parts of our lives, our bodies are ambiguous. They are a gift from God that allow us to move about and enjoy God's world. But they are also limited, frail, and bound to a corrupt and sinful world. In Jesus, God invites us to *steward* our bodies as a gift, to care for them and to care for one another. And yet, we are to avoid making our bodies the center of our concern or an object of worship or passion. Our bodies do and will grow old. They do and will fail us. Our body does not make a good god. Our text for this week gives a glimpse of the apostle Paul's view of the body - although he disciplines his body for life in Jesus, his confidence is not in his training and pressing on toward the goal. Rather, his confidence is in God who will "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (21).



Idol of the Week

Watch the Dove: Making of a Beauty Ad

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U>

1. What does this video say about how we value the body and appearance in our society? In what ways does our approach to the body and beauty harm us?
2. What other ways can you think of how we either over- or under- value the body? What do you think it looks like to trust and honour God with our bodies?

Weekly Shared Practices



Sabbath - Strength

Practice solitude this week. Find a 2-3 hour window where you can be alone in a quiet place. Bring your Bible and a journal and wait for God to speak. Don't be discouraged if he remains silent, sometimes solitude is about addressing and clearing out the noise in our own heads. Share this experience with your discipleship partner.

Hospitality - Neighbour

Romans 12:12-13 says "Be...faithful in prayer...practice hospitality." Spend some time praying for your neighbours this week and plan to do another evening in the park. Honour God with your body by bringing active games to the park.

Blessing - One Another

Bless your discipleship partner this week. Write a word of encouragement for them and pray for them throughout the week.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who labor to raise it will have worked for nothing.
Unless the LORD stands watch over the city,
those who guard it have wasted their time.
[Offer your day to God. Ask for wisdom to discern where he is at work and the courage to join him]

God provides for His own.
It is pointless to get up early,
work hard, and go to bed late
Anxiously laboring for food to eat;
for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.
[Thank God in advance for his protection and provision today]
Amen.

Evening Prayer

Think back over your day.
Where has God provided for you?
What good work has he done?
Where was he with you or strengthening you?
Give thanks to him for these things.

Think back over your day.
What burdens are you carrying?
When did you feel vulnerable or weak?
Where did you sense God's absence?
Offer these circumstances to God. Pray about them.

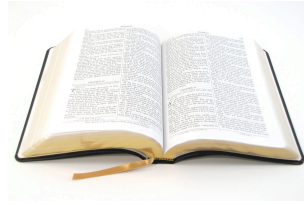
Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who labor to raise it will have worked for nothing.
Unless the LORD stands watch over the city,
those who guard it have wasted their time.
God provides for His own.
It is pointless to get up early,
work hard, and go to bed late
Anxiously laboring for food to eat;
for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.
Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind

Thursday

Read Philippians 3:1-4:1

1. Read this text carefully and slowly two times. What stands out to you? Where does your attention rest?



2. How has the Spirit challenged you in this text?

3. What questions does it raise?

Friday

Read Philippians 3:1-4:1

1. In this text, Paul both dismisses and affirms the body. At the beginning, he dismisses the ways that Jews of his day would prepare and posture their bodies for the sake of appearing better, holier, or more privileged than others. Even though Paul had the right genetics, upbringing, teachers, and schools...he considers all these things “rubbish”. If Paul were in our church today, what would be some of the things we value in relationship to bodies, genetics, teachers, habits, etc. that Paul would now consider “rubbish”?

2. But Paul also affirms the body. Although he doesn’t think that he’s going to be saved by doing the right things with his body, he *does* engage in training for the sake of life in Jesus. He “presses on towards the goal, “ by “sharing in the sufferings” and death of Christ and entrusting himself completely to the grace given him in Jesus. These are big ideas. What, specifically, do you imagine Paul doing with his life? What has he rejected and what has he embraced? How can we imitate Paul?

3. What are some of the key practices - the key ways that we train our bodies - as followers of Jesus?

Saturday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. What are all the things that Paul encourages us to do with our bodies in this text? Who do we associate with? What do we do? How do verses 3-21 clarify what Paul means by “offering” our bodies “as a living sacrifice”?

2. Continue memorizing the text.

Monday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

Dwell in and work on memorizing the text.

Tuesday

Read Philippians 3:1-4:1

1. Read the text slowly and meditatively. Pray through the text.
2. What do you think living “according to the pattern we gave you” looks like today? How is God inviting you to offer your day to him?

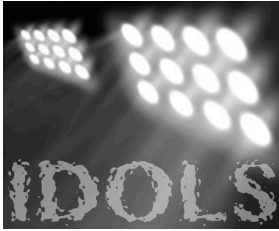
Wednesday

Read Philippians 3:1-4:1

1. What has God taught you this week?
2. Where have you experienced God?

Sermon Notes

Idols Week 4



Money

Week 5: Matthew 6:19-34

Money is one of the most basic idols that we have. Why? Because money is a means for gaining power. With money, we can move people, we can do things, we can influence outcomes. In some ways, money does make the world go round. But money is a “treasure on earth” and so it is subject to the same exchange of glory that the Israelites had with the calf. Money is a limited good. It runs out. Somebody always has more. When money becomes our god - when we store up for ourselves treasures on earth - we become anxious. When we seek power all on our own, become more vulnerable and frail. Instead, Jesus invites us to learn to desire *only* the Kingdom and to trust God for the rest.



Idol of the Week

Watch this Capitol One Commercial, and then the following MasterCard and Kay Jewlers ones:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVE7haSLmE>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71KAO_bmc2o&list=PL7DF5EB5148CC31FE

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ve11gEm_II

1. What do these commercials promise? What is it that money does for us?

2. The MasterCard and Kay commercials are interesting, because it seems to suggest that there are some things that money *can't* buy, and yet the dad had to spend *a lot* of money just to get his son to talk; in the Kay commercial, the son learns the purchasing ‘power’ of jewelry. Money and commercialism tends to infiltrate even our closest relationships. What is it that money cannot or should not buy? How do we limit the power and influence of money?

3. Look for ways in which money is an object of worship this week. What does it promise us? Why does it make a poor god?

Weekly Shared Practices



Sabbath - Strength

Sabbath-rest teaches us the kind of trust in God's provision that Jesus references in Matthew 6. Practicing Sabbath frees us from worry and makes acts of generosity possible. After your tithe this week practice generous giving. It is hard to worship money, or worry about it, if we freely give it away. Plan this out and share it with your discipling partner.

Hospitality - Neighbour

Practice hospitality without being entrapped by money. Find two free things to do in your neighbourhood and invite another family to participate with you.

Blessing - One Another

Romans 12 gives us some specific instructions on what to do with our enemies. We are to live at peace with everyone, and to bless even those that persecute us. Now, we probably don't have enemies at church, but we may have some relationships that are either strained or distant. Find a way to connect with or bless someone that is not in your immediate group of friends. Or, if you are struggling to forgive or reconcile with someone at Southside, take some steps in that direction this week.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

Unless the LORD builds the house,

those who labor to raise it will have worked for nothing.

Unless the LORD stands watch over the city,

those who guard it have wasted their time.

[Offer your day to God. Ask for wisdom to discern where he is at work and the courage to join him]

God provides for His own.

It is pointless to get up early,

work hard, and go to bed late

Anxiously laboring for food to eat;

for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.

[Thank God in advance for his protection and provision today]

Amen.

Evening Prayer [Heart]

Think back over your day.

Where has God provided for you?

What good work has he done?

Where was he with you or strengthening you?

Give thanks to him for these things.

Think back over your day.

What burdens are you carrying?

When did you feel vulnerable or weak?

Where did you sense God's absence?

Offer these circumstances to God. Pray about them.

Unless the LORD builds the house,

those who labor to raise it will have worked for nothing.

Unless the LORD stands watch over the city,

those who guard it have wasted their time.

God provides for His own.

It is pointless to get up early,

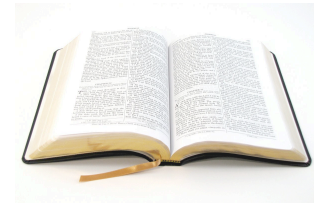
work hard, and go to bed late

Anxiously laboring for food to eat;

for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.

Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Read Matthew 6:19-34; Ecclesiastes 5:8-15

1. These texts suggest several different reasons why money (or storing up treasures on earth) makes a poor idol. List as many different negative consequences as you see in the text.
2. Do you see any of these consequences being played out in your own life? In what ways do you struggle with pursuing money or material gain over and against God? In what ways has your heart followed your treasure? Pray about this and give it over to God.

Friday

Read Matthew 6:19-34

1. The solution to idolizing money is to treasure God's kingdom instead: for our heart will follow our treasure. If we treasure God's kingdom, then we will also not worry since we know that God's kingdom is a realm of abundant grace. Where do you see worry in your life? And what does that reveal about what you treasure?
2. All of this leads to the question: how? *How* do we learn to desire first God's kingdom? Look in the text for clues. What practices does Jesus invite us into?

Saturday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. Romans 12 gives us a picture of abundant generosity rooted in personal confidence in God's mercy. "In view of God's mercy...offer..." As you work on memorizing the text, pray through it and allow God to challenge you.
2. In view of God's mercy, offer your resources to God today.

Monday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. Dwell in the text. What is God saying to you?
2. Continue to commit this text to memory.

Tuesday

Read Matthew 6:19-34

1. Dwell in this text. What do you see now that you didn't see at first? How has God spoken to you in this text?
2. Most translations say "seek first" the Kingdom. But this is misleading. The Greek reads something closer to "desire *only*" the Kingdom. How does that make a difference in how you think about this text?

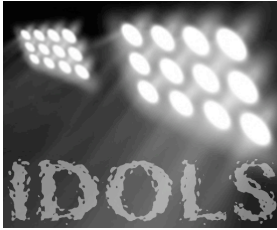
Wednesday

Read Matthew 6:19-34

1. What have you learned this week?
2. What has God been saying to you?

Sermon Notes

Idols Week 5



Work

Week 6: Ecclesiastes 3:9-14

Work is given to us by God. He made us to join him in caring for creation. And yet, our work is subject to the same degeneration and sin as our bodies. The work of our hands will not live forever, for “everything that God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it.” But because we desire to make something of ourselves, some of us are tempted to make our lives about work. This is a mistake. It is one more way that we trade the glory of God for the glory of something that will not last - as Ecclesiastes helps us to see.

Idol of the Week

Watch the following commercial and then look at the ‘motivational’ poster:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3R-rtWPYIY>

1. These express two different common ways we view work. In the commercial, faster is better. In the poster, we are so tired of being faster that we are encouraged to give up any ambition. How do you experience these two different perspectives on work?
2. How do both of them express the loss of God as the one who gives our work meaning?
3. What do you think the Bible gives us to put work in its proper place in our lives?
4. Look for ways in which work is done well and poorly this week.

Weekly Shared Practices



Sabbath - Strength

The Sabbath is the practice where we remember that God is at work even when we are not. It is where we remember that “unless the Lord builds the house, the people work in vain”. Practice resting in two different ways this week. (1) Rest from your work, from email, from screens after 6pm Saturday to 6pm Sunday. (2) During the week, discipline yourself to rest from work and be present with your family when you are done with work for the day. If you do not work right now, rest from your daily activities on the weekend and set aside screens each evening during the week.

Hospitality - Neighbour

As a part of your rest from work, host (or make yourself available to be hosted) your neighbour.

Blessing - One Another

This week, send a note to your Mission Group Leader or Congregational Leader and ask how you can serve them this week.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

Unless the LORD builds the house,

those who labor to raise it will have worked for nothing.

Unless the LORD stands watch over the city,

those who guard it have wasted their time.

[Offer your day to God. Ask for wisdom to discern where he is at work and the courage to join him]

God provides for His own.

It is pointless to get up early,

work hard, and go to bed late

Anxiously laboring for food to eat;

for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.

[Thank God in advance for his protection and provision today]

Amen.

Evening Prayer [Heart]

Think back over your day.

Where has God provided for you?

What good work has he done?

Where was he with you or strengthening you?

Give thanks to him for these things.

Think back over your day.

What burdens are you carrying?

When did you feel vulnerable or weak?

Where did you sense God's absence?

Offer these circumstances to God. Pray about them.

Unless the LORD builds the house,

those who labor to raise it will have worked for nothing.

Unless the LORD stands watch over the city,

those who guard it have wasted their time.

God provides for His own.

It is pointless to get up early,

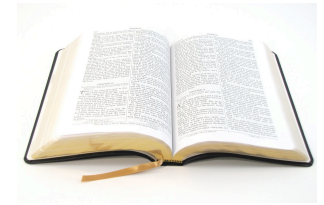
work hard, and go to bed late

Anxiously laboring for food to eat;

for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.

Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Read Genesis 1:27-2:25; 3:1-20

1. These are familiar texts. Genesis 2 shows us the goodness of work. We are made to be gardeners with God, to have dominion, to care for God's earth with him. List all the different things that God asks Adam and Eve to do. What principles can you glean from this about the goodness of work? What elements of your work reflect the *goodness* of work in this Genesis account?
2. Why do you think God rests on the seventh day?
3. Genesis 3 shows us how work has been corrupted. How is the corruption of work related to sin? In what ways do you see your work as reflecting this sinful corruption?

Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-14

1. Summarize this text. What does it say about work?
2. What does it say about the world?
3. What does it say about God?

Saturday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. How does 12:9-21 relate to your work-life?
2. Continue to work on memorizing this text.

Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-14; Isaiah 55

1. Ecclesiastes says that our work is a meaningless burden because God has put eternity on our hearts. What do you think this means? Why is it that we want our work to *matter* or to somehow last beyond our lives?
2. Ecclesiastes also says that only God's work lasts forever, and that nothing can be added to it or taken away from it. What do you think this means? What does this mean for our everyday work? Does this *add* meaning to your work? Why or why not?
3. Read Isaiah 55. This is a picture of God's lasting work, the promise of God's redemption and salvation. How can our everyday work make sense in light of this?

Tuesday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-14; Colossians 3:1-2

1. Picking up the questions from yesterday, how does the Colossians text help us to see the meaning of our work in light of God's everlasting work?
2. Pray for your work this week. How is it that God draws or includes your work in his eternal and everlasting work?

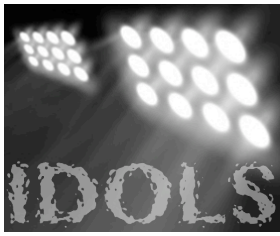
Wednesday

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:9-14

1. What has God taught you this week?
2. Where have you seen God at work?

Sermon Notes

Idols Week 6



Self

Week 7: Philippians 1:27-2:11

The Greek myth of Narcissus features a handsome youth who fell in love with his own reflection in the pool. He found himself so captured by his own image that he was unable to notice or love anyone or anything else. Eventually, he turned into a flower. Today, we tend to call our modern Narcissus-types people with “high self-esteem.” But this puts a positive spin on a dangerous reality, for self-worship lies at the heart of most idolatry. In one way or another, we are tempted to worship and find ultimate worth in the work of our own hands, in the ourselves and the things that we create. But we are not our own creators. Our lives cannot be self-enclosed entities. We are made to reflect the glory of an Other - our Creator God. The example of Jesus lived out in community provides the only real alternative to a lifetime of staring at our own reflection in a pool. We are made to love, made to serve, made to lay down our lives for one another.



Idol of the Week

Watch this Toyota commercial:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTn1EP0w2VU>

1. This video makes fun of self-centeredness - which is obvious when it shows up in a parent. Self-centeredness makes *us* the center of things and turns the people around us into ‘tools’ or ‘means’ to meet our needs or desires. When and where does self-centeredness show up for you?
2. What do you think is at the root of self-centeredness? How do we learn this?

3. In what ways does our faith free us from selfishness?

4. This week, be on the lookout for symbols and signs of self-centeredness in our world.



Weekly Shared Practices

Sabbath - Strength

Pick one day this week and try to not talk about yourself. You will need to work hard at this. When asked a question, steer it to others. Ask good questions. Listen. Be present with others. Reflect on this practice with your discipling partner.

Hospitality - Neighbour

Use your MG time this week to include and serve others.

Blessing - One Another

Pick one command from Romans 12:3-21 that you can practice this week on behalf of others...and then do it.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer [Heart]

We confess that we are set this day in the midst of your awesome, awful work. We will, because we have no alternative, be present this day to your dreadful work of termination. We watch while you pull down and dismantle that with which you are finished.

We will, because we have no alternative, be present this day to your dream-filled work of evoking, imagining, forming, and inviting.

We are double-minded in your presence, because we treasure what you end and we fear what you conjure - but we are your people and trust you all this day in your awesome, awful work.

Override our reluctance and take us with you in justice and mercy and peace.

Take us with you in your overriding, that our day may be a day of joy and well-being and newness from your very hand.

In the name of your decisive newness, even Jesus. Amen.

(From *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth* by Walter Brueggemann, page 27)

Evening Prayer

(From Isaiah 45)

You, oh God, are the Lord, and there is no other

Apart from you, there is no God.

Thank you, Father, for how you have strengthened me today

Even when I have failed to acknowledge you

[Reflect on how God has been present with you today]

From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting,

may all people come to know that there is no other God besides you.

For you are the Lord, and there is no other.

[Pray by name for those who do not know Jesus]

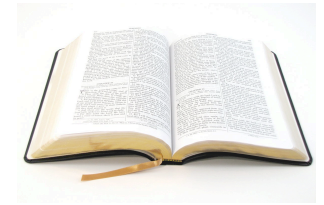
May your kingdom come, your will be done

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

[Silence]

Amen.

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Read Philippians 1:27-2:11

1. This is a familiar passage. Read it slowly and meditatively. Where does your attention rest?

2. Pray through the text. Ask the Spirit what He wants you to do with this text today? What is God asking you to do?

Friday

Read Romans 12:9-21

1. What connections do you see between this (now familiar) text and Philippians 2:5-11?

2. The basic idea throughout these texts is that God has created us for love, which means that we cannot thrive and be self-enclosed or cut off from others. What experiences do you have of finding life through loving and serving others? When have you cut yourself off and become selfish?

3. Pray about finding ways and places to serve others.

Saturday

Read Romans 11:33-12:21

1. I think there is a direct relationship between the kind of living we see in 12:3ff and the confession of faith in 11:33ff. What do you think? Why do you think we need to trust in God's greatness in order to give ourselves to serving others?
2. Do you have this text memorized?

Monday

Read Ephesians 5:21

1. Meditate on this text. Ask God what this text means for today. What would he like you to do in response to it?

Tuesday

Read 1 John 4:7-21; Philippians 1:27-2:11

1. We love because he first loved us. What do you think this means?
2. Read the text carefully. What moves you in this text? Where do you see and experience the love of God in your life?
3. How is the experience of God's love related to acts of humble service?

Wednesday

Read Philippians 1:27-2:11

1. What did you learn this week?
2. Where have you seen God?

Sermon Notes

Idols Week 7