

Introduction: *Engage your group by helping them to understand the major theme.*

In his bestseller *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller further develops this line of thought, showing the reader examples of the “particular kinds of brokenness and damage” caused by idolatry:

- If you center your life and identity on your spouse or partner, you will be emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. The other person’s problems will be overwhelming to you.
- If you center your life and identity on your family and children, you will try to live your life through your children until they resent you or have no self of their own. At worst, you may abuse them when they displease you.
- If you center your life and identity on your work and career, you will be a driven workaholic and a boring, shallow person. At worst you will lose family and friends and, if your career goes poorly, develop deep depression.
- If you center your life and identity on money and possessions, you will be eaten up by worry or jealousy about money. You’ll be willing to do unethical things to maintain your lifestyle, which will eventually blow up your life.
- If you center your life and identity on pleasure, gratification, and comfort, you will find yourself getting addicted to something. You will become chained to the “escape strategies” by which you avoid the hardness of life.
- If you center your life and identity on relationships and approval, you will be constantly overly hurt by criticism and thus always losing friends. You will fear confronting others and therefore will be a useless friend.
- If you center your life and identity on a “noble cause,” you will divide the world into “good” and “bad” and demonize your opponents. Ironically, you will be controlled by your enemies. Without them, you have no purpose.
- If you center your life and identity on religion and morality, you will, if you are living up to your moral standards, be proud, self-righteous, and cruel. If you don’t live up to your moral standards, your guilt will be utterly devastating.

[Excerpt taken from “Tim Keller on Idolatry,” Preaching Today [online], 6 September 2014 [cited 18 December 2015]. Available from the Internet:

<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/june/1062308.html>; see also Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Dutton, 2008), 275-276.]

Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God. The Israelites redirected their worship from the one true God to a golden calf idol and ultimately, as Stephen the first Christian martyr stated, “In their hearts [they] turned back to Egypt” (Acts 7:39). Consider today how we are turning our hearts away from God and worshipping the idols of our day.

Part 1: *Engage group with an action to grasp the lesson theme.*

When faced with the opportunity to walk away from God and put something or someone in place of God, we are saying that we distrust God. *Like Israel, we will also fall if we distrust the purposes of God.*

“Wait for the LORD; be strong and courageous. Wait for the LORD.” Psalm 27:14. When Moses went on the mountain, the Israelites could not wait on the Lord. They had to have a worship fix and because of their insecurities and mistrust, they worshipped the golden calf and forgot the God who brought them out of Egypt. They even used the gold that was gathered from the plunder of their great escape.

Give each person an index card and have them write ways they have distrusted God and not waited on His plan. After a time of reflection, pray over the cards, have everyone tear up the cards and throw them away as a statement of belief in the one true God and his future provision and plans.

Part 2: *Help your group members connect with the lesson from illustrations of current culture.*

Read aloud Romans 1:22-25: “*Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.*”

Bring several copies of the newspaper to your group meeting. Ask group members to look through the paper or to search online for illustrations from culture that depict idol worship. As your group finds illustrations, write them on a poster board or white board. At the top of the poster board write: “...*they exchanged the truth of God for a lie.*”

Then ask the question “How are you exchanging the truth of God for a lie in your life?”

Part 3: *Engage your group by empowering them to pray.*

Ask 1-2 volunteers to read Romans 8:34 and Galatians 6:2

“Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the One who died, but even more, has been raised; He also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us” (Rom. 8:34).

“Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

Just as we find that Moses interceded before God for the people of Israel, we must also intercede before God for those in our lives who need intercession. Ask your group break up into smaller groups of 2-3 people. Encourage the smaller groups to share their needs with each other and their prayer concerns. Have each group pray over the concerns that its members express. Have each group also share the names of the people for whom they are interceding who do not know Christ savingly, and then as a larger group, lift those names in prayer.