

LORD

Our fall discipleship series focuses on the Ten Commandments. Not only what they teach us not to do, but what to do. Jesus is Savior and Lord. Once we know Him as Savior, it's time to begin to allow His lordship in every corner of our lives. I can easily recognize Jesus as "Lord" in some abstract way. He's Lord of the universe. He's Lord of all history. But it gets harder when I think about His lordship in my own life. Is He really my master when I'm thinking about my relationships with my family? Is Jesus my first consult and guide when I'm arranging my finances? So much of discipleship is simply about loving Jesus more—more than desires of the flesh, more than money, more than what my neighbor has. The Ten Commandments are a great measure of our hearts. Do we love Jesus more than these? Jesus is Lord.

We live in a neighborhood up north that was severely impacted by the Waldo Canyon fire six years ago in 2012. Almost 350 homes were destroyed by that fire and our house had “smoke mitigation” performed before we bought it. So we thought about that a little when we were moving in. People told us to put our firebox together—that box of precious things you would want to grab and throw in the car in case you had to evacuate quickly. We said, “Yeah, yeah, thanks” and always intended to do it. A few weeks ago a fire sparked up on Ram-part Range Road just over the mountain from us, and that got my attention. I looked at a map and saw just how close that actually is to our house, and I thought again about the fire box. But it went out, so we didn’t do it. But we should. We will. I’m sure we will. It makes you think—what would you put in the box? What matters so much, what is so dear to you that it fits in the box? I happen to like almost all of my stuff. There’s some stuff I could do without, but that’s Abigail’s stuff. My stuff I like! What goes in the box and what gets left behind? If your heart is a firebox, what goes in there first? What is first in your heart?

The second commandment asks you, “What is lord of your heart?” It’s a command against idolatry. We have a tendency to think of idolatry, idol worship, as something that used to happen long ago. Ancient people used to worship false gods and idols, totems and lucky charms. But now we are sophisticated and modernized, so we don’t have to worry about that anymore. We think of idolatry as something that has been eradicated by our modern era, like smallpox or polio. Actually, idolatry is the most pervasive, most common, most rampant sin against God there is—and it does the most damage. You don’t break any of the other commandments without first breaking this one. If you commit adultery, you first elevate love and sex above God. If you murder, it is because you first disregard God; you put your rage or your desire for revenge above your confidence in God and His justice. If you steal, if you lie... you get the idea. We are far from free of idols. We are thick with them.

Martin Luther said, “Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God.” Whatever goes first in the box in your heart, whatever you cannot live without, whatever you seek most to gain happiness, it starts to control you. Becky Pippert

wrote, “Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives” (*Out of the Saltshaker*). See, the problem is that these idols are not dead and silent like statues or shrines in the corner of the room. They start to control us and we hang our hopes on them. We rest our lives on them. They are not strong enough hooks to hold our hopes and not strong enough foundations to keep our lives secure. If there is anything occupying the place of lord in your life that isn’t Jesus, you need a better lord!

You really want to read verses 3–5 together. The first two commandments kind of blend together: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exodus 20:3-5). It isn’t that we don’t produce art. If you just read verse four as the second commandment, it sounds like we are not supposed to make anything. It isn’t that we don’t produce beautiful, inspiring things. But don’t take something in creation and make it an object of worship alongside, or above, God. The things in creation are to reflect their Creator, and when we take a good thing, a beautiful thing, out of creation and make it so special to us—make it an ultimate thing—it takes over and becomes an idol. Worship can be a ritual act, a communal ceremony, but it can also be the simple act of loving and valuing and seeking something—seeing something as worthy of your time and attention and sacrifice, more worthy than the one true God. That’s when it goes off the rails. It can be very subtle. We may not find ourselves kneeling before statues of Aphrodite begging her to give us something, but we are driven to sacrifice and obsession over body image, health and fitness. We don’t pour out wine sacrifices to harvest gods or sacrifice animals to make business deals, but when our pursuit of money and success takes the first place in our hearts, it is easy to perform a sort of child sacrifice—neglecting family to gain wealth and prestige.

The fight against idolatry runs straight through the Old Testament. There are fourteen different synonyms used to describe idols and images and

false gods. Tim Keller in his book *Counterfeit Gods* says, "God was saying that the human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them." He goes on to say, "In ancient times, the deities were bloodthirsty and hard to appease. They still are."

We fashion idols out of all kinds of things. We can have *cultural* idols, trends or common virtues like economic prosperity, technological progress, even love of country can become an idol. There are *personal* idols. Some people don't feel valuable unless they are the smartest person in the room—they have an intellectual idol. Some have physical fitness idols, love idols, performance idols. There are even *religious* or spiritual idols. All they need to do is pull our devotion away from Jesus just the slightest bit. It can even be an image of Jesus, or a place we worship regularly or a symbol or trinket that has captured a bit of your heart. I used to have my one Bible, and I wasn't sure I could meet with God reading another Bible. When I was in fifth grade, I went on the Southwest Trip with Broadmoor Elementary school. In Santa Fe I bought a silver cross necklace for \$11, as I remember. I didn't take that off until I was in my twenties. I held it sometimes when I prayed. I'm not saying it was an idol, but it captured my attention a little and sometimes that's enough to bring anxiety into your relationship with Jesus. Can I still pray if I don't find my necklace? Can I still hear from God if I'm in a new Bible? Can I feel the presence of God if the camp where I first prayed has been sold off or burned in a fire? What if this sanctuary went down? Could I still know Jesus without this space, without red carpet, without these chandeliers? What I'm saying is don't get too attached to anything but Jesus. He alone is Lord of your heart.

So, what's to be done? There isn't a single one of us in this room who doesn't struggle with this tendency, who has no idols competing for space in the firebox or your heart. We all have them. How do we root them out before they trap us and disappoint us? God expresses His heart here in this passage, "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of

those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:5-6). When we read that God is jealous, that's not some character flaw or some brooding anxiety in God's heart, as though God is worried that He's not going to get enough attention from us. That's not it. God is expressing His heart for us. He hates to see us chase false gods. He knows that we belong to Him and He belongs as Lord of our hearts. He knows that disobedience can impact generations right down the line. A daughter can absorb her mother's false devotion, or even a grandmother or great-grandmother and before you know, it third and fourth generations of a family have run off in the wrong direction. But one believer living in true devotion to the Lord can have an even greater effect—to a thousand generations, it says. God's heart is not to leave us devoted to false gods but to remove them. To set us free of them. To eliminate them entirely and show us the life that is truly life.

When Moses received these Ten Commandments, he came back down from Mount Sinai to find that the people had made themselves an idol—a golden calf. Literally while Moses was talking with the one true God who had just rescued them from Egypt, the people gave their hearts to an idol. Moses was furious. It says in Exodus 32:20, "And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it." That's one method. Pretty dramatic. You want to worship this gold cow instead of reserving your devotion and love for God Himself? How about you drink it? I'm not sure what happens when you drink gold dust. It can't be good. Jesus was equally as clear in His Sermon on the Mount when He said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). The idol Jesus noticed in this instance was the idol of money. "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). So you have to choose. Who do you choose? What do you love more? What do you put your hope in? Where do you place your confidence, your security, your safety? What can you not live without? To lose this thing would be to lose your will to live? Choose. Love Jesus more.

Because when your heart is set on a false god,

you will eventually come to the moment of painful and dramatic disenchantment. Where we lived in the north metro suburbs of Atlanta, there was a common cultural story. It went something like this: we moved to the city for jobs out of college, fell in love downtown and got married. We got a little house in the city. When we had kids, we wanted to stay downtown but the schools were rough and private school was expensive so we moved out to the suburbs. The big sacrifice was for the kids. The commute to work is for the kids. The one parent who stops work, stops work for the kids. The sports are for the kids. The house you pick is for the kids. The vacation is for the kids. In the absence of anything else we can agree upon in common, we can all agree that a sacrifice is always worthy if that sacrifice is (say it with me) *for the kids*. But do you see what happened? The kids became little gods; and kids don't know how to be god. The crisis came when one of the kids collapsed under the pressure, "fell off the Achievatron" as David Brooks would say, and the whole family system didn't know what to do. This was all for the kids. The same happens to a woman who has devoted her life to physical fitness only to suffer an injury and watch her body waste away. A man who devoted his life to investment banking 80 hours per week and loses it all when the market crashes. A couple who poured their whole heart into a house only to have it burned to the ground overnight. A pastor addicted to fame, a blogger addicted to likes, a high-schooler whose whole life is her social network and she suddenly finds her reputation destroyed on Instagram. The sudden disenchantment, the twilight of the idols, it can be rough.

There is only one God worthy to be God. There is only one Lord who can be Lord of your heart. Any other hook you hang your hopes on will fall. Any other rock you try to build your life around will crumble. There is one Lord, one God, one name under heaven to be praised and worshiped and adored. There is only one who has proven worthy to be praised, only one who died and overcame death proving His ability to hold your life in His hands eternally. Do not make for yourself anything to worship as a god. The Lord is God. The Lord alone is Lord of your heart. There is one God, one Father of our Lord Jesus Christ known by His Holy Spirit. One. He is Lord of your heart.

STUDY GUIDE

LORD • EXODUS 20:4-6

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read the passage for the week: Exodus 20:4-6. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note words or phrases that seem meaningful. Pray for your study of God's Word.

- Re-read verse 4. Some people look at this verse and conclude that there is no place for art/sculpting/painting in the Christian life. Does this seem accurate?
- Verses 5 and 6 reference a challenging concept for western ears. What do you think about the idea that God would punish four generations because of the great grandparent's sin? Is this outweighed by the promise to love to a thousand generations those who love God and follow His commands?
- At the heart of this command is avoid using images and sculptures to worship God. Israel is instructed to worship differently than its neighbors. Today, are there pros and cons to representing Jesus in art? What are some of these?
- Physical idols are less common in American culture than in the ancient context in Exodus. But this commandment is not limited to the worship of physical idols. What kinds of things could be considered idols in our context? What sorts of things does our culture "worship?" Are any of these a struggle for you?
- Pastor Tim Keller describes idolatry as turning "good things" into "ultimate things." What do you think about this idea?
- Read Romans 12:1. Paul explains that worship involves giving our entire selves over to God. Is there anything other than God that you give yourself over to? What would it take to surrender these things in order to receive the life offered in Christ?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

Last week you began thinking about ways to be outwardly focused as we head into the fall. Spend a few more minutes thinking about this. Were there any other ideas that came to you this week? Write down three practical ways you could join in God's mission this fall.

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Whatever occupies your mind last at night and first in the morning is your god. Whatever you turn to when you are confused or lost or frightened is your god. Whatever you must have and cannot do without is your god. Remove these and hold God in the highest place. Spend a few moments praying that you would be quick to look to God, to live life with God rather than lesser substitutes.