



EVANGELISTIC
PRAYER
TEAMS

2025
QUARTER 3



EVANGELISTIC
PRAYER
TEAMS

2025
QUARTER 3

EPTs gather Christian workers across Australia to encourage one another in our **CONVICTION**, **CHARACTER**, **COMPETENCE**, and **COURAGE** in helping our friends and colleagues meet Jesus. We also pray for each other that God may work in each other's lives so that Jesus may be known.

Vision: To reach the world through workers with the good news about Jesus.

Aim: 1000 people across Australia meeting Jesus in the pages of the Bible.

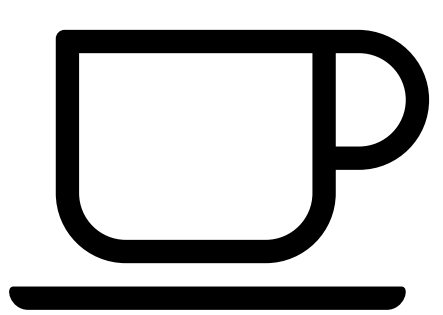


EVANGELISTIC
PRAYER
TEAMS

2025
QUARTER 3

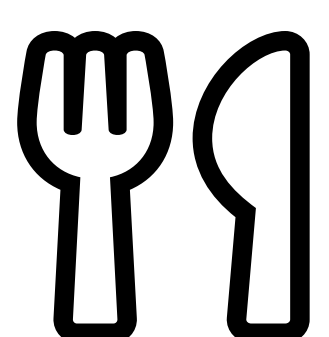
TAKE THE NEXT RELATIONAL STEP

COFFEE



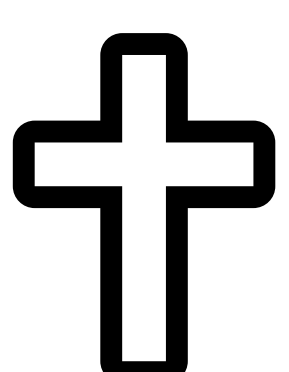
Shared a personal conversation
Knows I'm Christian
Spent social time together

DINNER



I understand their values and worldview
I've shared the Bible's worldview

GOSPEL



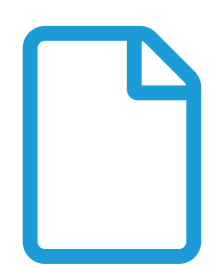
Made a clear gospel presentation
Reading the Bible
Become a Christian
Joined a good church



MODERN IDOLS



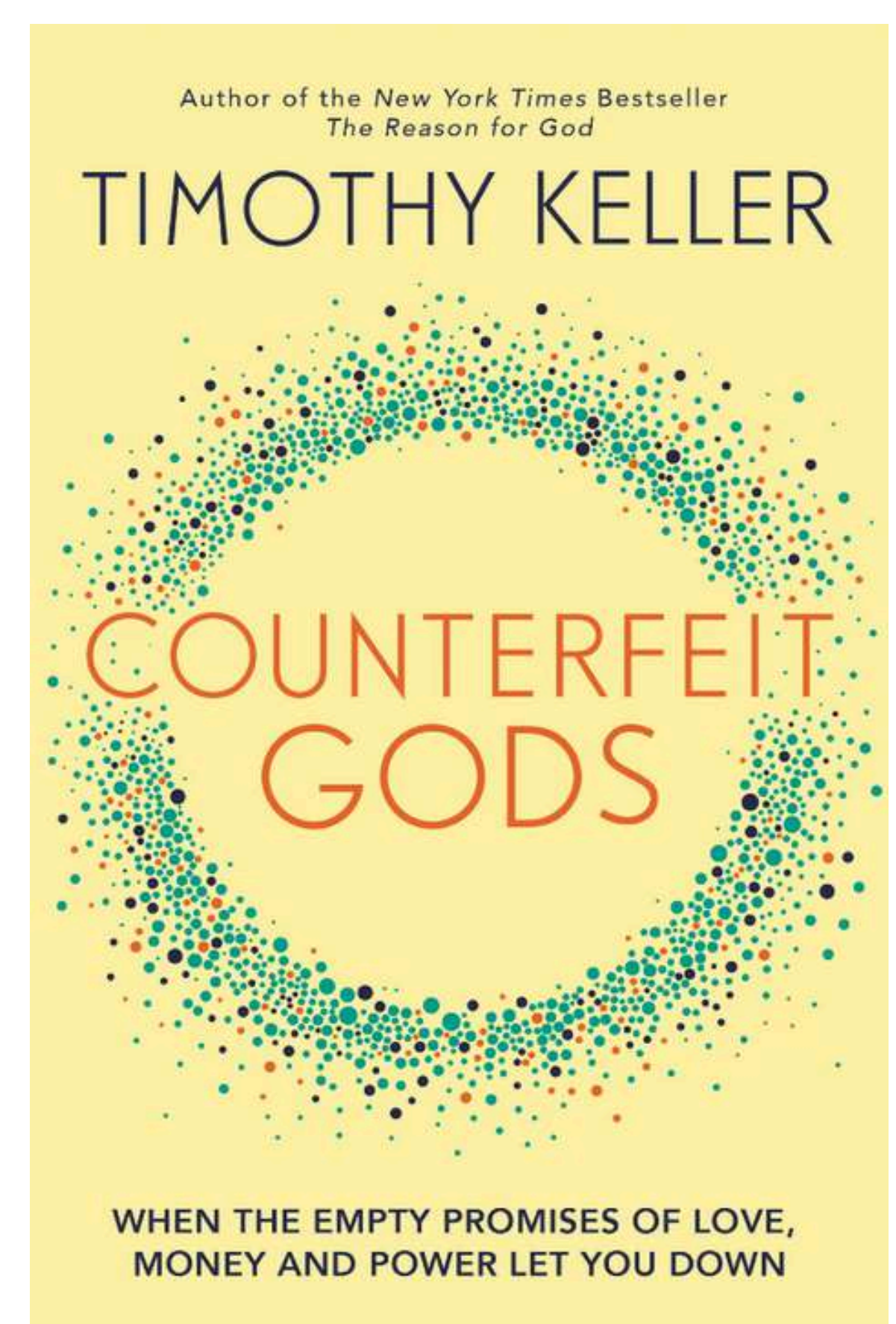
EVANGELISTIC
PRAYER
TEAMS



Summary

These studies examine how idolatry infiltrate our lives, undermine our witness, and hamper our attempts to share Jesus in the workplace.

These studies owe a great deal to Tim Keller's book, *Counterfeit Gods*.



Structure

- 1: THE SUBLTY OF MODERN IDOLS
- 2: THE WITNESS OF TURNING FROM IDOLS
- 3: LOVE AND OTHER CATASTROPHES
- 4: THE INSIDIOUS CORROSION OF MONEY
- 5: THE CRIPPLING TRAP OF SUCCESS
- 6: THE SEDUCTION OF POWER
- 7: THE RELIGIOUS IDOLS
- 8: THE DELUSION OF SELF IDENTITY
- 9: THE FALSE FULFILLMENT OF FAMILY
- 10: THE COMFORT BEYOND PLEASURE AND PAIN



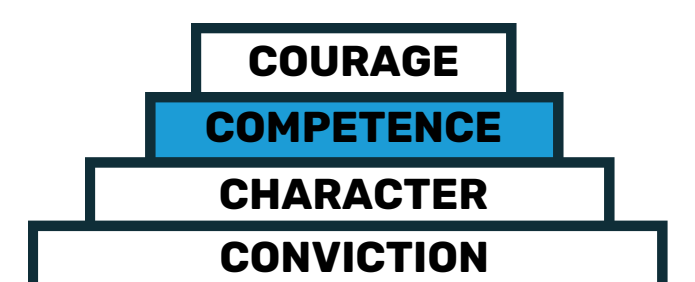
City Bible Forum ©2025

New International Version (NIV) Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.



MODERN IDOLS

1. THE SUBLTY OF MODERN IDOLS



INTRODUCTION

We tend to think of idols as the examples above. Representations of gods or other spiritual beings that are objects of worship. Many of us think idolatry is a thing of the past, what are some examples of modern day idols?



BIG PICTURE

An idol is any otherwise good thing in creation that becomes more fundamental than God to our happiness, meaning in life or identity. Idols are a danger for us all.



BIBLE PASSAGE

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

"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; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,

Exodus 20-2-5

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 1:21-25

**KEY TRUTHS**

1. The first two commandments are more than simple rules, they describe the true fabric of reality – particularly the relationship between the creation and the creator. This is idolatry, the natural inclination we all share to follow the desires of our hearts.
2. We fail to worship our creator and instead worship created things, rather than the creator.
3. God gives us over to the desires of our hearts, and we exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship idols instead.

**APPLICATION**

Tim Keller has said that our hearts are idol factories, we take *any* good part of creation and turn it into an ultimate thing – an idol.

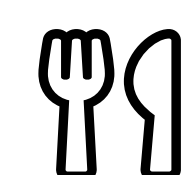
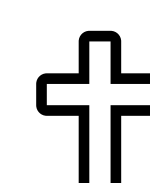
“Every human being must live for something. Something must capture our imaginations, our heart’s most fundamental allegiance and hope. But, the Bible tells us, without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, that object will never be God himself.”

Unfortunately, we Christians tend to get proud of our ability to resist certain idols, but also tend to overlook others. We visit our local Thai restaurant and take comfort that we would never trust in a dumb statue, we scoff at those who put credence in horoscopes or psychic readings, but there are far more subtle, modern idols that we often overlook.

There are even some idols that we have unwittingly adopted as acceptable.

**Prayer**

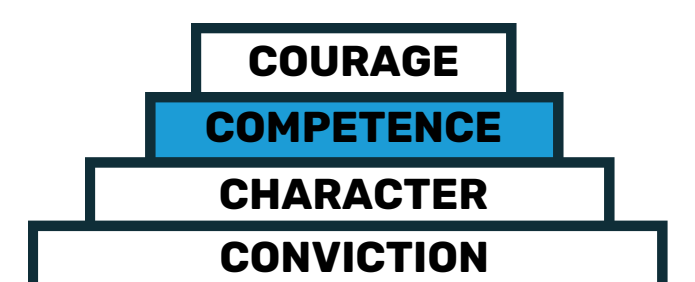
Pray for wisdom in discerning idols, particularly the more subtle idols around us.

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

2. THE WITNESS OF TURNING FROM IDOLS



INTRODUCTION

“Why did our culture largely abandon God as its hope? I believe it was because our religious communities have been and continue to be filled with ...false gods. [And so they] have turned to other hopes”

Tim Keller

What do you think?



BIG PICTURE

The ability to turn from idols is a witness to the power of the gospel of Jesus.



BIBLE PASSAGE

we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 8-10

**KEY TRUTHS**

1. The Thessalonian Christians became known throughout their whole region as they turned from idols to serve the living and true God while they waited for Jesus to return.
2. The power of the gospel of Jesus has tangible results in the lives of

**APPLICATION**

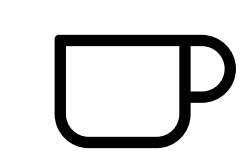
This series will explore the idols that are prevalent today. Many of them can trip us up and keep us from being a clear witness to the power of the gospel in our lives. As we saw last week, anything in creation could be an idol; we can turn any good thing into something wicked.

Tim Keller highlights that anything that becomes more fundamental than God in our lives, or anything that if it were taken away would make our lives seem hardly worth living is an idol.

In these studies we shall look at love, money, success, power, religious idols, self, family, and pleasure.

**Prayer**

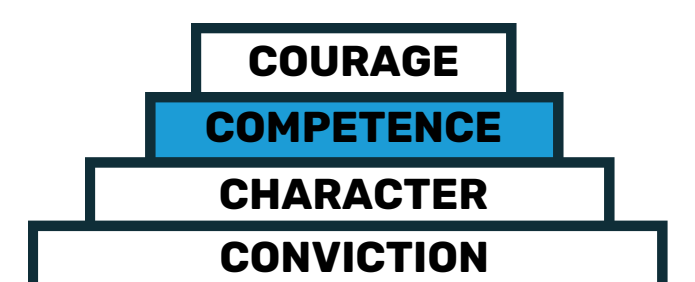
Pray for humility to recognise when a good part of creation has become an idol in our hearts.

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

3. LOVE AND OTHER CATASTROPHES



INTRODUCTION

For almost a century, children had drunk deeply from the Disney songbook - "Some day my prince will come", "So, this is love", "Can you feel the love tonight?", "Kiss the girl". We have been raised on a heady mix of romantic love; the idea that all we need is to find our happily ever after person to be complete. Love is an old long-worshipped idol, Aphrodite, Eros, Venus, Cupid. Even today people talk about believing in love.

What do people around you think about love?



BIG PICTURE

When love is a picture that reminds us of the God who is love, it's a great thing. But when love becomes ultimate, when it replaces God - it becomes an idol and wrecks havoc.



BIBLE PASSAGE

So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Genesis 29:20

Jacob claims his bride - only for Rachel to be switched out for Leah - the plainer, older sister. He works a further seven years to secure Rachel's hand. He had two wives, but "his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah."

Genesis 29:30

3. LOVE AND OTHER CATASTROPHES



KEY TRUTHS

1. Jacob fooled his father, then dudded his brother, ran away and when he got to his uncle's place he quickly falls in love with his daughter, Rachel. He promises to work for his uncle for seven years for Rachel's hand.
2. Jacob serves his time, and is instead given Leah on their wedding day. He then serves a further seven years for Rachel. He had Leah and Rachel, but Jacob loved Rachel, and not Leah.
3. Because Leah isn't loved, God enables her to conceive four boys, three of whom are named after her sorrow at being unloved and her desire to be loved. Jacob's love for Rachel causes misery for Leah.
4. Jacob's love for Rachel causes him to preference her children over Leah's. This causes jealousy between his children, to the point where Leah's children almost kill Joseph. Jacob's love for Rachel eventually creates international political upheaval in Egypt.
5. Love, when it becomes ultimate, when it replaces God, becomes a destructive idol, causing disaster into the next generation.



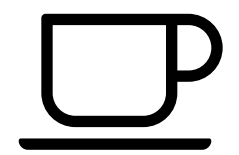
APPLICATION

Doesn't everyone deserve love? Love is great, but we follow the one who famously never married, the one who will be our groom in the great heavenly wedding. Love was never meant to be an ultimate thing, it was meant to point us to the God who is love.

Love is love! It's a catch cry that speaks to the great disordering of love in our culture. But we can so idolise heteronormal love in traditional marriage, that we marginalise singles in our churches. Further, we can start believing in a gospel of traditional marriage - as if all same-sex attracted people need is to find an appropriate spouse and they will be fine. We seem to forget that they need Jesus.

**3. LOVE AND OTHER
CATASTROPHES****Prayer**

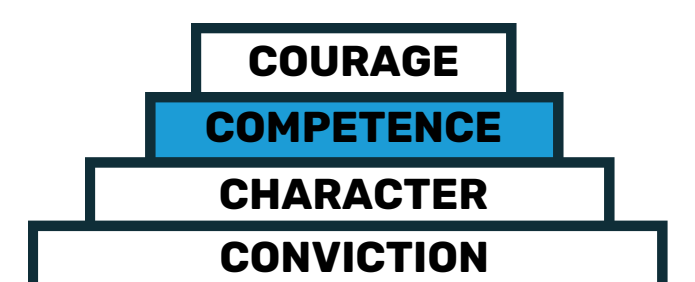
Pray for discernment to recognise if love has crept it's way into your heart to replace God.

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

4. THE INSIDIOUS CORROSION OF MONEY



INTRODUCTION

"Greed, for lack of a better word, is good." Gordon Gecko, Wall Street

"Advertisers have us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy things we don't need" Tyler Durden, Fight Club

What do you think?



BIG PICTURE

One of the biggest rivals for God's place is Money. Jesus says we can't serve God and money, but we tend to think, 'maybe I can'



BIBLE PASSAGE

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

**KEY TRUTHS**

1. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap that leads to ruin and destruction.
2. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Money is a neutral thing, it can be used for good, but it can also be a great evil – causing some to wander from the faith.
3. Wealth is an alternative hope to God – we are commanded to put our hope instead in God who richly provides everything for our enjoyment.
4. Often we think trusting in God will lead to the stoic life of a monk, but God provides for our enjoyment.
5. This isn't about being rich or poor, money is a trap for those who are trying to get rich as well as those who are rich.
6. Godliness with contentment is great gain – contentment with the provision of God for our enjoyment is key to hoping in God and resisting money.

**APPLICATION**

A Christian home should be distinguishable from its neighbours. Not just whether there's "As for me and my house..." on the wall, our houses should reflect different priorities in how we spend money.

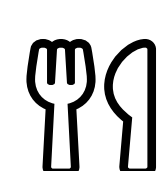
If someone were to walk into your house, what difference would they notice because you are Christian? How would your use of money be evident?

Or imagine you were followed around for a day, would they notice something different in the way you spend money? Would they think money was of first importance to you?

How are you actively working at putting your hope in God rather than in your wealth?

**Prayer**

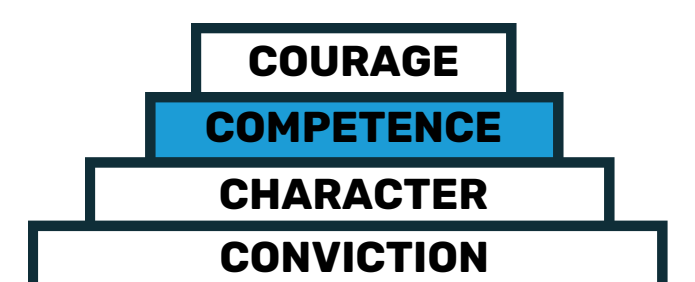
Pray that God would expose where money has taken root in your heart and give you the strength to put your hope in him instead.

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

5. THE CRIPPLING TRAP OF SUCCESS



INTRODUCTION

Tim Keller describes that in traditional cultures, personal worth is about honour – how we discharge our role in our community. In modern society, which is far more individualistic, personal worth is about dignity – our right of self-determination for each individual. There is therefore great pressure to prove ourselves through personal achievement. We are valued for being exceptional.

How does this fit with how you experience the world?



BIG PICTURE

Success is about exalting the exalted, but God humbles the exalted and exalts the humble.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Luke 18:9-14

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Luke 18:15-17

**KEY TRUTHS**

1. We meet a number of characters here that contrast with each other. The Pharisee boasts of his success in religious observance.
2. The tax collector can't even look up to heaven, but beats his breast - "God have mercy on me, a sinner". The tax collector is a hopeless case, he recognises he can't help himself, and throws himself on the mercy of God.
3. Then we meet a bunch of babies. Babies are at the opposite end of life from success, they can't do anything.
4. The tax collector is justified, not the Pharisee, the kingdom of God must be received like a baby. The humble are exalted, the exalted are humbled before God.

**APPLICATION**

Our culture drips with success; efficiency gurus, life management tips, optimisation apps. We happily share our role titles, the letters after our name - though it helps no one - because it gives us meaning, it tells people our worth.

Christians know their worth - the precious blood of the Lord Jesus - everything else fades by comparison. Humbling ourselves frees us from playing the social ladder games, and enables us to serve and love people freely as we base our worth in God's exaltation, not in our self-exaltation.

Imagine the difference in our attitude at work if we truly lived this humility in Christ.



Prayer

Pray for humility, that you would rest in the exaltation of God of all those who humble themselves before him.

Remember

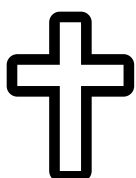
COFFEE



DINNER



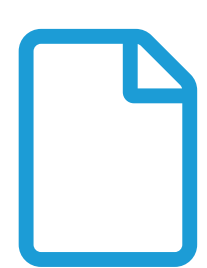
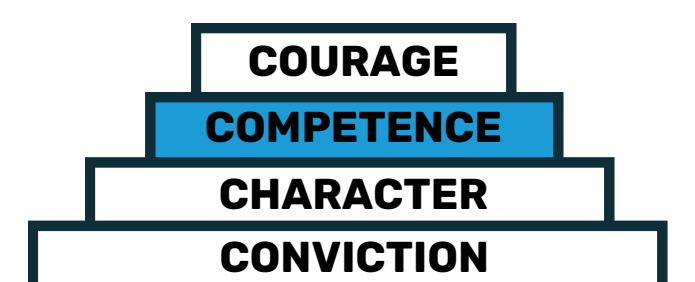
GOSPEL





MODERN IDOLS

6. THE SEDUCTION OF POWER



INTRODUCTION

We live in polarising times. The opposition is not just mistaken, but evil. Whether you vote for this party or that, this leader or that, seems to be more about identity than policy. Our destinies are caught up with the powerful.

How do you see this work in the lives of those around us? or in our lives?



BIG PICTURE

We're powerless creatures, dependent upon God for everything, but instead of seeking God's good provision, we seek power in powerful people - or in attaining power for ourselves.



BIBLE PASSAGE

*In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the Lord establishes their steps.*

Proverbs 16:9

*In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water
that he channels toward all who please him.*

Proverbs 21:1

*Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
"Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles."*

Psalms 2:1-3

**BIBLE PASSAGE (cont)**

And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:8-11**KEY TRUTHS**

1. Powers and rulers sit under the authority of God – they may rise up against and seek to overthrow God, but the true order will be re-established
2. Every ruler will one day bend their knee before Jesus, they will have no choice. All human, and even spiritual forces will submit to the rule of Jesus – their power will be shown to be weakness.

**APPLICATION**

Christians benefit from knowing the ending before we get there. We need not fear if this or that leader or party come to power, Jesus wins. We can judiciously consider our vote, not invested in any particular leader to save us, safe in the knowledge that the outcome will not change who is the true king – the Lord Jesus.

Christians can also rest in the knowledge that God will judge much more harshly those rulers who abuse their power and use it in unjust ways.

Unfortunately, Christians can still be caught up in human power games, believing only this leader or party can rule properly. How are you enticed into trusting human power?

**APPLICATION (cont)**

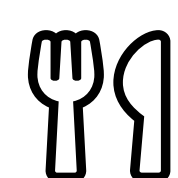
When Constantine declared he was a Christian and that Christianity was the state religion, the church which had been heavily persecuted up until that time, found itself suddenly with unprecedented power. It did not go well for the church. Nominalism was born and the weapon of coercion has unfortunately been part of the history of Christendom.

Today, to our sorrow, many Christians seem intent on putting their hopes in this or that leader. How do you see this happening?

How do you see this tendency in yourself?

**Prayer**

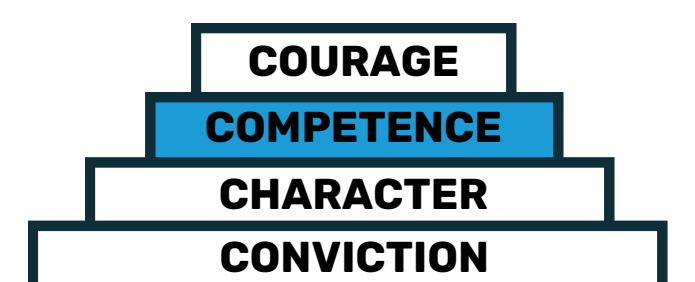
Pray for a deep trust in the Lord Jesus bringing his kingdom to bear, and that we would not seek the seduction of human power.

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

7. THE RELIGIOUS IDOLS



INTRODUCTION

During his ministry, with which people did Jesus have the most trouble?

What was it about religious people that made them trouble?



BIG PICTURE

We are great at ignoring God's word to follow human rules that make us feel more religious. Jesus' harshest criticism was for religious idolatry.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

*"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules."*

Matthew 15:1-9



KEY TRUTHS

1. Religious people like to follow rules and traditions, and they expect others to likewise.
2. Religious people like to frame their ways of skirting God's word with religious motives.
3. Religious people honour God with their lips, but their hearts are far from him. Their worship is empty.
4. Religious people are convinced that they are spiritually and morally correct, but are actually far from God.



APPLICATION

There are a number of ways we can replace true worship with human rules. We can contrast ourselves to those other churches who water down their theology. Usually we choose some peripheral point of theology, who's allowed to do what in church, and that becomes the marker of doctrinal purity. Or else we trust in God's grace to us, plus our ministry success or victory in one particular moral area. Or perhaps we pity the people in that church whose worship is dead, not like our real expression of worship. Or perhaps we confuse the kingdom God is building, that's not of this world, and the country we currently live in, believing there is something uniquely Christian about our country or our leader. Is it any wonder when people look at Christian idolatry, think this is what it means to follow Jesus, and want nothing to do with him?

What religious idol is potentially a temptation for you?



Prayer

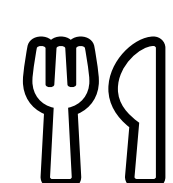
Pray that God would reveal any religious idols that you may have in your heart.

Remember

COFFEE



DINNER



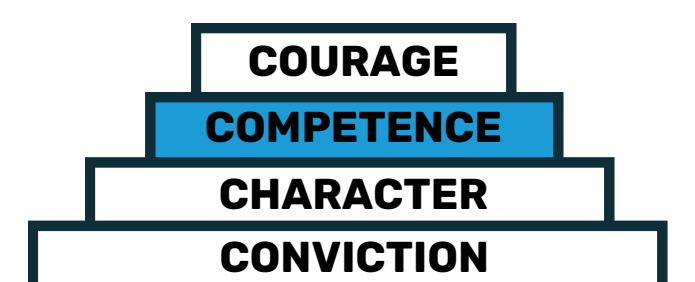
GOSPEL





MODERN IDOLS

8. THE DELUSION OF SELF IDENTITY



INTRODUCTION

Jim Carrey recently said, “Don’t get me wrong, Jim Carrey was a great character and I was lucky to get the part, but I don’t think of that as me anymore. Jim Carrey was a less intentional character, because I was playing someone I thought people would like, but it was a character.”

Who or what does ‘Jim’ believe defines him?



BIG PICTURE

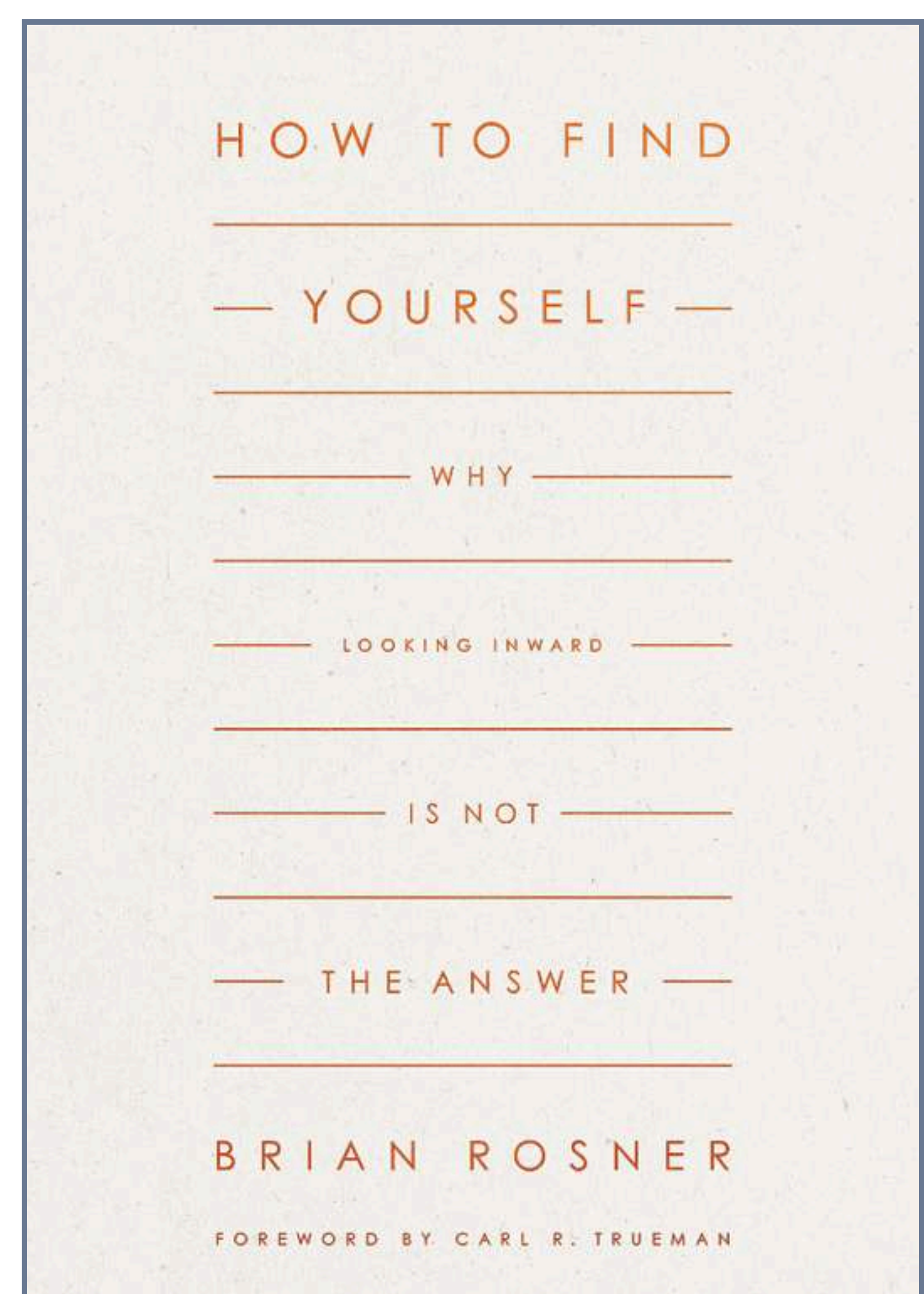
People these days increasingly seek to define themselves by their innate, individual identity - by what makes them happy. However, Christians have found true identity in being known by God, trusting him and his word, and finding our purpose in Christ.



KEY TRUTHS

This study is indebted to Brian Rosner’s book, *How to Find Yourself: Why Looking Inward is not the Answer*

Who we are, our purpose and morality used to be tied up in our role in society. Recent trends have been about finding the answers internally - from within. This has been termed *Expressive Individualism*.



**KEY TRUTHS (cont)**

The tenets of Expressive Individualism are:

- The best way to find yourself is to look inward
- The highest goal in life is happiness
- All moral judgments are merely expressions of feeling or personal preference
- Certain aspects of personal identity – gender, ethnicity or sexuality – are of paramount importance
- Forms of external authority are to be rejected
- The world will improve dramatically as individual freedom grows
- Everyone's quest for self-expression should be celebrated

The key desire is to live more authentic lives; lives that better capture who we are within. However, living this way has produced people who are more fragile, less able to cope with the harsh reality of life, and fail to truly know ourselves in a meaningful way. This means we are less able to live a truly good life, and instead our lives are self-deceived, self-absorbed, and self-centred.

Firstly, we are self-deceived. We are not individuals. Before we are born “we inherit a great river of knowledge, a great flow of patterns from many ages and sources.” Genetics, religion, culture, family, education is all information that flows from those older – and even the dead – to us, the yet unborn. Our sense of self owes far more to others – even those we don't know or will ever meet – than we appreciate.

Further, our sense of self is distorted. We tend to exaggerate our good qualities, underestimate our poor ones, and particularly, to overestimate our abilities in direct proportion to our incompetence. “We don't know ourselves. Most of what we think and believe is unavailable to conscious review. We are our own deepest mystery.”

“We are not an individual, we did not create ourselves, we exist in a web of relationships, we are social animals – we are being-in-relation. To know ourselves we need to be known.”

Finally, we are increasingly living in a culture that has let go of, or rejected outright, a traditional narrative. Each of us star in our own short story, rather than take our part in God's grand story of redemption. We exclude the transcendent and instead drift into pessimistic nihilism, where human existence is as meaningless as Barbie's pink, plastic dream home.

**KEY TRUTHS (cont)**

In contrast, Christians believe knowing yourself is not as important as knowing God. “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matthew 10:39. And, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God...” Actually, more important than *knowing* God is *being known by* God, as the Apostle Paul himself states when he continues his thought, “But now that you know God —or rather are known by God...” (Galatians 4:8-9).

“We live in a world where, increasingly, people are clutching at straws, unable to glimpse a story which would lead the way into true peace, freedom and justice. The Christian gospel offers such a story.” and “Those who are known by God intimately and personally are well equipped to deal with the questions of existence, ego, ethics, enemies, and enjoyment, and have deep resources from which to draw in responding in positive ways to life’s challenges.”

In the end, that which we were so quick to reject as prohibitive and repressive to our personal identity and freedom, was actually true freedom – knowing God as Father, trusting in his word, resisting satanic lies, and finding our identity in being known and loved by God.

The one human who truly lived freely and authentically, the Lord Jesus, is the one *in whom* we all find our true identity, our true freedom .

**APPLICATION**

The current interest in gender identity is an exercise in expressive individualism. Whereas once one’s sex was assigned at birth by means of genetic test (or in the majority of cases, a quick examination of the newborn’s crotch), gender is not something that can be tested for. Gender could be any number (and the number is growing) of identifying terms based upon how an individual feels about themselves. Such an identity is about the person living authentically, and should be celebrated. However, we should not be surprised if the growing acceptance of gender identity by our society fails to deliver the missing happiness. “You do you” isn’t working.

**APPLICATION (cont)**

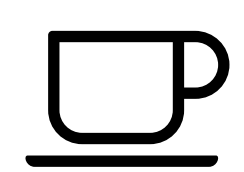
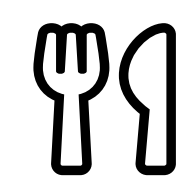
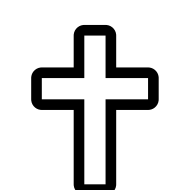
But can Christians fall for “you do you”? Absolutely, we just dress it differently.

In an increasingly mobile society, Christians no longer expect to remain at one church throughout their lives. And so the question of “choosing” a church is one those who went before us didn’t imagine having to answer. Those in Corinth had a church to choose. When choosing church, how often does authenticity trump faithfulness? Increasingly Christians have used authenticity to avoid going to churches altogether. We place ourselves in that centre stage position, calling upon God to deliver for our main character needs – rather than placing ourselves as extras in God’s grand play – taking direction from him.

How have you been tempted to ask God to deliver for you, rather than ask where you fit into God’s plans?

**Prayer**

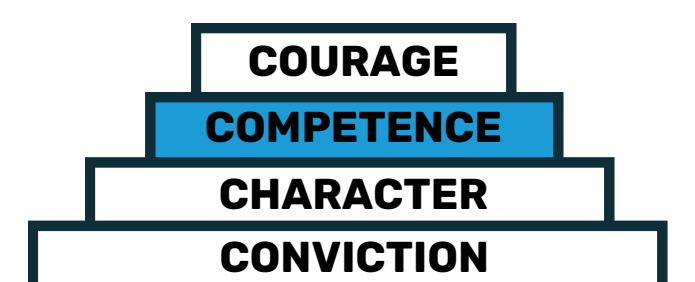
Pray that God would reveal your part in his grand narrative of the redemption of the world.

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

9. THE FALSE FULFILLMENT OF FAMILY



INTRODUCTION

Family comes first!

Have you noticed how often this phrase gets repeated today?



BIG PICTURE

Family can be a wonderful gift from God, but it can also be a dangerous and distracting idol – particularly in the eyes of Christians.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Ephesians 6:1-9

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

Mark 10:29–30

**KEY TRUTHS**

- “Blood is thicker than water” is usually taken to mean that family comes first. But the original saying may have meant the opposite: “the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.” In other words, bonds formed by choice—such as in war or through commitment—can be stronger than family ties.
- Before the industrial revolution, families were large and inclusive. A household could include parents, children, extended relatives, apprentices, servants, orphans, and unmarried adults—living together under one roof. (We see that household tables in places like Ephesians reflect this larger concept of family)
- Family relationships then were also seen as less firm than today. Spouses were warned not to love each other too much, and children were regarded as impermanent, expected to be sent out into the world once they were ready.
- The industrial revolution changed this. Capitalism increased competition between workers, which led to a narrowing of family units—focused more on biological ties. After World War II, this shift was finally cemented as women, essential to wartime industry, were encouraged back into the home so men could return to work. The ideal woman became a homemaker, building a peaceful domestic space and raising children for the good of society. The nuclear family became the norm, and those outside of this ideal were often pushed to the margins.
- Family is important—a gift from God (Psalm 127:3–5)—but Jesus doesn’t treat it as ultimate. He says following him is worth even leaving, or “hating,” one’s family. But for those who do, Jesus promises far more: a new family in this life, and eternal life to come.
- So “blood is thicker than water” might just point to this deeper truth: the blood of Christ creates a stronger bond than even the closest family ties.

**APPLICATION**

'Family comes first' is such a pervasive concept that it has become self-evident. Christians have clung to family as one of the one few remaining points of agreement with society around us. It has become something of a rallying concept. So, Family First is a predominately Christian political party. We run family services, much of what we do is focused on the family. As a result our churches are full of families, but often difficult places for others in our midst. Singles often find church life difficult, finding they are often treated with suspicion, rather than embraced as part of the church family.

1 in 4 households in Australia are single people - and this demographic is the fastest growing in our country. Focusing on families ignores a quarter of the households in Australia.

There are single people at work too. Preferring families over others is a poor witness - particularly as we are the ones who are meant to care for widows and orphans, and who follow the one who was never married.

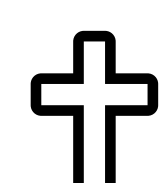
Finally, family can be an acceptable excuse for withdrawing from Christian and secular community. It can become a nice sounding way of being selfish, because 'family comes first' is never questioned. Family can be an idol, and we need to guard our hearts.

**Prayer**

Pray that God would help us reflect on how we relate to our family and those outside our family.

Pray for opportunities to be involved in the lives of those around us.

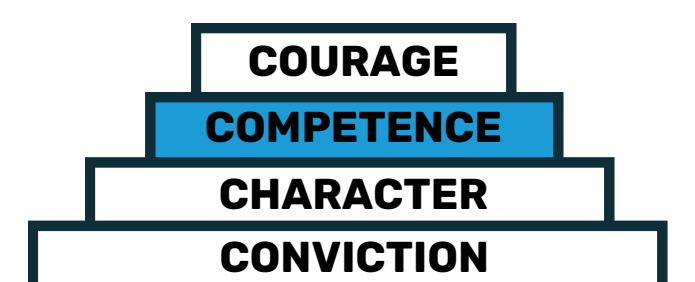
This study is indebted to Danielle Treweek's *The Meaning of Singleness*

Remember**COFFEE****DINNER****GOSPEL**



MODERN IDOLS

10. THE COMFORT BEYOND PLEASURE AND PAIN



INTRODUCTION

We tend to think of idols as the examples above. Representations of gods or other spiritual beings that are objects of worship. Many of us think idolatry is a thing of the past, what are some examples of modern day idols?



BIG PICTURE

In pursuing pleasure and minimising pain, we should be happy and fulfilled – but we find only anxiety. True pleasure is found in resting in God’s love.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Luke 9:23-25

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, .

2 Timothy 3:12

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

Romans 1:21-25

**KEY TRUTHS**

- Many people today believe that happiness is life's greatest goal—usually defined as seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.
- And we've never had more ways to do that. Imagine explaining a shopping centre to a medieval king: marble floors, golden trim, lush greenery, fountains with clean water just for decoration. Within metres, you can find food from around the world, salons to cut your hair, people to do your makeup or give you a massage, stores selling clothes, gadgets, books—anything you want. It's a level of luxury that would have stunned the richest rulers of the past. Yet it's normal life for many today.
- With all this comfort and choice, we should be the happiest people in history. But instead, we live in an anxious age. There's an emptiness inside us we try to stuff with things—but it never satisfies our deepest need.
- We learn through experience that chasing pleasure doesn't lead to happiness. Pleasure tends to come as a byproduct of doing other things particularly loving Jesus and others.
- Jesus said that anyone who wants to save their life must lose it for his sake. We follow a crucified Saviour. And the Bible reminds us: everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted.
- But we trust the God of all comfort. He comforts us in our troubles, and his comfort helps us comfort others. Trouble is inevitable in our world, we can't avoid pain, and pleasure is fleeting – but we are comforted through God's action in Christ who suffered to bring us comfort.
- You can no more chase pleasure than you can escape pain – but you can find comfort in the God of all comfort.



APPLICATION

David Williams has identified that our society has slipped into a Pleasure/Pain culture. Our culture believes there is a divide between the supernatural and natural worlds; that God rarely breaks into everyday life – indeed he may not be able to. So, if God is distant, all that's left is to chase pleasure and avoid pain.

This thinking has impacted how we as Christians pray:

- *We are anaemic in our prayer.* It is our last resort, because we've absorbed the idea that God is removed from our daily lives.
- *We seek divine supernatural experiences.* Because God rarely breaks into our natural lives, we seek him in the supernatural, and not our everyday. This can mean we fail to keep our natural responsibilities, like loving our neighbours. So our prayers focus on the supernatural, and not God's will.
- *In pleasure, we forget to pray; in pain, we pray for the return of pleasure.* We do not seek the comfort of God, thus we cannot comfort others.

Imagine if, instead of chasing pleasure and avoiding pain, we chose to deny ourselves and seek the comfort of knowing God and being known by him.

Imagine being able to comfort those around us who are worn out from chasing pleasure and anxious about pain.

What difference would that make in our workplaces and our relationships?

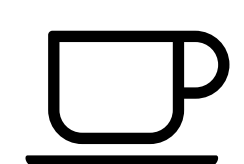


Prayer

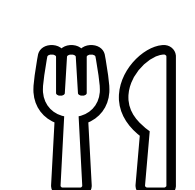
Pray for wisdom in discerning idols, particularly the more subtle idols around us.

Remember

COFFEE



DINNER



GOSPEL

