

Sermon Discussion Questions for Small Groups and Families:

Idols, part II: Love | Genesis 29:14b-35 | Chapter 2 of "Counterfeit Gods"

1. What evidence do you see in our culture that romantic love has become a counterfeit god? Be specific.
2. The story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah shows both the causes and consequences of making love into an idol. What do we know about the characters (Jacob and Leah, in particular) that set them up to seek their significance through romantic love? Do similar scenarios continue to work themselves out today? If so, how so?
3. What were some of the signs in Jacob's life that he was, in his pursuit of Rachel, starting to behave like an addict? What forms of sexual or relational addiction are prevalent in our culture? Do you struggle with any of these personally? Talk about that...
4. Laban does to Jacob (Genesis 29) exactly what Jacob did to his brother Esau (25) and to his father Isaac (27)—he swindles and deceives him. Sin has a way of boomeranging, doesn't it? Have you ever experienced your own vices and abuses flying right back in your face, from others?
5. "In the morning—behold, it was Leah!" What impact did Laban's deceit have on Jacob's life? On Leah's? On Rachel's? On their children? What does this say about the nature of sin?
6. "Through all of life there runs a ground note of cosmic disappointment" (p. 37, see also CS Lewis quotes on 38, 39). What does Keller mean by this? Is he overstating his case? How does our boredom and dissatisfaction point us to heaven, and to God himself (p. 39)?
7. If you're married, or in a relationship: do you ever place expectations on your partner that are unrealistic or burdensome? Men tend to crave respect, affirmation and sex, whereas women tend to crave sacrificial love, intimacy and affection. In either case, are you asking your partner to do more than he or she can do? How can you tell the difference between a healthy, innate need for affirmation or affection, and an idolatrous one? In other words, at what point does our quest to meet our deepest needs become destructive?
8. Tim Keller uses the phrase "hole in their heart" to describe both Jacob and Leah. Can you resonate with that in any way? If so—how? What people or events in your life have left you with an acute feeling of emptiness? How did you try to deal with that at the time? Would you do anything different today?
9. Pastor Bill said in his sermon, "hurt people hurt people." Talk about a time, in your life, or in the life of someone close to you, when that vicious cycle finally stopped. What happened? Be specific.
10. How did Leah get her life back?
11. What good thing in your life are you treating as an ultimate thing that you need to take your heart off of, if you're going to get your life back? What imperfect love, what incomplete joy, have you set your hopes on—that are robbing you of your joy and satisfaction? What do you need to let go of, in order to get your life back?
12. How did Jesus become the man that nobody wanted?
13. Meditate on and discuss the following quote: "If we are deeply moved by the sight of his love for us, it detaches our hearts from other would-be saviors. We stop trying to redeem ourselves through our pursuits and relationships, because we are already redeemed. We stop trying to make others into saviors, because we have a Savior... "The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one..." (p. 45).

Spend some time in prayer for one another.

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure*

*How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory*

*Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice,
Call out among the scoffers*

*It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished*

*I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection*

*Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom*

-Stuart Townsend