

Discussion Questions for Small Groups and Families:

Idols, part IV: Success | II Kings 5:1-13 | Chapter 4 of “Counterfeit Gods”

1. Keller argues that the pursuit of success is driven by fear—fear of feeling inadequate and being mediocre. Do you agree with this? How do you see people in our culture trying to justify their existence through the pursuit of success?
2. “Successful people are much more shocked and overwhelmed by troubles...[their success] gives them a false sense of security” (p. 75). Why do you think that is? What is it about success and achievement that makes us feel like we’re immune to hardship and suffering?
3. Sociologist Chap Clark argues that this generation of teenagers has been systemically abandoned by the adult world. One of the ways this abandonment plays out is by heaping extraordinary pressure and expectations upon kids. Keller says, “the family is no longer...a haven in a heartless world...Instead [it] has become the nursery where the craving for success is first cultivated” (79). Do you agree? Is this a form of “white collar abandonment”? How can families and churches respond to this cultural phenomenon?
4. How does Namaan attempt to leverage his success into divine favor? Have you ever tried to manipulate God or put Him in your debt? How?
5. Elisha’s prescription to Namaan was to wash himself in the Jordan seven times. Why did that offend Namaan’s sensibilities? How is the command to wash a perfect parable of receiving grace?
 - a. Reflect on the quote, “If you want God’s grace, all you need is need, all you need is nothing. But that kind of spiritual humility is hard to muster. We come to God saying, ‘Look at all I’ve done,’ or maybe ‘Look at all I’ve suffered.’ God, however, wants us to look to Him—to just wash” (88).
6. What did it cost Namaan’s slave girl to tell him about Elisha? How is she a precursor to Jesus?
7. When do you struggle with feelings of inadequacy? What sorts of behaviors do you resort to in order to mask or dispel those feelings? Are you, in any way, relying on your performance to rescue you?
8. Why is the gospel of grace necessary for shifting our motivation from being fear-based to joy-based?
9. Keller ends the chapter by saying, “Jesus’ salvation is received not through strength but through the admission of weakness and need” (95). Is this good news or bad news? Does this gospel threaten you in any way? Why is humility such a difficult thing to cultivate? How does this statement run cross-wise to our human ways of thinking?
10. What is one thing you sense God calling you to do or be this week, as a result of reading and discussing this chapter?

Spend some time in prayer for one another

Your eye is on the sparrow
And Your hand, it comforts me
From the ends of the Earth to the depth of my heart
Let Your mercy and strength be seen

You call me to Your purpose
As angels understand
For Your glory, may You draw all men
As Your love and grace demand

And I will run to You
To Your words of truth
Not by might, not by power
But by the spirit of God
Yes I will run the race
'Till I see Your face
Oh let me live in the glory of Your grace

-I Will Run to You (Darlene Zschech)