

Homegroup Notes for Week Beginning 17/3/2025.

Introduction:

'Above All', Belmont Morning Teaching, February 2nd- March 23rd, 2025.

"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods."

Psalms 40:4

Introduction:

Why?

This series seeks to draw the church back to a full God-glorifying life in Christ by considering the effect of idols. It recognises the creation of an idol whenever an idea, an object, or an aspiration usurps the place of God at the centre of our lives. In this way we break faith with God, who says at the outset of his covenant **'You shall have no gods before/besides me'** (Exodus 20/3) and we find ourselves enslaved- as 2 Peter 2.19 says, **'They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."'**

Idolatry is a matter *for the church* and its worship, a matter of discipleship. It is not about sniping at the world but recognising when the world is shaping the culture and more importantly the values of the church and of believers. What remains is a body without integrity, an ersatz church lacking the conviction and freedom that comes from being devoted to the Lord Jesus.

Put otherwise this series seeks to provide a pathway to reassess faith and to sift out all that distracts us and hinders us by fixing our eyes afresh upon Jesus (Hebrews 12.1-2, the subject of our 'All Together' services on January 5th and February 23rd)

What?

The series will be structured around four phases.

- The first week will identify what an idol is, setting that within a contemporary understanding having looked at the way that idols are presented in Scripture.
- Week two will look at two ways in which idolatry is addressed and dealt with from the Bible, both of which ultimately looking to the call back to God in Christ.
- Weeks three to six will look at specific contemporary areas of potential idolatry and examine the way they work and what the good life centred on Christ does to reclaim good creation from being turned to seductive counterfeit gods.
- Week seven will celebrate a life lived out of true worship and identify the anchorage in faith that glorifies God and sets us free to enjoy shalom in creation.

Week Beginning March 17th:

NB. These notes are not designed to be followed in their entirety. Please select from them the areas you want to discuss.

This week's material is developed from the talk on March 2nd about Information and Distraction but also has some reference initially to Paul's talk about intimacy, relationships, and sex on February 16th.



In Genesis 15, God speaks to Abram in a vision. There are two different translations on the first sentence:

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

OR *"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your reward will be very great."*

- What difference does it make if we see God as our reward, not as the one who rewards us?
- What would it mean to live with an understanding of God as our reward?



- You might like to begin your time of prayer with a song of devotion to God?

Possibly read the words of 'Be thou my vision'?

- Spend some time reflecting on God as our 'very great reward.'
- Give thanks together?



Paul spoke about Augustine's words, *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."*

- How might that thought inform our understanding of our struggles with 'idols'?
- What might we prioritise in response to Augustine's remark to find 'rest' (peace)?
- How can housegroup help to foster that peace?

Paul also spoke about the fact God encourages intimacy and friendship but does not make sex obligatory in this.

- What do you understand by the word 'intimacy'?
- Can you think of examples from the Bible?
- What does intimacy with God look like? How does that inform other intimacies?
- Are there people who may feel excluded in our church fellowship who we need to be especially aware of as we talk about intimacy and relationship?

Jonny spoke from Genesis 3.1-5 in discussing distraction and the addictive need to be informed or not to miss out.

Read these verses together:

- How does the serpent distort the words of God and what are the consequences?

- Jonny made the point that 'becoming like God' can be confused with 'becoming gods.' We are already made 'in his image.' What is the subtle difference between being called to be 'like God' and desiring to become gods?
- Jonny spoke about 'FOMO 'fear of missing out.' In Genesis 3 what is the serpent offering that will ensure humanity does not miss out?
- What do we miss because of following the serpent's advice?
- Jonny quoted "*While the fruit reduced the capability gap between God and humanity, it widened the character gap.*"
- Can we be more concerned with our capability than our character?
- Read Genesis 3.7-8, what are the consequences of following the serpent's advice?

Some practicalities:

Jonny concluded his talk spending some time focusing on the distractions specific to our age. Here are some of the quotes he used:

"We live in an information addicted age, where we also have a tsunami of information – truth and counter truth – instantly and readily available. What do we need to know, how quickly and is it possible to be less compelled and more attentive to God and to community?"

It can be a good thing to own a mobile but it's not healthy to be owned by the phone.

- How can we ensure that the 'good thing' of mobile technology and our internet-informed and connected world is experienced as a grace rather than an idol?
- Jonny spoke about these practical measures:
 - Binning social media apps
 - Switching off notifications
 - Having a sabbath rhythm