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In the book *Counterfeit Gods*, Timothy Keller expresses the belief that there are false idols in all of our lives. The desires that are in one's heart, if left unchecked, will become the focus of life rather than the Lord. Keller uses Abraham as an example of one who gives up everything for the sake of God. However, even Abraham allowed his promised son, Isaac, to temporarily take first place over God. Nevertheless, when God called on Abraham to show his dedication to God over Isaac, Abraham chose to trust the Lord utterly throughout the entire experience, as he made the decision to live for the Lord completely. We must also trust in God completely and, once we do that, we will realize that we no longer need the idols in the controlling ways that we once did.

Keller further explains that one of the most common idols in peoples' lives is love. People expect the love that they find, whether through marriage, multiple marriages, or extramarital relations, to make them complete, but this is an empty promise. Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel exemplify this. Jacob was blinded by his love for Rachel and willing to do almost anything in order to obtain her. When Laban realized this, he took advantage of this weakness by simultaneously getting rid of his unwanted daughter, Leah, and obtaining free labor from Jacob. Another misguided idea entertained was Leah's desperate yearning for Jacob's love, which she thought could be obtained through bearing him sons. While Rachel remained barren, Leah gave birth to many sons. However, Jacob took no notice of Leah, no matter how many

times she thought, “this child will make my husband notice me for sure.” By her fourth son, Leah finally realized that she needed to direct her attention to the Lord instead of trying to make Jacob care about her. It is through this son that Jesus is born, and the treatment of Leah foreshadows how Jesus was treated throughout his earthly existence.

Another false god, as Keller points out, is wealth. Many do not realize, or want to admit, that they indulge in greed, but it is found in most everybody in our culture. Zacchaeus illustrated this lifestyle perfectly; he was one of the wealthiest men in Jericho, yet he would always try to get more money. He was blind to his own greed. When he met Jesus; however, something changed. He was willing to endure public humiliation by climbing up a tree to see Jesus. After dining with Him, Zacchaeus pledged to give fifty percent of his income to the poor and to repay back anyone that he had cheated four times the amount. Zacchaeus realized that he was incredibly poor in the area that mattered: his belief and faith in God. We can learn from this that there are different levels of idols, “deep” and “surface.” Each surface idol is there because of a deeper wanting, such as power, approval, comfort, and control. Money is an example of this concept, as one can want money to gain power, to have approval from peers, to have financial comfort, and to exert control over others.

An additional idol that Keller exposed is the empty promise of success. Many people feel they must constantly prove their worthiness by being successful in all that they do. This is dangerous in several ways, from them viewing themselves as “god,” to their confidence being shattered when they encounter a failure. This view of achievement is not a new cultural development; it existed even in biblical times. Naaman, the powerful commander of Aram’s army, had wealth and achievements, but also had the shameful and fatal disease leprosy. God chose to humble him and teach him that human achievement has its limitations. God used

servants and the dirty water from the Jordan to cure Naaman. This went against Naaman's world view, as he thought these simple things were far beneath him; however, God used these "simple" things to perform a miracle for this powerful man, which caused Naaman to believe in the God of Israel. We can learn from Naaman's experience, as well as Jesus's connection to this same principle. He was the entire world's servant and paid the ultimate price for the safety of the world: death.

Another major distraction from God is the area of ideology displayed through politics and nationalism. People view their political party as the only authority on knowing how to run the country, and they refuse to listen to the other side of the political spectrum, whether they are in agreement or not. It is also hard to name the exact point when a concept such as patriotism or equality is pushed too far and becomes detrimental to the nation, and often the entire world. Systems of government can also become idols, as what happened with communism. This is a form of deifying power, and the actions that King Nebuchadnezzar partook could be considered the same. He became so powerful that he viewed himself as god, yet he was also paranoid that his power would be taken away. God showed Nebuchadnezzar that God is ultimately in control by causing Nebuchadnezzar to suffer a mental breakdown, then restoring his sanity. We are scared to admit that we are not in control of every aspect of our own lives and are devastated when something outside of our control causes us harm. We try to put ourselves above God, but we would be well served to remember King Nebuchadnezzar.

In addition, Keller asserts that, alongside the obvious idols in our lives, there are also "hidden" idols that come from the influence of our culture on us. In the business world, managers must think for the good of the company in the long run, and also know what is good regardless, such as paying their employees more and treating them well. There are three

possibilities for American society: one that focuses on God; one that focuses on America as the “god” nation; and one that focuses on ourselves as “gods.” An example of focus on the “god” nation would be Jonah, as he saw the nation of Israel in this light. He disobeyed God because he viewed preaching to Nineveh “aiding the enemy” and did not want Assyria to survive. Even though he agreed to go preach because of his encounter with God’s power, he became angry with God when God showed Nineveh grace. This reveals that he had not truly worked God’s plan into his heart; therefore God confronts him with a comparison of how Jonah wasn’t loving like God was, and Jonah repented. Jesus, unlike Jonah, showed the ultimate grace by not keeping it just for one nation, but instead making it available to all.

Furthermore, Keller proposes that one cannot simply remove an idol, as it will find its way back into their life. It must be replaced with a love and adoration for God. Jacob begins to realize this as he is wrestling with God. He demands a blessing, because he knows that God is the only thing that matters and, if he does not hold on to God, his existence would mean nothing. We should learn this as well, as we look for the ultimate blessing in all worldly idols, such as power and money, and never find it until we finally turn to God and receive His blessing.

As I was reading this book, I realized that a false idol in my life is the “mood” of my friends. I always feel happy when my friends are happy, and I am sad when they are sad. This is a controlling factor in my life, and I sometimes pay more attention to it than what the Lord is telling me. This is a version of the “acceptance” idol that I have dealt with for most of my life. It stems from my childhood, as I was the kid that was overlooked and not accepted by most of the others throughout my elementary years.

If acceptance did not have such a strong hold in my life, and I had not set it up as an idol, I could focus more on “doing” than on “feeling.” My time would be better spent not on trying

to bolster the feelings of the others around me, but instead directing my actions as well as others in the direction that God would want. I would also pay more attention to how God would want me to respond in a crisis situation, rather than reacting in a way that would cater to the feelings of the other person in the situation. I now see that the desire of acceptance by others is a form of idolatry, as is all other sins. It should be rooted out and replaced with God's acceptance instead.