



CAMPUS GODS

created by
Tyler Ellis

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“Campus gods” is a 7-lesson study suitable for small groups, one-on-ones or for personal study, inspired by Guy Chmielecki’s book by the same title (used by permission). Each lesson addresses an idol that students are particularly prone to worshiping on campus. These include the gods of achievement, sex, substances and information.

Lesson guides contain scripture readings as well as excerpts from commendable authors such as Kyle Idleman, Randy Alcorn, and Craig Groeschel. Helpful questions are also provided for group discussion or personal journaling and application.

Ultimately, as students gain a new perspective on idolatry, the heart as a battleground, and the jealousy of God, they will grow in understanding and in passionate resolve to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

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LESSON 1 – THE BATTLEGROUND OF THE GODS

Discussion Questions

1. See if your group can collectively list the Ten Commandments. (For help, see Exodus 20:1-17)
2. While most people will admit to lying, stealing, and dishonoring their parents, why might the average person assume they haven't broken the first commandment? (Probing Question: What comes to mind when you think of idolatry?)
3. Martin Luther once said you can't violate the last nine commandments without breaking the first one first. What do you suppose Luther meant by that statement?

Reading

In his book, *gods at war*, Kyle Idleman says, "What if it's not about statues? What if the gods of here and now are not cosmic deities with strange names? What if they take identities that are so ordinary that we don't recognize them as gods at all? What if we do our "kneeling" and our "bowing" with our imaginations, our checkbooks, our search engines, our calendars? What if I told you that every sin you are struggling with, every discouragement you are dealing with, even the lack of purpose you're living with is because of idolatry? Anything at all can become an idol once it becomes a substitute for God in our lives. Anything that becomes the purpose or driving force in your life probably points back to idolatry of some kind. Idolatry is always the issue. It's the trunk of the tree, and all other problems are just branches."

Discussion Questions

4. Imagine your heart as a battleground, at the center of which sits a throne. In light of Kyle Idleman's quotation, what idols can you think of that compete for the throne of people's hearts today?
5. Briefly share an example or personal story of a time you or someone you know struggled with a temptation and tried to treat the symptoms instead of the deeper issue? What happened in the long run?

Reading

Discuss what the following scriptures have to say about the heart and why they are relevant to the topic of idolatry: Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:33-35; 22:37-38.

LESSON 2 – OUR JEALOUS GOD

Discussion Questions

1. By way of review, have someone in your group recap how we today can actually break the commandment not to worship idols, without literally bowing down before a graven image.
2. How would you define jealousy?
3. While we generally think of jealousy as harmful or sinful, there are scenarios in which jealousy can be a good thing. Imagine if you were married and someone started a rumor that you were having an affair. What would it say about your spouse if they heard the rumor, believed it, but weren't jealous?
4. Read Exodus 20:4-5. Then read 34:14 and discuss how it elaborates on the jealousy of God.

Reading

“For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24). In the Bible, the words jealous and zealous are basically interchangeable – it’s the same Hebrew word in the original texts. We think of zeal as being intense enthusiasm. That idea captures why God is so possessive about us: he is, as he says, a consuming fire of passion for us. We need to remember, as we talk about God’s intolerance of idolatry, that everything comes back to a passionate love that is so immense, so powerful, that it burns hotter than a billion suns. The only relationship God is interested in is one that is exclusive and completely committed. He is not interested in an “open relationship” with you. God is jealous for your heart, not because he is petty or insecure, but because he loves you. You can’t understand the seriousness of idolatry without understanding the jealousy of God. And you can’t understand his jealousy without some understanding of his relentless, powerful love for you, because they are intertwined.”

~Kyle Idleman, *gods at war*

Discussion Questions

5. The Bible uses a powerful analogy to describe what idolatry feels like to God. The prophets compare it to a cheating spouse. How does this analogy change the way you view yourself, God, and His moral guidelines?
6. Have someone in your group quote John 3:16 (or read if necessary). The event of the coming of Jesus represents just how far God is willing to go to win your heart. Why is it important that we understand the reason Jesus came to earth, before we move on in our series to address specific idols we struggle with today?

LESSON 3 – THE GOD OF ACHIEVEMENT

Discussion Questions

1. Bowing down to the god of achievement is one of the most common forms of idolatry on campus. As you read characteristics of this god, consider sharing with your group, one you've struggled with:
 - You're more concerned about making an "A" than actually learning.
 - Your participation in anything hinges on whether there are opportunities for you to be a leader.
 - You allow your demanding schedule to come before your health (proper food, exercise, sleep).
 - You're obsessed with winning and you're slow to celebrate the successes of others.
 - You don't really know what contentment feels like.
 - Your relationships are superficial because you use people in order to get what you want.
 - Your feelings of stress and anxiety seem like a way of life.
 - You're gradually forming addictions and/or have even contemplated suicide.
 - You're prone to neglect family, friends, church, Bible reading, and prayer.
 - You view salvation as something to be achieved, as if Heaven depends on your spiritual résumé.
 - Your identity is tied to your achievements rather than the thoughts and feelings God has for you.

2. Discuss what Walker Percy and Jesus are and are not saying about achievement in the quotes below:

"You can get all A's and still flunk life." ~Walker Percy

"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ~Jesus (Mark 8:36)

Reading

"The word success is not found very frequently in the Scriptures, but one of the closest biblical equivalents is the word blessed. Jesus gives an in-depth portrait of what it means to be blessed when he begins the Sermon on the Mount."

~Kyle Idleman, *gods at war*

The order of the beatitudes is very important. Jesus begins by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." (Matthew 5:3) In other words, Jesus is saying, "Successful are those who are humble enough to ask for help."

An interview with a college student (adapted from *The Fuel and the Flame*, by Steve Shadrach):

- INTERVIEWER: "So why did you come to college?"
- STUDENT: "Well, I'm here because I want to get a good education."
- INTERVIEWER: "Okay...but why do you want to get a good education?"

- STUDENT: “Mmmm. Well...because I want to get a good job.”
- INTERVIEWER: “A good job, huh? Why is it that you want to get a good job?”
- STUDENT: “I admit it, I want a good job so I can get a better salary.”
- INTERVIEWER: “Well, why would you want a better salary?”
- STUDENT: “I see where you’re going with this!”

“Goals of advancement in the world are not necessarily sinful unless they become idols. The real question is, what is your motivation? Is it for your glory or God’s?” ~Kyle Idleman, *gods at war*.

Discussion Questions

3. Was Jesus successful? How should the answer to this question shape the way we view achievement?
4. Read, discuss, and pray together about what the following Scriptures have to offer pertaining to achievement: Colossians 3:23; Matthew 6:33; John 6:27; Philippians 3:4-9.

LESSON 4 – THE GOD OF SEX

Sex was not invented by Hollywood but by God. Genesis 3:1 says, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Sex was part of the “all” that was so good. Even after the fall of Adam and Eve, God’s Word speaks openly of the pleasure of sex within marriage (Proverbs 5:18-19; Song of Solomon 4:5; 7:1, 6-9).¹ God created hormones and attraction, and designed our bodies to give and receive pleasure.

Sex is a gift from God. However, a gift can become a god when we love it more than the giver.

1. How have you seen the god of sexual pleasure worshipped on campus or in your own life?

Consider the gift of fire. In a stove, it heats our food. In a lantern, it lights our way. In a fireplace, it warms our bodies. Yet when those same flames move outside their boundaries, what happens? Horrible devastation. The most magnificent gifts of God, taken outside their God-intended boundaries, become utterly ruinous. So it is with sex. Its potential for great good has a flip side – potential for great evil.²

When we walk inside God’s boundaries for sex, we demonstrate that the giver of sex is the object of our worship. But when we walk outside God’s boundaries for sex, we demonstrate that the gift of sex is the object of our worship. This is a form of idolatry.

The more we care about God, the more we will care about his blessings and boundaries for sex. Before we look at specific scriptures on the topic, there are two concepts that will be helpful to understand: the definition of fornication and the meaning of sexual immorality. First, the dictionary defines fornication as “voluntary sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons or two persons not married to each other.” Second, sexual immorality comes from the Greek word *porneia*, from which we derive the word pornography. *Porneia* literally means anything that causes sexual arousal outside of marriage.³

2. Read the following scriptures and briefly discuss what they say about God’s boundaries for sex: 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4.

It’s important that we comprehend not only that God opposes sexual sin, but why he opposes it. Like guardrails on a highway, God’s boundaries aren’t given to deprive us of pleasure but to protect us from harm, so as to ensure true pleasure.⁴

3. When we are confronted with a boundary from God, why does it help to understand the moral reason why behind the command?

A great deal of research has been done by social scientists on the subjects of pornography, premarital sex, and cohabitation. Here is a sobering list of consequences that can follow:

- Increased chances of disease.
- Increased chances of sexual dissatisfaction.
- Increased chances of rape.
- Increased chances of domestic violence.
- Increased chances of kids without fathers.
- Increased chances of prostitution.
- Increased chances of abortion.
- Increased chances of suicide (or attempts).
- Increased chances of marital affairs & divorce.
- Increased chances of indifference toward God.

All of us have offered sacrifices of some kind on the altar of sexual pleasure, obsessing over the gift rather than the giver. Amazingly, God's forgiveness is readily available, though it may look different for the person who is a Christian and the person who is not.

An illustration will help. Imagine a leaking pipe under a sink. What we can see on the outside of the pipe are cracks dripping water on the floor. But what we cannot see on the inside of the pipe is a clog causing the cracks to spring up because of mounting pressure. This illustrates two things: what sin is and what confession looks like. The clog represents our rebellious heart of sin, which is essentially choosing our ways over God's ways. The cracks represent our specific sins, which are manifestations of the heart (e.g. lying, stealing, sexual immorality, etc.). Just as the clog should be repaired before the cracks, the general heart of sin should be confessed before the specific expressions of sin are addressed.

According to the Christian worldview, God's forgiveness is not achieved on the basis of our ability to repair the proverbial cracks, but rather received on the basis of Jesus' ability to repair the proverbial clog. So confession looks different for the person who is a Christian and for the person who is not.

The Christian who has looked to Jesus as leader and forgiver has confessed the sin of choosing his or her ways over God's ways. Having been forgiven and reconciled to God (see Acts 2:38), the Christian is then given God's Holy Spirit to help repair the cracks as they confess specific sins from that point on (see 1 John 1:9).

4. Does the clogged pipe illustration make sense? What happens when people are misled to believe that God's forgiveness is based on our ability to repair the proverbial cracks of specific sins?

1. Alcorn, Randy. The Purity Principle.
2. Alcorn, Randy. The Purity Principle.

3. Groeschel, Craig. Weird.
4. Alcorn, Randy. The Purity Principle.

LESSON 5 – THE GOD OF INFORMATION

Information is a broad term. It encompasses knowledge and news, facts and fiction, claims and creeds, research and reports, speculations and opinions, directions and instructions, statistics and hypotheses, jokes and trivia, stories and gossip, advice and more.

It might sound strange to imagine that information, of all things, could become an idol that would compete for the worship that belongs to the Lord God alone. But the fact is, we can become addicted to information. We can allow information to make us fearful, or arrogant, or apathetic. We can even be deceived by wrong information that can potentially lead us away from God altogether.

In this study, we will consider characteristics of the god of information. Each characteristic includes a few talking points, a question to discuss, and a scripture to look up and pray into your life as a group.

TIME & WISDOM

- The average American spends 41% of their life staring at a screen.
- **How has the god of information made you or someone you know a chronic time waster?**
- Read and pray Psalm 90:12 into your life.

FEAR & TRUST

- Media outlets pick and choose what stories to share and they often put their own slant on the stories.
- As evidenced by websites like snopes.com, you can't trust everything you read on the Internet.
- **How has the god of information made you or someone you know fearful?**
- Read and pray Philippians 4:6-7 into your life.

ARROGANCE & HUMILITY

- It's easy to think we know more than we do. If we become proud, it will be hard for us to welcome mentors, ask for help, learn to interpret and apply information, and prepare for the future.
- **How has the god of information made you or someone you know arrogant?**
- Read and pray Proverbs 18:12 into your life.

DECEPTION & TRUTH

- Truth isn't determined by the majority vote.
- History is riddled with examples of beliefs held by entire cultures that were eventually shown to be wrong: the geocentric theory, bloodletting, eugenics, slave trade, segregation, and many end-of-the-world predictions.
- When it comes to our search for truth concerning life's biggest questions, our motives and methods make a big difference. We must be willing to go where truth points at all cost.
- **How has the god of information made you or someone you know deceived or close-minded?**
- Read and pray 1 Thessalonians 5:21 into your life.

LESSON 6 – THE GOD OF SUBSTANCE

The success of college students is very much shaped by the experiments they choose to conduct, both inside and outside the classroom. While knowledge is the “substance” typically consumed in history, math and English courses, “Parties 101” is among the courses many students register for each semester, and the “substances” consumed are almost always drugs and alcohol. As parties have become a trademark of the college experience, the god of substance has become a prominent altar on campus, at which many a student has offered sacrifices.

According to www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov:

- Each year, 1,825 students die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries.
- 97,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.
- 1 out of 4 students having unprotected sex say they were too intoxicated to know if they consented.
- About 25% of students report academic consequences of their drinking, including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.
- 31% of students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse.¹

Whether the use and abuse of substances is a temptation you struggle with today or not, what value is there in examining the motives people have in consuming them, and the motives God has in regulating them?

God’s motives behind regulating drugs and alcohol

While some people believe the Bible condemns drinking all together, it is the opinion of the author of this Bible study that the Bible doesn’t condemn drinking but drunkenness. Two passages worth reading on your own are Psalm 104:14-15 and John 2:1-12, the latter of which Jesus turns water to wine at a party. Ultimately, whether your interpretation leads you to abstain or partake in moderation, you should live in line with that interpretation, so as not to violate your conscience.

The Law

- All drug use, except for legitimate medicinal purposes, is illegal. That includes sharing and selling your own prescription drugs of every kind.
- If you are under the age of 21 in America, then it is illegal for you to drink alcohol.
- Read Romans 13:1. What we can conclude about God’s motives for regulating substances, as it pertains to the law?

Controlling Influence

- Liberty comes with responsibility, and the consequences of abuse are painfully real.²
- Short-term effects of getting high or getting drunk: memory loss and vision impairment, slower muscular reaction, and increased error due to lack of attention and judgment.
- Long-term effects of getting high or getting drunk: depression, addiction, life-ending accidents, suicide (attempts); unintended pregnancies, rape, domestic violence and crime; as well as the loss of paychecks, scholarships, driving privileges, careers, and health.
- Read Proverbs 23:29-35 and Ephesians 5:18. What we can conclude about God's motives for regulating substances, as it pertains to controlling influences?

The Body

- While alcohol and tobacco use are not illegal, they are highly addictive and have been proven to be major contributors to many diseases.
- Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. What we can conclude about God's motives for regulating substances, as it pertains to the body?

Others

- It is not loving to drink in the face of someone who is underage, or strongly tempted by it, or has a history of abusing it.
- Read Romans 14:20-21. What we can conclude about God's motives for regulating substances, as it pertains to others?

Wisdom

- Deciding to drink is a risk that must be calculated in light of many things, such as who you are, and the family you were born into.
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:23. What we can conclude about God's motives for regulating substances, as it pertains to wisdom?

People's motives behind consuming drugs and alcohol

There are a number of reasons people use and abuse substances.

- These include: to have fun with friends, to break the ice with the opposite sex, to cope with stress, to escape one's present reality. There is also the desire to be liked and accepted. No one wants to feel like an outcast, so they do what everyone else is doing.³
- The slang that people use for getting drunk also tells us a lot. People call it getting wasted or they talk about getting hammered, wrecked, trashed, smashed, tanked, blitzed, and many other terms.⁴

Too Christian, Too Pagan

There is an excellent book relevant to the topic at hand entitled, *Too Christian, Too Pagan*, in which Dick Staub proposes that some Christians are too Christian, and some are too pagan (i.e. irreligious).

Christians become too Christian when...

- They assume they cannot associate with people who aren't also Christians.
- All their friends are Christians; they're comfortable in their Christian subculture.
- They complain about the horrible things going on in our culture, and how evil people can be.

Christians become too pagan when...

- They reduce their faith to intellectual positions, but those beliefs never touch their everyday life.
- None of their closest friends are Christians.
- They conform to the corruption of the world.

The balance we need is found in the Word of God and in the example of Jesus. The question isn't did Jesus go to parties (Matthew 9:10-12; 11:19) but why did he go to parties?

What does it mean to be "in the world but not of the world?" (John 17:15)

Personal Questions

- Are substances controlling you? Are you ready to surrender them to God? Do you need help?
- Are you more preoccupied with what others think of you than what God thinks of you?
- Are there situations you need to avoid because you're too weak to resist?
- Where do you land on the scale of "Too Christian" or "Too Pagan"?

LESSON 7 – THE GOD OF ME

Review

With this lesson, we come to the end of our *Campus gods* series. We began the series by discussing how it's possible to break the commandment that says not to worship idols, without literally bowing down to a graven image.

In an effort to “love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength,” we’ve addressed some of the most common idols found particularly on the university campus, which compete for the throne of students’ hearts today.

- 1. In addition to the various gods we’ve discussed over the past several weeks (Achievement, Sex, Information, and Substance), what other gods would you add to the list?**
- 2. Do you agree with the statement: “all gods, in one way or another, attempt to take the One True God off the throne and put me in His place”? Why or why not?**

The following reading is adapted from Kyle Idleman’s book, “gods at war.”

The foundation of reality is that there is one God, and you are not him. Once that’s established, a choice must be made, and here it is: I know that there is the Lord God, the master of all creation. I also know there’s the god of me, the pretender to the throne. Whom will I serve?

Will I worship God, and find my true place in this universe, the perfect place he has arranged for me? Or will I worship me and decide I can somehow come up with a better life than the Creator could design?

What God once said to the King of Tyre, could be said to all of us today, at one point in our lives: “In the pride of your heart you say, ‘I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god’ ... But you are a mere mortal and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god” (Ezekiel 28:2).

Broken Cisterns

READ: Jeremiah 2:9,11-13

Jeremiah summarizes the rebellion of God’s people into two sins: they have rejected God and have instead turned to worthless idols. He explains to the people that when we put ourselves on the throne instead of God, it’s like insisting on digging our own broken cisterns to drink out of when there is a spring of fresh, living water flowing right beside us.

1. CAMPUS GODS, by Guy Chmielecki
2. Welcome to College, by Jonathan Morrow

3. University of Destruction, by David Wheaton
4. King of the Campus, by Stephen Lutz.

Cisterns were an important part of everyday life in Israel during Jeremiah's time. In fact, thousands of them have been uncovered by archaeologists. Rain was infrequent and scarce about half the year, so the people in those days would dig their cisterns and then line them with bricks and plaster to hold water. But cisterns were always breaking and losing water. Even when they didn't break, the water would often become stagnant or the supply would be inadequate.

The people would have thought of Jeremiah's metaphor as ridiculous. No one would ever choose a cistern as their water source when a spring of crystal clear water was available. But that captures the ridiculousness of idolatry. We choose a broken well with stagnant water, instead of the spring of fresh water. We look to something or someone to do for us what God was meant to do for us.

3. Finish the following statements:

Instead of looking to God as our source of comfort, we turn to _____

Instead of looking to God as our source of significance, we turn to _____

Instead of looking to God as our source of security, we look to _____

Instead of looking to God as our source of joy, we look to _____

Instead of looking to God as our source of hope, we look to _____

Instead of looking to God as our source of truth, we look to _____

Those things we look to for help aren't necessarily bad or evil in and of themselves. In fact God may use them to accomplish his purpose, but the question is, have they become broken cisterns that we turn to instead of living water? Am I putting my hope in something that doesn't hold water?

The Living Water

READ: John 4:13-14.

So what are you thirsty for? Are you stressed out and thirsty for peace? Are you lonely and thirsty for love? Are you bored and thirsty for purpose? Are you thirsty for acceptance? For validation? For significance? Are you just thirsty for something more? The god of me relentlessly calls us to chase after all these things. But ultimately we're left more thirsty than ever.

So here's the invitation from Jesus: "Drink from me, and you'll never thirst again."

4. As a result of this series, what have you learned about God? What have you learned about yourself? How does this affect your approach to daily living?

Personal Application

5. Based on what you have learned about God and yourself, what is God asking you to do? What is preventing you from doing this? How can our group help you take these steps? (Set a goal that is specific, attainable, and measurable).

Prayer