

Bible Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S NOTES BEGIN ON PAGE 245 OF THE BOOK.

Welcome! The following guide is designed to be used alongside each chapter of *Idol Lies*. My own life and the lives of women piloting this study have been so dramatically changed by understanding our heart idols that I am excited about what God will do in your life. I encourage you to do this study with a friend or group of women if possible, for women meeting together, seeking God, sharing honestly, and caring for one another is one of the sweetest places this side of heaven.

What *you* bring to this gathering is a huge factor in how rich your group will be. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you begin.

- The women who are most likely to form deep friendships with each other and with God are the women who show they care through being faithful in attendance and in homework.
- The homework is divided into five days. Work through these questions before you meet with your group. When you meet, you will first watch a short video and then discuss your homework.
- The guide is designed for you to do the first lesson before the first meeting. The page numbers in this guide refer to page numbers in the book *Idol Lies*.
- You can write in the book or download and print the lesson at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>. This downloadable format provides extra space and also has links for valuable additional resources—all of it intended to allow you to more effectively absorb and apply Scripture's truths in your life.
- Something else to keep in mind when you meet: If you are naturally talkative, hold back to give the shy women a chance to gather courage and speak up. And if you are shy, circle a few answers ahead of time and ask the Lord for strength to speak up so you too can enrich the group.

Take the above to heart, and this will be an unforgettable group.

—DEE BRESTIN

LESSON 1: LAYERS OF LIES

VIDEO 1: Layers of Lies (The videos before each lesson are ten to twenty minutes each and available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>. You can watch them on your own or wait and watch them in your group. For more information on the videos, see the leader's notes starting on page 245.)

ICE BREAKERS

- A. Share your name, why you've come, and what you hope to receive from this study.
- B. What stood out to you from the video and why?

Prepare your heart for homework each day with prayer and music.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Combining prayer and Scripture leads to power. When a verse in the study becomes "radioactive" to you, use it for personal prayer. For example, this week one of the first scriptures is Jeremiah 17:9, which says we have deceitful hearts. Right then you could pray, "Lord, help me see the truth about my real desires and give me Your desires instead." This is a life-changing way to combine Bible study and prayer.

SONG: Sing to the Lord with understanding. Suggestions for this week: "Open the Eyes of My Heart" by Paul Baloche, "Eyes Wide Open" by Sara Groves, and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" by Isaac Watts. If you Google these titles and artists you will find various websites with lyrics, music, or video versions.

DAY 1: DECEITFUL HEARTS

1. Read chapter 1 in the book, underlining or highlighting ideas, phrases, or verses that stand out to you.
 - A. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things." How, in the story in this chapter about Dee's assistants, had Dee deceived herself?

- B. Proverbs 20:5 says, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." How did Dee's friend Jan begin to do that for Dee?

C. Find at least two things that stood out to you from this chapter and explain why they stood out.

D. A group can only be as rich as its individual members. How do you think the Lord would have you enrich this group by your:

1) Preparation?

2) Sharing in discussion?

3) Responding to others?

4) Openness to God?

DAY 2:

IDOLS OF THE HEART

Often we think idolatry doesn't apply to us because we confine it to outward idolatry, bowing down to statues. But the Bible also warns against inward idolatry.

If possible, watch the three-minute video from David Powlison that asks, "Is idolatry a problem in my life?"; <http://www.ccef.org/video/idolatry-problem-my-life>.

2. Read Ezekiel 14:1-5.

A. When certain elders of Israel came before Ezekiel, what did God tell the prophet about their hearts?

- B. The NLT translates verse 3a as, “Son of man, these leaders have set up idols in their hearts. They have embraced things that will make them fall into sin.” Explain how an idol of the heart, such as power or the approval of others, could lure a person, even a spiritual leader, into sin.
- C. Look at verse 5 and explain what idols of the heart do to our relationship with God.
3. Dr. David Powlison says that whenever something bad comes out of our mouth or our life, it reflects an idol of the heart. Can you give an example of this from your life recently?

DAY 3:
RED FLAGS FOR IDOLATRY

There is always a danger with a familiar story that we will presume we know the point when we might not. Try to put aside your presuppositions as you read.

4. Read Luke 10:38–42.
- A. Why do you think Martha was so anxious and worried?
- B. Look again at verse 40. The Greek word translated *distracted*, *cumbered*, or *worried* comes from a root that means “to carry a weight.” Being alert to our body language is one way to become aware when a heart idol is motivating us. What do you imagine Martha’s body language might have been at this time?

DAY 4:

DISCERNING WHAT WE MIGHT LOVE MORE THAN GOD

Once you spot the red flags that an idol is operating in your life, the next step is discerning what heart idol is operating. Though this is not a comprehensive list of what we might idolize, it provides a helpful way to think of our most common idols:

- Comfort/Security
- Approval/Affirmation
- Power/Control

7. Martin Luther commented that breaking commandments two through nine of the Ten Commandments is always preceded by breaking the first commandment to have no other gods before God. Give an example of how you have seen this to be true in your own life. (See Exodus 20:1–17 for the Ten Commandments.)
8. What did Jesus say to Martha in Luke 10:42? Based on Mark 12:29–30, what do you think is “the most important thing” or “the one thing that is necessary”?
9. What might have been Martha’s deep heart idol that was producing bad fruit in her life? Why do you think that? Might there have been more than one idol involved? Explain.
10. How could Jesus have met Martha’s needs better than her heart idol could?
11. Answer these questions to see if you can begin to discern what things might be more important to you than God.
 - A. Where do you tend to go for joy and peace in your mind?

B. What, if you lost it, might make you feel like life was not worth living?

C. Where do you spend your money most effortlessly?

12. With these things in mind, do you have a sense of what heart idol might be prominent in your life? If so, what is it?

DAY 5:
MARTHA, MARTHA

Jesus was passionate in His conversation with Martha because idols cause pain and block intimacy with Him.

13. How was Martha's idol hurting her and keeping her from Jesus?

14. If Martha had only tried to fix the symptom (the visible sin of worry), what might have been her approach? Why is seeing the root problem (the invisible deep idol) a more effective approach?

15. Are you seeing this story differently than you have in the past? If so, explain.

16. What is your take-away from this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: For this first meeting, the facilitator will close in prayer. If this is a group more comfortable with audible prayer, each woman can pray for the woman on her right for her understanding of this study. If group prayer is new to her, she can simply say, "Lord, bless (her name)."

- D. What else stood out to you in this chapter and why? Could you relate to Christy's story? If so, how?

DAY 2: **BONDAGE HAS LAYERS**

When the Israelites were delivered out of external slavery, they rejoiced. Yet they had a deeper bondage, an internal slavery, that kept them grumbling and wandering in the wilderness. Our bondage has layers.

2. Read Mark 8:22–26.
 - A. After Jesus touched the blind man the first time, how did the man respond to the question Jesus asked?

 - B. Jesus could have healed this man with one touch, but this miracle is also a parable. What does it teach us about spiritual blindness? What does it remind us about how we see people?

3. Counselor David Powlison suggests this exercise to help you discover your heart idols. Look up the following verses and turn their commands on their heads to help discover your heart idols:
 - A. “You shall love the LORD your God . . .” (Deuteronomy 6:5). What do you really love, cherish? To what or whom does your mind and heart run?

 - B. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart . . .” (Proverbs 3:5). What do you really trust—where do you run for refuge?

C. “Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing . . .” (Psalm 34:10). What do you most frequently seek?

D. “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever . . .” (Psalm 19:9). What do you fear? What, if you lost it, would make you feel desperate?

DAY 3: TURNING GIFTS INTO GODS

The Greek word *epithumia* (inordinate desire) turns up repeatedly in the Bible to describe our tendency toward wanting something too much because we think it will satisfy our soul. The gift itself is good—it is the “over” or “lustful” desire in our hearts for the gift that snares us.

4. In each of the following verses, a gift has been turned into a “god” because it was desired “too much.” (The NIV uses the phrase “too much,” while other translations have the concept of an inordinate desire.) Look up the verses below and describe the danger in each case. Also, in each example, what do you think may have been the deep heart idol that *enticed* the abuse?

A. Proverbs 20:19 (too much talk)

B. Proverbs 23:20 (too much wine, too much meat)

C. Proverbs 25:16 (too much honey)

D. Proverbs 25:17 (too much visiting)

E. Proverbs 30:8–9 (too much money)

Epithumia may also be translated “lusts,” and that sexual connotation shows what a strong pull it can have on us. In fact, James takes this word and expands it into a sexual metaphor: “The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer” (James 1:14-15, MSG).

5. Meditate on the above verse in *The Message* or another translation and unpack the metaphor:
 - A. From where does temptation come and how is it described?

B. What points does Paul make by comparing it to lust or to sexual desire?

C. When that desire grabs what it thinks it must have, to what does it “give birth”?

D. Then, what does sin do?

- E. Now paint this picture with an actual scenario, using a good gift like sweets or money or friendship. How could *epithumia* lure you into danger, give birth to sin, and then continue to multiply death in your own life?

DAY 4:

PUT OFF THE OLD, PUT ON THE NEW

Whenever the theme of heart transformation comes up in the Bible, you will find an exhortation to put off these inordinate desires and put on Christ. Idols cannot be removed, they can only be replaced, for our souls are like hungry whirlpools that will not tolerate a void. When we mentally replace trusting our *invisible* heart idol with trusting Christ, we are then empowered to replace the visible destructive behavior (such as saying unkind words) with visible constructive behavior (such as saying edifying words).

6. Read the appeal to believers in Ephesians 4:20–24 to be delivered from the power of sin. The word *epithumia* occurs at the close of verse 22. How is it translated in the Bible version you’re reading and what does this tell you?

7. Colossians 3 also deals with *epithumia* and replacing our heart idols with Christ: putting off and putting on. Read Colossians 3:1–4.
 - A. In verses 1–4, what commands are we given and why?

 - B. In terms of relationships, what happens to a friendship when that friend is “your life”? To a child when that child is “your life”? What happens to you in either of those cases?

 - C. If there comes a day when Christ is all you have, do you think you could survive? Be content? Why or why not?

DAY 5:
IDOLS DEMAND A SACRIFICE

Our idols are not our friends—they only pretend to be. They promise to solve a problem, but then they trap us. Pagans gave literal sacrifices to their idols, even sacrificing their children on the fire to the god Molech. Today, our soul idols extract blood from us as well: our health, our contentment, and our very lives.

8. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–20.

A. What happened to *most* of the Israelites whom God had set free from slavery in Egypt (verse 5)?

B. Why are these incidents recorded for us (verses 6–7)?

C. Resisting temptation involves *enduring* suffering but then leads to freedom and peace in the arms of our Savior. What promise do we have when we are tempted by an idol (verse 13)?

D. There is a demonic element to which we open ourselves when we worship idols. Find the warning in verse 20.

9. If you are beginning to see one of your heart idols, what sacrifice do you see it might demand?

10. Read Genesis 4:1–7.

A. What happened and why do you think Cain was so angry?

B. When something bad comes out of our heart or mouth, it is evidence that an idol of the heart is operating. What do you think Cain's deep idol might have been and why?

C. God gave Cain a vivid word picture of the desire that could lure him into destruction. Find it in verse 7.

The New American Standard version translates verse 7 as: "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?" When we embrace our idols, it shuts God out. When we turn away from them, He comes to us, His face shines upon us, and indeed, we are lifted up. God provided a way of escape for Cain, but Cain did not take it.

11. Read Genesis 4:8–16.

A. What did Cain do, and how do you see this leading to a downward spiral?

B. What price did Cain's idol, whatever it was, extract from him?

12. What is your take-away from this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: Have each woman share what idol or idols she is beginning to glimpse in her own heart. Then the facilitator should lift up each woman's name and two or three women may say a sentence prayer for her before the next woman's name is lifted up. If your group is large, divide into smaller groups of three or four.

LESSON 3: WHY ONLY SOME WILL BE SET FREE

VIDEO 3: Why Only Some Will Be Set Free (available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>)

ICE BREAKERS

(choose A or B to share and then go around the group to answer C)

- A. Jonathan Edwards says we do what we most want to do. What does this tell you about your dominant desires?
- B. What things do you think about the most? What does this tell you about your dominant desires?
- C. What stood out to you from the video and why?

Tim Keller has a free sermon entitled “Removing Idols of the Heart” available at www.redeemer.com that would be so helpful for you to listen to on your own this week: <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/removing-idols-heart>

Prepare your heart for homework each day with prayer and music.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Pray through 1 Peter 4:1–2 this week. You could pray something like this: “Lord, put steel in my heart to say no to my idol, the way Christ said no to temptation. May I look to things above and to being set free. Make my dominant desire living for Your will.”

SONG: “In Christ Alone” by Keith and Kristyn Getty.

DAY 1: DOMINANT DESIRES

1. Read the third chapter, highlighting as you go.
 - A. Choose two points to comment on. What are they and why did you choose them?

 - B. A. W. Tozer said that the reason some people “find” God in ways that other believers do not has to do with their dominant desire. This goes along with what Jesus said is the most important commandment. What is that commandment, according to Matthew 22:37?

DAY 2:
THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Every world religion offers a philosophy and commands its followers to obey. Christianity is unique in that it offers a power that helps us obey. So often we trust this power for initial salvation, but then we work really hard in our own strength to live the Christian life. Instead, we need to also trust this power to equip us to walk by faith moment by moment, to turn from our idols and toward the living God.

2. Read Romans 1:16–17.

A. Why did Paul refuse to be ashamed of the gospel (verse 16)?

B. Look at page 49 in *Idol Lies* for Jack Miller’s definition of the gospel. What are the two parts of the gospel?

C. Leslie gave an illustration from her life on page 49 and applied the gospel to help her achieve victory. What was the situation and how did each part of the gospel play a part in her repentance and faith?

3. Review Rebecca’s story from pages 43–45 and explain the following:

A. What problem was she trying to solve with food?

B. What lie had she embraced and how did this show the deceitfulness of her heart?

C. When she was afraid to let go of her idol, how did the second part of the gospel help her?

- D. Take a moment right now to give glory and thanks to God for who He is and how He has blessed you in the last twenty-four hours.

DAY 4:
EXCHANGING THE TRUTH FOR A LIE

Whenever we give in to our idols, we have exchanged the truth for a lie. The illustration given in this passage is the practice of homosexuality, but we are naive if we think this passage could not have also been illustrated with a multitude of other sins, including the one that besets us.

6. Read Romans 1:24–27.

A. What illustration did Paul give in verses 26–27 of exchanging the truth of God for a lie?

B. What did you learn from Wesley Hill’s testimony on pages 47–48?

C. Though your temptation may be different from Wesley Hill’s, when you are tempted, the lie may be the same: If you do not do this, you will have a “lesser life.” What is, indeed, the truth?

7. Read Romans 1:28–32.

A. When we are not willing to suffer to resist temptation, we are sucked into the downward spiral. Describe what happens to our mind and heart, according to verses 28–31.

- B. Give an example from your own life to illustrate verse 32—how you sometimes not only practice a sin, you approve of others who practice it.

DAY 5:

HE WHO SUFFERS IS DONE WITH SIN

Understanding the lie behind his temptation to embrace a gay lifestyle—that not to do so would lead to a “lesser life”—was pivotal for Wesley Hill. The same principle is true for us whether we are resisting unforgiveness, gluttony, manipulation, or another sin. We will suffer at first as we endure through the temptation, but then comes the “Greater Life.” We will experience intimacy with God and a joy and a strength that those who refuse to suffer will never know.

That is the truth we must receive in place of the lie. We will not be completely done with sin until, like Christ, we die and are resurrected. But we can experience the diminishing power of sin and increasing joy on this earth as we die to ourselves.

8. Read 1 Peter 4:1–2. What promise is there for the believer who is willing to suffer in order to say no to sin?

9. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.

A. Resisting temptation involves temporary suffering. What does this passage teach you that could help you not to lose heart?

B. What is the lie you tend to believe in a temptation you often face? Write down the truth you will put in its place.

10. Your success as this study continues depends on your dominant desire. What would you say is your dominant desire right now?

GROUP PRAYER: Each individual says a prayer about the specific truth that can take the place of a lie she believes. Let one or two others support her prayer. When there is a pause, the next individual lifts up her request.

LESSON 4: A SHOCKING METAPHOR

This lesson is longer than the others and your facilitator may choose to do it over two weeks or skip some sections in discussion. (If you divide this into two weeks, go through question 12 the first week.)

VIDEO 4: A Shocking Metaphor (available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>)

ICE BREAKERS

- A. Why do you think adultery leads to such intense emotional pain? Why do you think God calls it “treacherous” and “violent?” (God thunders at those who have betrayed their spouses. In Malachi 2:16, He condemns the unfaithful man, saying he “does violence to the one he should protect” [NIV].)
- B. What stood out to you from the video and why?

Prepare your heart daily with prayer and song.

PERSONAL PRAYER: The consequences of running after our idols may feel severe, but God’s purposes are always for our good. Pray through Hosea 2:14–15.

SONG: Consider singing “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” by Charles Wesley or “Arise, My Love” by Michael Card.

A free sermon you may wish to listen to on your own to help you understand how heart idols are like false lovers that hurt us is Tim Keller’s “Christ, Our Life,” available at redeemer.com: <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/christ-our-life>

DAY 1: A METAPHOR TO AWAKEN US

According to rabbinic tradition, a kiss from God is a living word of prophecy. When a verse leaps out at you and speaks to your heart, you are being kissed by God—slow down, savor it, and contemplate what He is telling you.

1. Read the fourth chapter, highlighting as you go.
 - A. Choose two points to comment on. What are they and why did you choose them?

E. How have you been like Gomer in the past? How are you like Gomer today?

4. Read Hosea 2:9–13.

A. What phrases stand out to you in this passage?

B. Describe the Lord's emotion in Hosea 2:13.

5. Read Hosea 2:14–15.

A. Where was God going to lead Gomer and what was He going to do there?

B. What is His ultimate purpose, according to verse 15, for leading us into the wilderness?

C. Be still before God and ask Him, "How does this relate to my life right now?" Is there a way God is speaking tenderly to you in whatever pain you are facing?

6. Read Hosea 2:16–23.

A. How will God's people one day relate to Him (verse 16) and why (verse 17)?

- B. In verse 18, God referred to the covenant, and in verses 19–20, He painted the covenant in terms of a marriage ceremony. What did God say He will do in this passage?

The phrase to know in verse 20 is the intimate expression of marriage. As our hearts are transformed, as we find God to be our all in all, we will, indeed, experience an intimacy akin to the best that earthly marriage can offer.

- C. How will God one day reverse the names of Gomer's children according to verse 23?

This renewing of the covenant, this exchange between God and man ("You are My people!" "You are my God!") is repeated twice in the New Testament and can be helpful as you worship. As you study the scripture, let God quicken you, let Him call you, let Him make a verse radioactive to you. ("You are My people!") Then, in response, slow down, pray the verse, live it out. ("You are my God!")

7. Describe the scene in Hosea 3:1–3. Who won the bid at the auction? What does this say about God?
8. Why is it that you cannot experience the presence of the Lord while you are engaged with your idols? What does that mean to you today?

DAY 3:

AS A BRIDEGROOM REJOICES OVER HIS BRIDE

The sexual metaphor has a positive aspect as well, one that should warm our hearts and give us confidence in our Bridegroom's commitment to us and His desire for intimacy with us. The best of earthly marriages, the most intimate moments that make us weep with love, are only a taste of what is to come with Christ. The Lord says this is a profound mystery (Ephesians 5:32).

9. What parallel did God make in Isaiah 62:5b? Try to put yourself in a bridegroom's place and describe what his feelings might be.

10. Turn back to Isaiah 1:18 and explain how the gospel makes it possible for Christ to completely delight in you.

11. In Zephaniah 3:17, find five descriptions of God's love for you.

In the poetic section of the Old Testament, we find two contrasting books side by side. The first, Ecclesiastes, has been called "the saddest song" because it shows a believer looking for love "under the sun," failing to realize God's love for him. In sharp distinction, the second, the Song of Songs, has been called "the sweetest song." Above all the biblical books, Charles Spurgeon says, it is the Song of Songs that shows us God's heart for us.

12. Read the Song of Songs 1:1–4. (Sometimes it is confusing to determine who is speaking in this poetic play. In the opening seven verses, though it varies between the individual bride and the corporate picture of the bride, it is always the "bride.")

A. What did the bride want according to verse 2?

B. How did she describe his love and then his name (verses 2–3)?

C. Describe her longing (verse 4). Do you identify with this?

13. Read the Song of Songs 2:8–13.

A. Describe what images come to mind as you read.

B. What refrain is repeated in this passage? What do you think God is telling you through this?

The Song closes it as it began, with the longing of the bride, though it is a longing that has matured through trial. In the beginning (such as in 1:2), the Hebrew word for love is dowd, referring to passion. Then He asks more of the Bride (such as in 2:13), using the Hebrew word rayah, meaning “committed love.” By the close of the book, the Hebrew word for love is a combination of the two, meaning ahabah or “passionate, committed love.” This is the covenant love God has for us, and which He longs for in return. You can see this love in 8:6–7.

14. Read the Song of Songs 8:5–7.

A. Describe the scene in 8:5a. What do you see in this?

B. In what ways have “wilderness times” drawn you closer to the Lord?

C. How is God’s love described in verses 6–7? What does this mean to you?

15. Were you “kissed” by God during this lesson? If so, share.

DAY 4:

DO YOU FIND GOD USEFUL OR BEAUTIFUL?

With earthly love, often what you experience at first is not so much love, but what Lauren Winner calls “ego-blast.” You are excited that someone so great is into you! But until you come to appreciate *his* beauty, it isn’t really love, it’s using someone for your own selfish gain.

In the same way, in our relationship with the Lord, we first long for what He can give us—salvation from hell, relief from suffering, material provisions . . . We may realize, as Gomer did in the book of Hosea and the younger son did in the story of the prodigal son, that it is better to be with Him than away from Him. But is that yet true love?

Jonathan Edwards reflected that religious people find God useful, but Christians find God beautiful. The Song of Songs is a poetic play in which the bride learns to find the bridegroom beautiful. The book is filled with mutual adoration. That is how our relationship with the Lord is meant to be.

Ezekiel 16 is a poetic play in which the bride finds her bridegroom useful. He adored her, but she used Him, taking everything He gives her and giving it to her idols. Historically, Israel formed alliances with other nations and participated in pagan idol worship. One frightening aspect of idolatry is that idols demand propitiation. They will take something precious from us: our health, our contentment, our children . . .

Ezekiel 16 is a miniature version of the book of Hosea. We will divide it into four “acts.”

16. Read Ezekiel 16:1–14 (Act 1: God Bestows Grace and Beauty).

A. Describe the state of the baby girl in verses 1–5.

B. Describe God’s response to her in verses 6–7.

C. In verses 8–14, we see pictures of covenant love and how it can make us beautiful. Describe those images.

17. Read Ezekiel 16:15–22 (Act 2: The Unfaithful Bride).

A. According to verse 15, what did the bride trust in, what did she become, and what did she do?

B. According to verses 16–21, what did she do with each of the gifts God had given to her?

C. Though this passage speaks about a different culture with different “gods,” we must not miss the parallel to our lives and our tendency to take God’s gifts and use them to worship our idols. Think about the talents or spiritual gifts, the blessings of children, or material provisions God has given you. How might you take these and use them to increase your own reputation, comfort, or power instead of using them to glorify Him and to sacrifice for “the least of these”?

D. What was the bride’s fatal mistake that led to her downward spiral (verse 22)?

18. How has God spoken to you through these first two “acts” in Ezekiel 16?

DAY 5:

A PROFOUND MYSTERY

Ezekiel 16 continues with the idols themselves turning on the bride and God allowing it to happen. This is His just wrath poured out upon His unfaithful bride, bringing us to the paradox of Scripture. God says He must punish sin, and yet, He so loves His bride. You hear His anguish in Hosea 11 when He remembered how when “Israel was a child,” He loved him; how He “taught Ephraim how to walk;” how He “bent down to feed” him. In anguish He cried, “How can I give you up, O Ephraim?”

God’s holiness demands that He must punish sin—and yet, how can He completely forsake us? He cannot. So He covenants that He will take the punishment on Himself, bearing what we deserve.

At the close of Ephesians, after Paul has described how earthly marriage should be mutual sacrifice and adoration, he says: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). Whenever the New Testament talks about “the mystery,” it is referring to the gospel. This mystery is hidden in Hosea and in Ezekiel 16, but we can see it better than they could, for we are on the other side of the cross.

19. Read Ezekiel 16:39–42 (an excerpt from Act 3: The Wrath of God).

A. Describe the wrath of God that fell on His people. (This describes how Jerusalem fell.)

- B. We think our idols will help us, but then they turn and “cut us to pieces.” They demand a payment to be appeased—they will take something precious from us. How have you experienced this?
20. Read Ezekiel 16:59–63 (an excerpt from Act 4: The Covenant).
- A. What does God say He will do concerning His faithless bride (verse 60)?
- B. What else stands out to you in this passage and why?
21. Read Ephesians 5:25–27.
- A. How, according to verse 25, did Christ love His bride, the Church?
- B. When you have doubts because life is hard or because God doesn’t answer your prayers as you hoped, how can the above truth help you to be confident of His love for you?
- C. Find the reasons that Christ was motivated to die for us in verses 26 and 27.

Paul used this image graphically when writing to the Corinthian church, which was known for immorality and susceptibility to false teachers. He said, “I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). The truth of Christ’s death for us should help us to remain pure, help us not to doubt His love, help us to turn from false lovers and trust in Him.

22. Think about times in the last twenty-four hours when something bad came out of your mouth or life. What were you trusting in rather than God? How might the gospel, the fact of Christ's willingness to die for you, and the fact of His power over death, help you to trust Him the next time you face a similar situation?

23. What is your take-away for this week?

GROUP PRAYER: The group facilitator says the name of a person in the group. Two women pray for that person, then the facilitator says another woman's name and others pray for her until every member of the group is prayed for.

- C. Lily lamented, asking God, “Why can’t I be happy like I was a year ago?” How did God respond and why did that help her?

DAY 2:

WHITHER THOU GOEST

2. Read Jeremiah 2:1–3.
- A. Describe what Israel was like at first, using the pictures God painted in verses 1 and 2.

 - B. How, according to verse 3, did God feel about Israel and how did He protect her, as a groom protecting His bride?

 - C. How do the above pictures make you feel? Explain.
3. Do you remember a “first love” time with the Lord when you were ready to follow Him anywhere? If so, describe what you remember about yourself and about your new “bridegroom.”
4. Read Numbers 11:5–6.
- A. After their enthusiastic beginning, describe Israel’s complaints. Why was this “selective memory”?

- B. The “wilderness” eventually reveals who loves God for Himself and who was following Him just for His blessings. What have wilderness times shown you about your own heart?
5. Read Jeremiah 2:4–5.
- A. What question does God ask in verse 5?
- B. How did the Israelites attempt to solve their unhappiness and what happened to them as a result (verse 5)?
- C. Give an example of facing discomfort, loneliness, or a difficult circumstance from your own daily life. Then specifically describe a foolish response and a wise response.

DAY 3:

SIN IS NOT BREAKING A RULE, IT’S BREAKING A HEART

6. Read Jeremiah 2:6 and describe some of the mercies Israel forgot.
7. Have you ever had the experience of loving someone lavishly, and yet they have forgotten that love? How did it make you feel?

In Exodus, the Israelites were delivered from the wrath of God when the blood of a lamb was placed on their doorposts. That exodus foreshadowed a much deeper exodus from slavery and of the blood of the Lamb of God. It is this lavish mercy, above all others, that we must remember whenever we face temptation.

DAY 4:

AN ATTRACTION AS STRONG AS AN ANIMAL SEX DRIVE

The Lord is trying to break through the denial of His children. We are so blind to our sin, so ready to deceive ourselves. But unless we see our sin, we have no hope. In this passage we repeatedly see the language of intervention.

8. Read Jeremiah 2:19–24.

A. Denial is a real phenomenon. We believe lies so we can pursue our idols. Give examples of a few lies that deceive people (racists, alcoholics, gluttons, gossips, fornicators, coveters . . .) into pursuing idols.

B. How, in verse 19, did God try to shake Israel awake to the consequences of idolatry?

C. Then God gave a series of illustrations to try to tap in to their hearts. Find those in verses 20–24, describing the last one in detail.

9. Ask the Lord to shine His light into the darkness of your soul and reveal any lie you are telling yourself so that you can pursue your idol. Then tell yourself the truth.

10. Read Jeremiah 2:25.

A. The Israelites were no longer in denial. They admitted they loved their idols. But how did they feel?

B. Have you ever felt that way?

C. The gospel shows us how loved we are. Imagine the enemy is telling you that God will not be there for you if you resist temptation. Speak the truth to your soul, using the evidence of the cross.

DAY 5:

THE FALSE LOVERS AND THE TRUE LOVER

One of the most frightening truths about idols is that they demand a propitiation, a price to appease them. If you give yourself over to power, you may lose your children; if you give yourself over to comfort, you may lose your health; if you give yourself over to approval, you may lose years of contentment.

11. Read Jeremiah 3:23–24.

A. According to verse 24, what will our idols devour?

B. What have your idols devoured in your life?

12. What must we do according to Jeremiah 3:25–4:4? What does this mean?

13. Our true Lover, instead of cutting us to pieces, allowed Himself to be cut to pieces. He paid the propitiation price Himself. Read Jeremiah 31:31–33 and describe the day that God described to Jeremiah.

We live in that day! The propitiation has been paid by our True Lover and He has given us His Spirit. Why would we run to false lovers? Bernard of Clairvaux calls God "a shy lover." When we are in the arms of another, He will not come to us. Repeatedly God articulates this truth with word pictures.

14. Find the picture in each of the following and explain what is being communicated:

A. 2 Corinthians 11:2

B. Psalm 45:10–11

C. Song of Songs 2:13–16

15. There is no better place to be than in the arms of God. Are you beginning to experience more of His quiet presence as you turn from your idols? If so, share something about it.

16. What is your take-away this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: Lift up sentences of thanksgiving and praise for what you are learning, how you are being set free, and for God's tender mercies.

LESSON 6: WHEN THE EARTH SHAKES

VIDEO 6: When The Earth Shakes (available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>)

ICE BREAKERS

- A. In a sentence, share a time in your life when suffering made no sense, but now, in retrospect, it makes some sense.
- B. What stood out to you from the video and why?

If possible, listen to this free sermon by Tim Keller: http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cfm?fuseaction=product.display&product_ID=17440&ParentCat=6 (This sermon was preached the weekend after 9/11/2001.)

Prepare your heart daily with prayer and song.

PERSONAL PRAYER: God gives us psalms of lament for our times of suffering—psalms that show us how to pray when we are at our lowest. Most of them begin with an honest expression of despair. At some point, usually, the Spirit reminds the psalmist of the character of God, and then the psalmist can express trust even if circumstances continue. Try praying through Psalm 13.

SONG: Possible songs include Katharina von Schlegel's "Be Still, My Soul" or Matt Redman's "Blessed Be Your Name."

DAY 1: THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

1. Read the sixth chapter, highlighting as you go.
 - A. Choose two points to comment on. What are they and why did you choose them?

 - B. Take one illustration from this chapter. What does it teach you about the mystery of suffering, our limitations, and God?

DAY 2:
A SEVERE MERCY

It never seems like mercy when you are in the midst of suffering, and yet both Scripture and life confirm that God refines His body, His bride, through suffering. His purpose is not only for individual refining but also for the refining of the whole body. When our world is shaken, it reveals the futility of our idols and the only One who can be our solid rock. God has all eternity in view, and too often we have only this earthly life in view.

2. Read Jeremiah 2:26–28.

A. According to verses 26–27, how did the kings, officials, priests, and prophets regard their idols?

B. How did their idols fail them, according to verse 28?

3. Read Acts 4:32 through Acts 5:11.

A. What beauty do you see in the early church as described in Acts 4:32–37?

B. What ugliness do you see in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira? What do you think might have been their deep idols leading to the visible sin?

C. What happened to Ananias and then to Sapphira? Why, do you think?

D. How well did their idols help them in their day of trouble? How does this apply to your soul idols?

E. How did this event, according to verses 5 and 11, impact the early church?

4. How we respond to suffering reveals where our trust lies. If we continue to trust in our idols, we will dig in our heels. If we turn, instead, to God, we will be changed. Read Jeremiah 2:29–32 and find phrases that show how God’s people responded in Jeremiah’s day to His shaking of their worlds.

DAY 3: **THE GREAT I AM**

God will not only make His disobedient children examples to the Church, He will refine His most extraordinary vessels. When you consider the people He used mightily, you realize that each suffered tremendously. We know, for example, that He loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—yet He took them through the fire.

5. In the book, how did Ed and Cynthia respond to the shaking of their worlds (pages 96–98)?
6. How are you responding, right now, to any shaking going on in your life?
7. What did you learn about Jesus as the I AM on pages 101–104? Was anything new to you? If so, explain.
8. Read John 11:1–16 and find evidences that Jesus loved Lazarus yet chose not to come running.

The Greek word translated stayed has the connotation of endured. There are times the Lord endures our suffering because He has a greater plan for us or for His corporate body.

9. Jesus gently chastised Martha in Luke 10 because He knew her idol was causing her pain and that she needed to trust Him instead. Here we go again. Read John 11:17–28 carefully.

A. What did Martha do and say in verses 20–21? Do you see any control or manipulation behind her words? Explain your answer.

B. What did Martha think that Jesus meant, according to her response to Him in verse 24?

C. What did Jesus claim in verse 25?

D. Jesus referred to Himself by the name God spoke to Moses (I AM who I AM). In all of the great I AMs in John, the friends of Jesus were in awe, and His enemies wanted to stone him. (See John 11:53.) Why did His words provoke such strong reactions?

E. What question did Jesus ask Martha in verse 26 and how did she respond in verse 27?

I believe this was when Martha's control idol cracked. Her idol had not been able to help her in her "day of trouble," but the great I AM could, and she surrendered. Then she went to get Mary—before she was pulling Mary away from Jesus, now she was sending her to Him.

DAY 4:
JESUS WEPT

10. Read John 11:29–44.

A. Mary and Martha spoke exactly the same words to Jesus. Why do you think He responded so differently to them?

B. Find phrases in the above passage that show the various emotions Jesus felt because of the death of Lazarus.

C. Jesus could have stopped Lazarus' death and did not, for He had higher goals than delivering His beloved from temporary suffering. What might have been some of those goals?

11. Does it help alleviate your suffering to know God cares for you? Why or why not?

DAY 5:
WHEN THE EARTH SHOOK

We can know that suffering for a believer is never punishment, for Jesus took that punishment on the cross.

12. Read Matthew 27:50–54.

A. Describe what happened on earth when Jesus died.

B. Why, do you think?

C. What was the reaction of the centurion and those who were with him?

D. What does this mean to you when your life is shaken?

13. Read Hebrews 12:25–29.

A. What warning are we given in verse 25?

B. What promise and meaning do you find in verses 26–27?

C. What, according to verses 28–29, should we remember in the midst of suffering? How should those truths cause us to respond?

14. What is your take-away this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: The facilitator should lift up each woman's name and two others should pray for her until everyone in the group has received prayer. If your group is large, divide into smaller groups.

LESSON 7: WHY WE CAN'T JUST SAY NO

This week we will look at passages from Romans 6, 7, and 8—key passages for transformation. This is a practical week during which you prepare your battle plan. I encourage you to use a modern Bible translation such as J. B. Phillips, the New Living Translation, or *The Message* if possible. (As one woman told me, “Romans 6, 7, and 8 make my head hurt, but *The Message* helps!”)

VIDEO 7: Why We Can't Just Say No (available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>)

ICE BREAKERS

- A. What is something you know you should not do, yet you still have a tendency to do it? (Or that you should do, yet you do not do?)
- B. What stood out to you from the video and why?

Prepare your heart daily with prayer and song.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Pray through Romans 6:13 or any verse in these chapters that quickens you.

SONG: Possibilities include Robert Lowry's “Nothing but the Blood” and Casting Crowns' version of “Who Am I?”

DAY 1: THE SIN WITHIN

1. Read the seventh chapter, highlighting as you go.
 - A. Choose two points to comment on. What are they and why did you choose them?

 - B. Meditate on Romans 7:8 from *The Message* on pages 109–110. What does it say? Have you experienced this? Explain.

DAY 2: FOLLOWING CHRIST OR IDENTIFYING WITH HIM

When we try to *follow* Christ, we will fail. But if we *identify* with Him, we will find power. Dr. David Needham illustrates this with a common scenario: A new television program comes on and you are immediately aware this is something that will incite your particular lusts, rooted in your idols, whatever those may be. One approach is to tell yourself, *I shouldn't watch this. I should turn this off.* You are a “house divided” and your old nature may win or feel profoundly disappointed and keep longing to return. But instead of just “saying no,” Needham suggests this approach:

For a moment you find yourself saying, “I want to watch this even though I know I shouldn't.” Then, with a sudden jolt, the gracious Holy Spirit reminds you of something so very important. “Hey, wait a minute!” you say. “Who am I anyway? Is watching this stuff truly compatible with who I really am. . . . Life for me is not . . . fantasy vacations, a perfect figure, an envious reputation. . . . I know who I am—I am fundamentally a spiritual being created by God to display Jesus. Life—real life—is right there.”

So I walk to the TV set and turn it off. No last, longing look this time.

Needham is right—who we *really* are will one day be manifest when all the dross is burned away and the gold is left. This is Christ in us, our hope of glory. Your idols and the rotten fruit they produce are not who you really are. They stand in the way of becoming who you really are. They are not your life. Christ is your life.

2. Paul used the picture of baptism in Romans 6:3–5—of going under the water and rising again—to illustrate saying good-bye to one life, leaving it under water, and saying hello to a new life.
 - A. What question is in Romans 6:1, and how is it answered?

B. What other question is asked in Romans 6:2? How is this phrased in *The Message*?

We get our identity, not from others, and not even from ourselves, but from God. Becoming a Christian means you not only start to follow Christ but you also identify with Him; you become part of Him.

3. Read Romans 6:5–11.
 - A. What is the summary of this paragraph (verse 11)? What is the negative (to whom do you no longer belong?) and what is the positive (who are you)?

- B. Take a common temptation such as gossip or stinginess and show how Romans 6:11, as illustrated by Needham’s approach, could lead to victory. Be specific—this is practice!

A story is told of St. Augustine, who left his sexually promiscuous lifestyle. When he was approached by a former lover who said, “Augustine—Augustine—it’s me!” he said, “I know. But it’s not me.” He was a new man in Christ.

DAY 3:

THEREFORE PRESENT YOURSELF NOT TO YOUR OLD MASTER BUT TO YOUR NEW

Overcoming sin is synergistic. We do not just passively expect God to deliver us, but we respond to His Spirit. Larry Crabb uses the term “dependent responsibility.”

Romans 6:12–14 fleshes out how this works: Since we no longer belong to sin, but to Christ, we must present our members (our minds, our tongues, our hands . . .) not to sin but to Christ. The victory begins internally, with a mental choice to turn from the idol and toward God. It always involves faith that God will be to you what your idol can never be. All this is invisible. But it will flesh itself out visibly as you present your “members” to God. For example, instead of using your tongue to criticize or manipulate, the tongue will be used to pray or to encourage. Instead of using your hand to write a check for an expensive new toy, you write one for helping the helpless. Instead of using your eyes for unedifying books and blogs, you will use your eyes for edifying books and blogs.

4. Read Romans 6:12–14 carefully.

A. We were born spiritually dead and in bondage, but that is not who we are anymore. Find two negative commands in verses 12 and 13a.

B. Now, because we are spiritually alive, set free, and belong to Christ, what two positive commands can you find in verse 13?

- C. We do not have to sin, for God provides a way of escape when we obey Him. Take a temptation common to you (a besetting sin) and explain how you would:
- 1) Internally, talk to your soul about who you really are and why God can be trusted to be to you what your idol can never be.

 - 2) Externally, how would this flesh itself out? What would you turn away from and what would you put in its place?
5. In Romans 6:15–19 Paul uses an illustration of slavery. What does he say?
6. Each time you identify with Christ to say no to the flesh, you become stronger. Is there a way you have experienced this? If so, share.

DAY 4:

THE LAW IS GOOD, BUT IT IS INSUFFICIENT TO CHANGE US

Romans 7 shows why we can't "just say no." Paul opens with a challenging analogy to marriage, saying that we are no longer "married" to the law, for God now has given us His Spirit. As promised in Hosea and in other prophets, there is a new power, and we must walk in that power, rather than trying to obey the law by ourselves.

7. Read Romans 7:7–11.
- A. Why is the law good, according to verse 7?

- B. How does sin pervert the law, according to verses 8 and 11?
- C. Dee's father commanded her not to ride her bike down a hill. That command became a temptation to her. Give an example from your life on how you have perverted a command into a temptation.
8. Using Romans 7:14–20, explain why we cannot obey the law in our own strength.
9. What is the answer, according to Romans 7:24–25?
10. What truth is given in Romans 8:1?

In every other religion, you work to gain a god's approval. In Christianity, because of Jesus, you are approved of. Then, out of love, you serve Him gratefully. This understanding is crucial in living the gospel-transformed life.

For example, I now am aware of how often I have manipulative or controlling thoughts concerning what I could say or do to try to "fix" people. Sin still dwells in me. But I see it now, because God has shown me my depravity. The gospel sheds light into my dark soul and my control idol. I see the lie. I am not better than others—I am so bad Christ had to die for me! But I also know Christ went all the way to the cross for me and for them. Because of this, I can also trust Him to fix the people that need fixing. If He wants me to be part of that, He will lead me to pray, to speak the truth in love, or to be silent. I must give control to Him.

11. Take the above illustration and explain how it depends on gospel truth to:

A. Repent.

B. Walk in faith.

C. Where are you still struggling? What lie are you believing and what truth could you speak to your soul based on the gospel?

DAY 5:

FEED THE NEW MAN, STARVE THE OLD MAN

If Christ now lives within us, we truly do have a new nature that needs nurturing. He will grow stronger as we feed him, and our former self, the old man, will grow weaker as we starve him. Who are you, really? Who do you want to feed?

12. The word “gospel” means good news. Good news is something that has happened in the past and is being joyfully reported. Good advice is something that is suggested to do in the future. According to Romans 8:1–4, what has already happened?

13. Romans 8:4 reiterates what we must do if we know who we really are. What is it?

14. Read Romans 8:5–7.

A. What negative and positive instructions are given concerning your mind?

B. How could you obey this better than you are? Be specific and realistic.

15. What is happening in you if you belong to God, according to Romans 8:9–11?

16. Read Romans 8:12–17.

A. Who are you according to this passage?

B. Resisting our idols involves suffering, but there is also a promise in verse 17. Find it.

17. What is your take-away from this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: You've heard where each person in your group is weak. Get in pairs or groups of three to pray for one another.

5. Read Philippians 3:8–9.

A. What is Paul’s testimony here?

B. How does he now see the things in which he once found his identity and value?

DAY 3:

THE GIRL NO ONE WANTED

The YouTube version of Bonnie Raitt’s “I Can’t Make You Love Me If You Don’t” makes Leah’s heartache come alive. Watch it via this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nW9Cu6GYqxo>

6. Read Genesis 29:16–31.

A. What contrasts do you find between Rachel and Leah in verses 16–18?

B. What did Laban do in verses 19-23 and why?

C. How did Jacob respond in verse 25, and how do you think Leah felt?

D. How long did Leah have Jacob to herself?

E. What are we told about Jacob in verse 30?

- F. Who did love Leah, according to verse 31, and how was that love shown?
7. Wanting a person's love is not a bad thing, but when it becomes an ultimate goal, like any idol, it will eventually turn and hack us to pieces. Can you identify with this? If so, explain.
8. Read Genesis 29:31–35.
- A. What names did Leah give her first three sons and what did each mean?
- B. How did these names reflect her *epithumia* (overwhelming desire)?
- C. Idols demand a price. What did Leah give up during the years she worshiped her idol?
- D. What did she name her fourth son, what did it mean, and why do you think she changed?

Leah's turn from her idol to the one true God led to many blessings, though most she would not see until after her life on earth was over.

9. In that patriarchal culture, women were rarely valued or mentioned. Do your best to find ways that God met Leah, cared for Leah, and allowed her to have a lasting legacy through Judah, the son that marked her turn from idolatry.

A. Genesis 29:31

B. Genesis 30:17

C. Genesis 49:29–33 (Do you see any tenderness here for Leah in Jacob's dying words?)

D. Ruth 4:11

E. Hebrews 7:14

F. Revelation 5:5

10. Thomas Chalmers said that the desire for sin and the desire for God cannot exist at the same time in the human heart—one will always push out the other. How does Leah’s story demonstrate the expulsive power of a new affection?

DAY 4:

THIS TIME I WILL PRAISE THE LORD

11. “Worship” comes from the same root word as “worth.” Often we can tell what is of the greatest value to us by asking, “What, if we lost it, would make life not worth living?” Ask yourself this again. How would you answer?
12. On page 128, Dee lists some ordinary means of grace that helped her set her affections on Christ. What were they?
13. How might you incorporate any of the above into your life so that you can put on Christ?
14. Believers from Basil to Bonhoeffer to Bono have found that praying the psalms helps them to worship. Today, pray Psalm 27 a few verses at a time. Here’s a sample prayer for the first, but make it your own.
- A. Psalm 27:1–3: *I do not need to be afraid of _____
_____ for You are my light and my salvation. No matter what comes against me, I can be confident because You are in control.*
- B. Psalm 27:4

C. Psalm 27:5–6 (This says, “I will sing and make melody to the LORD.” List a few songs you can easily sing throughout the day—and then do it!)

D. Psalm 27:7–10

E. Psalm 27:11–14

DAY 5:
LEARNING FROM RACHEL’S LIFE

15. Read Genesis 30.

A. What did Rachel feel she had to have for life to have meaning? Why?

B. Idolatry leads to distorted prayers, methods, and relationships. Find all of these in Rachel’s life in Genesis 30:1–15.

C. Children are a gift from God, yet when they become our life, we are likely to bring harm to them and to ourselves. What are some red flags for being too enmeshed with children?

In Genesis 31, Rachel stole her father's household gods when the family was fleeing Laban. Leslie Williams writes: "Without knowing fully what we are doing, we hide the things we secretly love and admire under our skirts, like Rachel, sitting primly and righteously on our camels, wondering why we are not whole, why we still suffer, why we feel unreconciled to the God we profess."

16. Meditate on the above quote from Leslie Williams and then answer the following:

A. Describe some of the ways Rachel suffered as a result of her heart idols.

B. Williams says we hide the things we secretly love—we may hide our heart idols from others, but also from ourselves. How has this study opened your eyes to any secret idols?

C. What suffering has clinging to your idols brought into your life?

17. What is your take-away this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: Gather in pairs or groups of three, confess where your souls are idolatrous, and pray for one another.

LESSON 9: RESPONDING TO OUR ONE TRUE LOVER

VIDEO 9: Responding to Our One True Lover (available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>)

ICE BREAKERS

- A. Every earthly love story that moves us taps in to the truer heavenly love story. Think of a book or movie with a love story that touched you. What parallel do you see between the male protagonist and Jesus?
- B. What stood out to you from the video and why?

Prepare your heart daily with prayer and song.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Find a passage that is meaningful to you from the Song of Songs or Psalm 45 and pray through it.

SONG: “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” in the traditional or contemporary version, “I Will Follow” by Jason Ingram, Reuben Morgan, and Chris Tomlin, or “Jesus, I Come,” a hymn written by William Sleeper and put to a contemporary melody for Indelible Grace by Greg Thompson, available on YouTube.

DAY 1: ARISE, MY LOVE

In the opening of the Song of Songs, the bride was euphoric in her newfound rest in her bridegroom. But in the section we will study, she has drifted away. Hudson Taylor writes:

Maybe the very restfulness of her newfound joy made her feel too secure. Maybe she thought that as far as she was concerned, there was no need for the exhortation, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). . . . Maybe she hardly thought at all. Glad to be saved and free, she forgot the world’s current course was against her.

In the Christian life, our Bridegroom continually challenges us to move higher with Him, dying more to ourselves, to our idols, and to what often feels “safe.”

1. Read the Song of Songs 2:13–17.
 - A. What did the bridegroom ask of his bride in verse 13?

B. Where was she hiding, and what did he want, according to verse 14?

C. Our fears can be just as detrimental to the fruit in our life as foxes are to grapevines. What fears have kept you from going higher with God?

D. What did the bride tell the bridegroom to do in verse 17?

E. How does Hudson Taylor interpret this passage? (See page 135.)

This passage is followed by a bad dream in which the bride cannot find her Bridegroom. Though we will never lose our relationship with Jesus, we can lose fellowship with Him, quenching His Spirit by refusing Him, sending Him away. But even the sense of His absence can work on our hearts, making us long for Him, making us desirous of hearkening to His call.

2. Are you becoming more aware of the sense of God's presence or His absence? If so, share.

3. Read Song of Songs 4:6–7 and explain how the bride responded when her bridegroom came for her again.

4. God is a God of second chances. Though you may have regrets about a way you responded in the past, you can use those regrets to respond rightly in another situation. Have you experienced this? If so, share.

DAY 2:

MESS WITH MY HEART, O GOD

In the book, Hope asks God to mess with her heart if she was wrong about opposing adoption, and He did, through the devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*. Read what she read from Chambers on page 135 of *Idol Lies*.

5. Does the quote from Oswald Chambers speak to you in any way, or not? Explain.

The Chambers devotional for that day was based on Jeremiah 4:1. We have already looked at Jeremiah 2 and 3, where God used the language of intervention, the shocking metaphor of an adulteress, and pleaded with His Bride because her idols had already taken so much from her.

6. For review and context, read Jeremiah 3:22–25.

- A. What plea did God make (verse 22) and what reason did He give (verse 23)?

- B. What did the Israelites lose by clinging to idols and working at cross-purposes with God (verse 24)?

- C. What response would be appropriate (verse 25)?

“O Israel,” says the LORD,
“if you wanted to return to me, you could.
You could throw away your detestable idols
and stray away no more.”

(Jeremiah 4:1, NLT)

7. Read the above and also the same verse in the translation you’re using.
 - A. Though the Israelites have told God “it is hopeless” (Jeremiah 2:25), He gave them hope. Find it.

 - B. What must they do in order to find freedom?

 - C. Our spiritual growth charts, once we have seen our idols, will still have dips, plateaus, and even plunges—but they should move steadily up. How have you seen growth in your life since beginning this study?

PERSONAL PRAYER EXERCISE: Is there an area where you feel you should dare to pray Hope’s prayer (“Mess with my heart, O God”)? If so, do it here, between you and God.

DAY 3:

RESPONDING TO HURT AS CHRIST RESPONDED

The same heart idol can manifest itself in different ways. One of the ways Hope’s control idol manifested itself was in a lack of forgiveness, especially toward her father. So often we want to “help” God discipline a person who has injured us by withholding complete forgiveness. For Hope, the light turned on when she realized that true forgiveness always demands a price. She was going to have to suffer, as Christ did, to give true grace.

8. What command and reason for the command do we find in Ephesians 4:32?

Moments before he died, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred because he tried to stop Hitler, asked God to forgive those carrying out his hanging. He mirrored what Christ did and what so many martyrs have done. (See Acts 7:60.) Bonhoeffer said that true forgiveness always demands suffering.

9. Read Matthew 18:23–35.

A. Summarize the parable and the main point.

B. What do you think “forgiving from the heart” (verse 35) looks like?

C. What are some pseudo ways to “forgive” and why should we run from them?

10. Read 1 Peter 2:21–25.

A. To what have we been called (verse 21)?

B. How is it that Christ found strength when persecuted (verses 22–23)?

C. Idols cannot be removed, only replaced. How could trust in God help you to let go of control and forgive from your heart?

11. How is the Lord speaking to you concerning forgiveness?

DAY 4:

THE IDOL OF “WORKS RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Hope had to stop trying to be the perfect Proverbs 31 wife. It’s so subtle but it is easy to find our identity in being a good Christian instead of being in Christ. We go to church, give money, serve in ministry, train our children—not so much out of adoration of God but so that others will see us as good Christians or so that we can feel good about ourselves. Instead of resting in Christ and finding our identity in Him, we are trusting in how “righteous” we appear to ourselves and to others.

12. Read Philippians 3:1–10.

A. Where could Paul have found his identity?

B. How did he come to see that?

C. Where did he find his identity instead and what was his goal?

D. If you were to write a personal parallel of this passage, what might you write?

13. Read Habakkuk 3:17–19.

A. God had told Habakkuk that a purging was coming, so Habakkuk was braced for the worst. How did he say he would respond if the labor of his hands failed?

B. If you had to brace yourself for the worst in your life, do you think you could respond like Habakkuk? Why or why not?

C. What did Madeleine L'Engle say about the “perfect family” and what she believes God has really called us to do (page 140)? Do you agree or not? Explain.

DAY 5:

HEAR, O DAUGHTER, CONSIDER, AND INCLINE YOUR EAR

As we grow in our understanding of God's love for us, we can let go of our idols, of our false identities, and rest in Him. One of the most beautiful passages about responding to our one true lover is Psalm 45. In many ways it is a condensed version of the Song of Songs.

14. Read Psalm 45:1–9 as a love poem. Write down the passages describing our returning King Jesus that most penetrate your heart, and explain why.

15. On the basis of who God is, what are we asked to do in Psalm 45:10? What do you think this means?

16. How is “the Bride” described in verses 13–15?

17. How can this passage help you to “put off” your idols and “put on” Christ?

18. What is your take-away this week and why?

GROUP PRAYER: Have one person lift up each woman’s name while the others pray sentence prayers for her. If your group is large, divide into smaller groups for this prayer.

LESSON 10: WHAT ANGELS LONG TO SEE

VIDEO 10: What Angels Long to See (available at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>)

ICE BREAKERS

- A. Name a way that you are beginning to understand how the gospel can save you, not just from the penalty of sin, but also its power.
- B. What stood out to you from the video and why?

Prepare your heart daily with prayer and song.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Pray through 1 Peter 1:10–13 for yourself, asking that you might better understand the breadth of God’s love and power for you.

SONG: “Mighty to Save” by Rodney Clawson or “Rock of Ages,” which was written in 1763 by Augustus Montague Toplady.

DAY 1:

HOW THE GOSPEL CAN RESCUE THE RICH AND THE POOR

1. Read the final chapter, highlighting as you go. Choose two points to comment on.

2. Read Proverbs 30:8–9.
 - A. Why did Agur ask God not to give him riches? Would you ever pray that way?

 - B. Why did Agur ask to be spared poverty? Can you identify?

Review this definition of the gospel:

We are more sinful than we could ever imagine (for Christ had to die).

We are more loved than we ever dared dream (for He *did* die).

3. Read James 1:9–10. How does this passage show how the gospel could rescue the lowly brother (the poor) but also the rich brother?

DAY 2:

IDOLS DELUDE AND DEMAND PROPITIATION

4. Read Zechariah 10:1–2.

A. What power, according to verse 1, does God have and why?

B. In contrast, find everything you can about what idols promise and actually do in verse 2.

5. Idols “promise consolation” but then turn on us. What price did Nicki’s idol demand of her?

6. At the end of this story, Dee shares that Nicki was still living with her boyfriend. She says Nicki was “managing” her idol (page 158). What does that mean? Do you see that happening in your life? Explain.

In The Great Divorce, C. S. Lewis tells of a character who kept a red lizard on his shoulder that the angel wanted to kill. That seemed too drastic a measure to the character, but the angel told him it was the only way to be free.

7. Jesus said “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The Spirit of God had to keep bringing the truth to Dee. Consider how her One True Lover kept speaking to her, breaking through her delusion.
 - A. In the opening chapter, Dee shares that she first became aware of her control idol through the bad fruit it produced and through a sermon called “Models of Manipulation.” What do you remember about that?

 - B. When Dee stood in front of her plundered jewelry box, she didn’t want to forgive. How is that a manifestation of the control idol?

 - C. The Lord brought a scene from *Les Misérables* to her mind. How is this scene a picture of the gospel?

8. Share a few specific ways your One True Lover is breaking through the delusion of your idol.

DAY 3:
THE GOSPEL SHOWS US HOW NEEDY WE
ARE AND HOW LOVED WE ARE

It is so easy to trust in religion instead of Christ, to look at how we are following the rules instead of seeing our great need and our great Rescuer. (Tim Keller’s messages on the parable of the prodigal son are available in free sermons on Redeemer.com. Look for the messages on Luke 15.)

9. Read Luke 15:1–3.

A. To whom is Jesus speaking? How do you know?

B. How can you see that these scribes and Pharisees did not grasp the gospel (verse 2)?

C. What then, were they trusting in? (See also Luke 18:9.)

D. What price do religious idols demand of those who trust in them?

10. Read Luke 15:11–19.

A. What evidence can you find for the younger son not loving his father for who his father was (verse 12–13)?

B. What might have been the younger son's heart idol?

C. How did that idol delude and what price did it extract from him (verses 14–16)?

D. When he came to his senses, how did the younger son see his father differently (verse 17)?

E. What did he plan to say to his father (verse 19)?

F. How have you “come to your senses” during this journey? Be specific.

11. Read Luke 15:20–24.

A. Find everything you can to describe the extravagant love of the father.

B. In what ways does this reflect the gospel?

C. True repentance always leads to a celebration! How have you experienced this in your life?

D. How did this picture help Nicki begin to turn from her idol?

E. How could this picture help you?

DAY 4:

THE SUBTLETY OF RELIGIOUS IDOLS

Both in the days of Jesus and today, it is common for a religious person or a Christian to think he is trusting in God when he is really trusting in his own righteousness. This was the delusion of the older brother and of the Pharisees to whom Jesus speaks. It can indeed hinder our own growth and intimacy with our True Lover.

12. Read Luke 15:25–32.

A. When the older brother heard that his younger brother was home “safe and sound,” how did he respond—and why, do you think?

B. Look carefully at what he said to his father (verses 29 and 30) and find evidences for a “heart of stone” toward both his father and his brother.

C. What was the older brother trusting in? How did that idol fail him?

D. Describe the extravagant love of the father to the older brother.

13. Have you ever felt as if God let you down because you served Him or kept rules, yet He didn't give you what you wanted? If so, what was wrong about your thinking?

DAY 5:

THE BEAUTY AND POWER OF THE GOSPEL

14. What has this study revealed to you about the darkness in your heart? Have you been able to see the idols, the beasts within? What has God shown you?

15. What has this study revealed to you about God's love for you? Have you been able to trust Him enough to let go of your idol and ask Him to come to you? Explain.

16. What do you think will be the lasting impact of this study on your life? Name three specifics.

GROUP PRAYER: Take turns giving praise to God for what He has done and is doing in your life.

Leader's Notes

Thank you for facilitating this study. Never have I seen truths so dramatically change lives—I anticipate you will see the same! Your role in prayer and encouragement is vital. Here are ways to make this group the best it can be.

EXPRESSING CHRIST'S LOVE

- During the week, pray for each woman by name. Pray for the group to be a welcoming and loving place.
- Greet each woman warmly each week and email or Facebook them during the week, letting them know they are valued.
- Make emails and phone numbers available for the group so they can bond with one another.
- Plan a special lunch or evening about halfway through the study and have the women share how they are being changed.
- Listen between the lines—sometimes you may feel led to visit a woman outside of study to express Christ's love to her.

PREPARING THE VIDEOS

- Each weekly session opens with a video. They are available for free at <http://worthypublishing.com/books/Idol-Lies/>. They are ten to twenty minutes each and include teaching from Dee and testimonies from other women. You'll probably want to download them on a computer ahead of time so they are ready when you want to show them. After downloading them, you can connect your computer to a large screen for a large group or simply show them on a small screen if your group is at a small table. Here are instructions for doing this—it's not hard, but a young techie person could help you if you have never done this!
- David Powlison has four video clips under three minutes each on idolatry that are very illuminating. You might want to play one a week for weeks 2 through 6. You can find them all at <http://www.ccef.org/video/keeping-ourselves-idol-worship>
- Consider showing an hour video on idolatry from Tim Keller sometime—perhaps a special evening, or you could hand out books the first session, get acquainted, and watch it then. It is called “The Grand Demythologizer” (available at www.thegospelcoalition.com and other websites).

ENCOURAGING HOMEWORK

- Encourage members to do their homework for their own growth and to be a good friend in the group. If they do this, they not only enrich the discussion, but you can skip the information-gathering questions (listed by chapter below). If the group tends to neglect the homework, call a few of the more mature women privately and ask them to be models for the others. You could also pair up accountability partners and put a more mature woman with a less mature one.

- Group attendance tends to average two-thirds, so a maximum group membership size should be twelve (so eight are usually present) for optimum sharing and pace. (Larger groups can begin together with video and video questions and then divide into smaller discussion groups.)
- If you opt to divide the lessons and do them in twenty sessions, watch the video and do two days the first half, and finish the last three days in the last half. Some groups find it hard to get through lesson 4 in just one week because the women have so much to say. So you may want to plan to divide that even if you are not dividing the other lessons.

KEEPING THE DISCUSSION STRONG

- Think of yourself as a facilitator that keeps the ball going to everyone instead of a volley between you and the group. Accomplish that by keeping these things in mind:
 - Occasionally go around the group asking everyone the same question.
 - Ask, “What does someone else think?”
 - If a woman in the group tends to monopolize the conversation, pray for her and, if necessary, speak gently and privately to her, asking her to help you draw the others out.
 - Watch for facial expressions. If a quiet woman seems almost ready to speak, gently ask her, “Did you have a thought?”
 - Avoid tangents, and keep the group moving.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Do Lesson 1 unless the group members are just receiving their books today and have not been able to do homework. In that case, have a get-acquainted time and watch “The Grand Demythologizer” video together. (See pages 245–246 about preparing the videos.) Then ask each woman to share what stood out to her from the video.

LESSON 1: LAYERS OF LIES

- Always watch the video first, then gather in as small a circle as possible and hear from as many as possible on the Ice Breakers.
- Information-gathering questions that could be skipped in discussion: 2a, 5, 8.
- **Q1d:** Give special emphasis to this question.
- **Q6:** If no one shares on this one, you may need to vulnerably lead the way.
- **Q9:** This is an important exercise, be sure to give enough time.
- **Q10:** For example, wanting human approval more than God’s could lead to coveting, stealing, and slandering.
- **Q11:** Loving God—and idols keep you from intimacy with God.
- **Q17:** Idols must be replaced, so seeing the deep heart idol could signal to Martha that she is not trusting God and could help her move not only away from her sin but toward God.

LESSON 2: SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

- Information-gathering questions that could be skipped in discussion: 2a, 8a, 8b, 10a.
- **Q3:** For comments, ask them to choose just one.
- **Q5:** Take time with E, you could skip the other parts of this question.

- **Q6:** Our desires are deceitful—these lies corrupt our souls.
- **Day 5:** Important—be sure to get to these!

LESSON 3: WHY ONLY SOME WILL BE SET FREE

- Information-gathering questions that could be skipped in discussion: 1b, 5, 8.
- **Q3c:** Believing God loved her is key to helping her wait on Him to meet her.
- **Q7b:** For example, people who gossip, make racist comments, are gluttonous in food or drink, spend money frivolously . . .
- **Q9b:** Hear from many on this one—you can't practice soul talk too often!

LESSON 4: A SHOCKING METAPHOR

When I've done this study with others, I've found that women had much to say in response to these questions, and many had never studied these passages. For that reason I don't think you should skip questions. I would also suggest doing this lesson over two weeks, with the first twelve questions for the first week. Then you will have no video the second week and you can finish the questions.

- **Q3a:** Our idols promise to do for us what we think God will not. In Gomer's case, her lovers provided for her and then sold her, naked, on the auction block. This vivid picture must not be missed.
- **Q3e, 5c, and 8:** Be sure to take enough time with these.
- **Q13b:** "Arise, my love"—God wants a bride who wants to be with Him. He also wants, according to verse 14, to hear our voice and see our face.

LESSON 5: OUR CHEATING HEARTS

- Information-gathering questions that could be skipped in discussion: 2b, 6, 13.
- **Q8b:** All of this is intervention language—trying to make the women face the truth that the cost for listening to idols is high.
- **Q8c:** A swift she-camel leaves tracks all over the desert when she is in heat, running until her feet are sore and she is spent with thirst. And yet—she cannot rest.
- **Q10c:** Another good chance to practice soul talk.
- **Q12:** Jeremiah 3:25 is the language of true repentance, when you admit not only that you were wrong, but you are willing to see the pain it has brought both to you and your God.
- **Q14a:** A pure virgin—particularly not following after false teachers.
- **Q14b:** Willing to put God over being with the people you love most.

LESSON 6: WHEN THE EARTH SHAKES

- Information-gathering questions that could be skipped in discussion: 4, 8.
- **Q3:** The story of Ananias and Sapphira, though shocking, should awaken us to the futility of our idols. It also demonstrates that we are part of a body, and if we are trusting in idols, God may need to shake our world to

purify the body. Questions in your group may arise about their eternal salvation. Only God knows the state of their souls. We do not know if they were eternally lost because they never really knew Him or if they lost only their earthly lives.

- **Q9a:** Her assertiveness (in contrast to Mary falling at His feet) seems to indicate rebuke, some control issues still alive.
- **Q9b** and **9c:** Martha thinks of resurrection as “coming in the future,” but Jesus makes it clear that when we believe, resurrection life begins immediately spiritually.
- **Q10b:** In the Hebrew, the verbs indicate wrath on the part of Christ. He seemed to be thinking of more than just this death, which He would quickly turn around. Perhaps He was grieving for all the funerals He would not stop.
- **Q12b:** We know God’s wrath fell on Christ for our sins and that God had to look away. Perhaps this was the Father’s grief and anger at the price that had to be paid.
- **Q13** and **14:** Be sure you get to these questions.

LESSON 7: WHY WE CAN'T JUST SAY NO

- This lesson is intensely practical and involves practicing a lot of soul talk. Hear the soul talk, especially from questions 3b, 4c, and 11c.
- Information-gathering questions that could be skipped in discussion: 2, 4a, 4b, 5, 7a, 7b, 9, 13, 16.
- **2:** Avoid a discussion on water baptism itself but focus on how it pictures death and resurrection.

LESSON 8: IDOLS CANNOT BE REMOVED, ONLY REPLACED

- The following questions are information-gathering questions and have many parts: 5, 6, and 8. Don’t take too long with these, but take a few comments.
- **Day Two:** Stop only briefly here, if at all, and then move to the heart of the story of Rachel and Leah.
- **Day Three:** If your meeting place has Internet access, you could show Bonnie Rait singing “I Can’t Make You Love Me” on You-Tube. It will set the scene for what you want to emphasize: the pain our idols cause. Go to the heart of idolatry, to the goodness of God, and to ways He blessed Leah (question 9).
- **Day Four:** This is an important day. Slow down.
- **Day Five:** Emphasize 15c, 16, and 17.

LESSON 9: RESPONDING TO OUR ONE TRUE LOVER

- **Q1:** Have someone summarize what is happening, but have many respond to 1c. Some have seen this passage positively, thinking of the bride hiding in the clefts as hiding in Christ. But that doesn’t work, since the Bridegroom represents Christ and is asking her to come out, to come higher.
- **Q2:** As Tim Keller says, “A sense of His absence is a sense of His presence.”
- **Day 2:** Since question 6 is a review, just answer 6b. Also, just answer 7c.

LESSON 10: WHAT ANGELS LONG TO SEE

- **Q3:** The gospel should assure the “lowly” brother of God’s love and should also humble the “rich” brother.
- **Day 3:** You could have someone summarize answers to 9 and 10, but get several responses for 9d and 10f.
- **Days 4 and 5:** Pace yourself to get here—these are important days. Have everyone answer 16 and close with a time of praise.