

MARVEL

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY POTENTIAL

Participant's Guide: Week 1

SERMON RECAP: WHAT DID THE TEXT MEAN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Our passage this week was Joshua 24:14-15:

"Therefore, fear the Lord and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh. But if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh."

We learned a few key points:

1. Discernment starts with fearing the Lord.
2. If you fear the Lord, you must place Him first and remove all other idols.
3. Discernment is a choice.

Question: What did God reveal to you during Sunday's message that challenged your thinking on how you have used discernment in your life?

THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

As we learned, discernment begins with the fear of the Lord. Fear is reverence and true devotion. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Prov. 9:10).

Oswald Chambers: "The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."

What you "fear" is normally your idol. It is where you derive your ultimate identity, worth, and value. As our founder and creator, God desires and deserves the central place of worship in your heart. Since you are created in his image, you can only find true identity and value through relationship with Him. To demonstrate God's attitude towards idols, the first two commandments provide a striking display of the generational impact of the sin of idolatry.

Read Exodus 20:3-6 as a group.

Question: What does this passage reveal about God in relation to Joshua 24:14-15?

Question: Have you seen the generational impact of poor discernment in the history of your family or another family?

Discernment is not just a one-time choice, but something that we have to learn as a way of living. Let's be honest: this just doesn't come naturally to us! In fact, pastor/theologian John Calvin once referred to the human heart as an idol factory. From birth, our tendency is to take good things and make idols out of them. In the book *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, Jonathan Dodson identifies three healthy steps to practice to lead both ourselves and others into a lifestyle of discernment rooted in the fear of the Lord.

- 1) Know your sin
- 2) Fight your sin
- 3) Trust your savior

Dodson: "Before we can fight our sin, we must know what sins are currently present in our lives. An unknown opponent is difficult to defeat. Knowing our sin requires familiarity with our particular temptations, areas where we are prone to sin. These temptations and sins may be visible or invisible, as obvious as anger or as subtle as self-pity."

1) Know Your Sin

To assist us in "knowing our sin," Tim Keller provides this helpful list of diagnostic questions from his book *Counterfeit Gods* to help us assess our hearts:

Read through the following list as a group- "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if..."

1. I have power and influence over others." (Power Idolatry)
2. I am loved and respected by ____." (Approval Idolatry)
3. I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life." (Comfort idolatry)
4. I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of ____." (Control idolatry)
5. People are dependent on me and need me." (Helping Idolatry)
6. Someone is there to protect me and keep me safe." (Dependence idolatry)
7. I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone." (Independence idolatry)
8. I am highly productive and getting a lot done." (Work idolatry)
9. I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work." (Achievement idolatry)
10. I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions." (Materialism idolatry)
11. I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in its activities." (Religion idolatry)
12. This one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me." (Individual person idolatry)
13. I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality." (Irreligion idolatry)
14. My race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior." (Racial/cultural idolatry)
15. A particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in." (Inner ring idolatry)
16. My children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me." (Family idolatry)
17. Mr. or Ms. "Right" is in love with me." (Relationship Idolatry)
18. I am hurting, in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt." (Suffering idolatry)
19. My political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power." (Ideology idolatry)
20. I have a particular kind of look or body image." (Image idolatry)

Question: Pick one or two of these statements that relate to you personally. Share your answers and describe how you have seen this "idol" show up in your life. What is the promise that your particular "idol" makes to you that is so appealing?

2) Fight Your Sin ("get rid of the other gods")

Before we discuss our role in fighting sin, here's the good news: Jesus has already won! He defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection, and he is now making all things new, including you and me.

Read Romans 6:7-11 as a group.

As we read in this amazing passage, every person was at one time enslaved to sin. However, through Christ's work on the cross, the decisive victory has been won. The power of sin has been broken although the presence of sin still remains in our flesh. Therefore, Paul says "consider yourselves dead to sin."

So how do we fight to remove these idols? We fight by replacing the inferior promises of sin with the superior promises of God.

Here's an example:

Idol: Life only has meaning if my children are happy and happy with me. (Family Idolatry)

Promise: If I can just keep my children happy, life will go well for me.

Truth: "Don't withhold discipline from a youth...Strike him with a rod, and you will rescue his life from Sheol (death)...The father of a righteous son will rejoice greatly, and one who fathers a wise son will delight in him" (Prov 23:13-14,24).

Promise: Discipline, in the context of a loving relationship, will lead to joy from righteousness and wisdom over time.

Activity: As a group, choose another example from the broader list above. Identify the promise that the idol offers and then search for the superior promise found in Scripture.

3) Trust Your Savior

As we read further in Joshua 24, we see the people affirm that they will join Joshua in serving Yahweh (Josh 24:16-18). However, Joshua makes a stunning statement in verse 19: "But Joshua told the people, "You will not be able to worship Yahweh, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins." Joshua knew the nature of the Israelites and their tendency to drift away from God. As we read on through the Old Testament, the majority of the Israelites fail to keep their promises and fall further and further away from the Lord.

Fortunately, our hope is not found in our own performance or morality:

"You'll never be moral enough and you will never measure up to a holy God. In fact, no matter how high you climb the spiritual ladder, you'll never reach him. But there is good news. Jesus actually climbed down the spiritual ladder for you, died for your failure to perform morally, rose again, placed you on his back, and then climbed back up the spiritual ladder, where he placed you right in the presence of a holy God, fully loved and fully accepted" (Dodson).

As a group, read 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Ultimately the power for obedience comes from trusting the one who has performed perfectly on our behalf. When we read the Scriptures, there are amazing promises made by God to His people. All of God's promises find their fulfillment in Christ.

So we trust His personal word to us. We take him at His word. Jesus is not an idea that we believe, but a person that we trust. The ultimate goal of discernment is that we choose daily to fix our eyes on Jesus and marvel at His great love for us and His ability to sustain us even when we fail.

Question: In closing, write down a specific promise from Scripture that has found its "yes" in Christ. How would this specifically impact your family if you were to truly believe this promise, regardless of where you are today?

CLOSING THOUGHT

Encourage each group member to memorize the passage during the upcoming week and to share with the group during your next time together.

For Further Reading:

Gods at War (Kyle Idleman)
Gospel-Centered Discipleship (Jonathan Dodson)
Counterfeit Gods (Tim Keller)