

# Idols of our time: Power

Mark 9:30-37

Anne-Marie Ternes

## Understanding and identifying idols:

An idol is anything that gives you more pleasure, security and happiness than God does. It could be a number of things:

- Another person (your family, your friends)
- It could be an object (money, your house)
- Something about yourself (your beauty, your physical fitness)
- Something you strive for (independence, control, influence, success)

All of these things are good things, they are blessings from God. But they become idols when we love and serve them more than God.

Idolatry = turning a good thing into an ultimate thing.

1. Have you identified idols in your life?
  - a. Ask yourself: what is your worst nightmare? What thing, if you lost it, would mean that almost all significance would be drained out of your life?
  - b. Is your answer to 1a above anything other than losing God? If so then you have identified an idol.

## Understanding power:

When we think of 'power' we might think of great political dictators and leaders: Donald Trump, Kim Jong-Un, or Adolf Hitler. We might think of great physical strength that is demonstrated by athletes. We might think of great mental strength and determination.

Power could be all of those things. But it can also be more subtle than that. There are two types of power:

- Potential - your own success, achievement and status.
- Influence - the ability to influence events or people.

We idolise power when we:

- Believe we are in control of events
- Derive a sense of self-worth from being able to change another person's mind
- Focus most on our own personal achievement and success

Can you identify times that you have idolised power?

## Mark 9:

1. Read through all of Mark 9.
  - a. What are the major events in the chapter?
  - b. What things stand out to you in these stories?
  - c. Putting these stories together, who demonstrates power?
  - d. Who desires power?

2. Why is the disciples' argument about who is the greatest (v34) so significant after the events in v30-32
3. What is the significance of the disciples' silence in v34
4. During Mark chapter 9, Jesus and his disciples are travelling towards Jerusalem. They are all anticipating the coming of God's kingdom. Based on v30-v34, what do you think their ideas are about what the coming of the kingdom of God is going to look like? (i.e. do Jesus and his disciples have the same idea?)
5. While travelling to Jerusalem, what is Jesus anticipating? What are his disciples anticipating? What does this tell you about their desires?
6. How does Jesus define greatness in the kingdom of God? (v35).
7. Why does Jesus use a child as an example? (see hint\* below if needed). What is significant about welcoming a child at that time?

### Battling idols in our lives:

Identifying idols in our lives is an important step. However, they need to be not just identified but removed. How can we do this?

Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish theologian and pastor, talked about "the expulsive power of a new affection"

The human heart is not a vacuum. It cannot be empty. We will always love and serve something. So we cannot simply decide to remove our love of an idol, we need to also fill our hearts with something else. When we fill our hearts with a 'new affection', we 'expel' the idol. This 'new affection' is a knowledge and love of Jesus.

1. How can you increase your love of Jesus?
2. In what ways can you grow in appreciation for what Jesus has done for you?
3. Are there ways that you can grow in your understanding of the gospel?
4. How can you make sure the gospel influences your life everyday?
5. How can we do these things together as a church?

\*HINT: The image of the child is about the child's status, not about character traits of the child. The child represents:

- Low order on the social scale
- One who is under the authority of others
- One who has not yet achieved the right of self-determination

So we are not being called to be like children. This is not about the innocence of the child. This is about modelling Jesus, who welcomes the child. Jesus who welcomes those who are least in society. He disregards his own reputation and status, and loves the lowly in society. He desires love and servanthood, not power.