

CITY ON A HILL

gods
at
war

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INTRODUCTION



WELCOME

First things first, thank you for choosing to lead this group. God has given his people three things to engage, encourage and equip them for his calling — **his Word, his Spirit and his church**. By making space for people to gather, you are opening the door for all three to converge. This is never to be taken for granted. So thank you.

This study is all about the struggle to reorient our hearts to follow God, which may seem simple at first. But as we go through the DVD episodes, group discussions and the journal, it will probably become clear that our hearts have been more seduced by false gods than we might have realized or cared to admit. This will feel very much like bad news. But be encouraged by this:

The more we understand the brokenness in our lives, the more clearly we will be able hear the good news of Jesus and follow it towards healing and renewal in the Lord.

As you undertake to lead this journey, there are some important things to remember so that you don't wind up

overwhelmed. For one, as the group's leader, *it's not your job to fix people, heal people or even convict them of sin.* Much less is it your responsibility to have all the answers. In fact, *trying to have all the answers can actually hinder you as a leader* and stunt your group's growth.

Your job is simply to help people feel welcome to honestly examine and talk about their habits, their desires and their worries — in short, their lives — and point them to God's Word for comfort and wisdom.

If you encourage people to deeper and deeper honesty, you will be able to watch as the Spirit does the heavy lifting. God bears the load.

Not everyone will come to the group ready to share their personal lives or even really examine them. To cultivate a group that invites open honesty, you can think of your group as something to both nurture and protect.

When it comes to nurturing, do what you can to create an environment in which deeper connections can form between you and your group members. Food can go a long way here. Whether you provide food yourself or you set up a rotation for each group member to bring a snack, always try to have something available to eat. You could even have a full meal and do the DVD episodes as a kind of dinner theater with discussion over dessert. Along with



food, make sure there are comfortable places to sit where everyone can see one another so no one feels on the outside of the discussion. And let people help you clean up afterward.

Nurture a family atmosphere where everyone has a part to play and everyone is welcomed.

Your group also needs protection. The stories on the DVD are unvarnished and will challenge each group member. People may talk about things they've never felt safe talking about before. Someone may confess an ongoing sin that's uncomfortable to know about. Or someone may act completely blind to idolatry that seems blindingly obvious to everyone else in the group.

One essential practice that will cultivate healthy openness in your group is establishing a standing rule that nobody shares group stuff with people who aren't there.

Consider it family business. This will protect your time and foster a feeling of safety and trust. That said, let people open up at their own pace. In a fruitful group, people should feel safe admitting to any and all of kinds of sin and hurt. So while there is work to be done, passing judgment is not part of that work. What this means on a practical level is that your group should have a sort of contract. Everyone has the freedom to share honestly and openly and everyone

else agrees to listen with care and acceptance. As people open up, encourage everyone to withhold criticism or easy answers. The time may come to confront sin, but do that slowly, very prayerfully and only after much listening. Each of us is just one unforeseen tragedy away from slipping into any manner of idolatry, so treat one another with grace and humility.

All of this talk of sin and brokenness spilling into the open might make the weeks ahead seem intimidating and uncertain. But let's go back to the start. The work you are doing to lead this group is not just something important to be endured — it's good work and rich with possible rewards. Time after time in the DVD episodes, you will hear people tell not just of their sorrows and dark times but also of the just-in-time relationships they had where someone reached out to them with the hope of Christ. Because someone reached out, these speakers' lives were forever changed.

Your group could be that relationship to someone.

Think of it like this. God can speak through burning shrubbery, donkeys and disembodied hands writing on a wall, and yet he chooses so often to do his work of reaching the lost and hurting through regular people like you and me. By offering space for people to explore God's Word and their own lives, you are making the exact kind of



opening in the busy 21st century where people can step out of expectations, pressures and disappointments and step in to find Jesus ready to completely rewrite their lives and their futures. Embark on this group with the anticipation of not just such an exciting prospect for the people in your group but also for yourself.

MAKING
THE MOST
OF YOUR
gods at war
STUDY GROUP

Here are a few practicalities to keep in mind as you approach group meetings:



ELEMENTS OF THE SIX-WEEK STUDY

Each week will involve:

1. Direct messages and instructions to you, the leader. These are just for you to read to yourself, helping you to understand the material and guide the meeting. Each week's brief introduction prepares you to lead the session, and the closing message is a prompt to pray for the time ahead.
2. A short welcome for the group that will get your members ready for the session.
3. The DVD presentation.
4. A guide for the discussion.
5. A sending prayer for the group to do together.

There is also an accompanying journal for the **gods at war** study that we recommend you use. You can incorporate as much or as little of it in each week's meeting as you find helpful. Perhaps reflecting on the previous week's journal exercises for a few minutes could replace the opening question time.

HAVE A BIBLE READY

It would certainly be difficult to talk very much about worship, idolatry and being transformed by God's grace without having access to God's Word. Have your Bible with you at each group meeting. Encourage your group to bring their Bibles as well. If a passage is referenced, have a volunteer read it before the discussion moves on. Let God's words shape your words.

PRAYER WILL BE IMPORTANT (of course!)

At the start of each week's lesson, you will find a space for you to compose your own personal prayer for the group. Think about the content of that week's lesson, think about what you know about your group's members, and think generally about God's intention to renew his people.

*Let these thoughts guide your prayer
for the group.*

At the end of each lesson, you will find a space to gather any prayer request from group members. Write them down and send them out to the group during the week to remind them to be in prayer for the group meetings and for one another as well.



GET FAMILILAR WITH ALL THE MATERIALS

We recommend that before the first group meeting you watch the leader's tutorial (found on DVD 1) and then, if possible, watch each video lesson in advance of that week's group time. Definitely read through the week's Leader Guide before your group arrives to get a feel for its flow and content.

SET UP & TEST THE DVD PLAYER

Make sure everything works.

BE CREATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO GROUP TIME

Build your group around what helps its members bond, build trust and open up. Don't build your group around ticking off every question in the Leader Guide. What would equip the group to listen and to care for one another? Do that. If you spend your entire group time having a rich discussion of one particular question, that's great.

If someone shares a deep hurt and you spend the rest of your time praying for him or her, that's great. This guide is meant to serve you and your group with the end goal being deep relationships marked by trust, honesty and a growing love for Jesus.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The writers and producers of this material pray for you in our service. It's a challenge to encourage others to confront their idols while you also seek to root out your own. You may feel inadequate to the task. The Bible, though, is filled with people who were inadequate to the task. What was true for them is true for you:

The Lord is more than adequate, and he is near. The work is his, the victory already won. All that remains is the journey.

“

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

”

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

WEEK 1: WORSHIP





INTRO FOR THE LEADER

This first entry in the leader guide is a bit lengthy; it contains the additional sections of “Preparation” and “Introduction to the Journal,” as well as a long “Welcome” section. This first session is your opportunity to set the trajectory for the entire series, to initiate some traditions that will give your meetings structure and a rhythm that will grow increasingly familiar — and even comforting — for everyone.

The goal of this first group meeting is to tease out a new concept of what it means to worship, as well as what forms an idol can take in our lives. The introduction section in the journal can be a helpful extra resource for you in addition to the first DVD episode. The journal contains short definitions for “worship” and “idolatry” that may help you get your own bearings before you lead the group.

Remember, your job is simply to give people space to talk, to give them something to start talking about, and to encourage them to be vulnerable, allowing them to talk about stuff that’s actually happened to them and share how they feel about it. Jesus promised that where two or more gather in his name, he will be there with them.

Spend a moment praying that God will help you believe this and give you confidence and even anticipation. As you lead, rest in Jesus’ presence.



WELCOME

As we begin this series, I first want to share my hopes for our time together. I primarily hope that this becomes a place where we each feel comfortable being open and honest and where we can count on receiving care and encouragement. I hope we each feel that the Lord has changed our hearts by the end of the series.

Very briefly, I want to share a couple of house rules that will help each of us feel safe and comfortable with opening up.

One, let's commit to keeping what's said here between us — we won't discuss anything that's said here in confidence with anyone outside the group.

And two, let's commit to listening to one another with care and acceptance. We will each encounter areas in which we need to turn away from sin and turn back to God and we should definitely encourage one another to change, but let's do that slowly, very prayerfully and only after much listening. Let's show each other the same grace God shows us.

Before we start the DVD episode, what are your initial thoughts or feelings about the **gods at war** series we're starting? Any initial reaction?

I'm curious, what do you think of when you hear the word "idolatry"?

Let us pray a short prayer before we watch the first episode:

Father God, you have brought each of us here together this evening because you have plans for each of us. God, help us to hear what you would want us to hear as we watch this episode and as we talk together after. Help us to know you and love you more. Amen.

DVD PRESENTATION

If you have a **gods at war** Journal, there is a space to jot down any thoughts or questions you may have while you watch. I also have paper if you would prefer to write on that.



Play Episode 1 on the **gods at war** DVD 1.

CONVERSATION

The following questions are meant to guide your conversation. Don't feel like you absolutely must get to them all. Don't rush. Let the questions breathe so people have time to think and answer.



1. Would anyone mind sharing their initial reaction?

One of the key points that Kyle Idleman makes is that everybody worships. Nobody doesn't worship.

1. Does that seem true to you? Do you feel like you worship something?

2. It will help us to talk about worship if we have a good definition that we can all agree on. When we say “worship,” what do we mean?

The “Gods at War” Journal that goes along with this study defines worship like this:

“Worship is something we do constantly and, in fact, cannot stop doing. Worship is the sum total of all the ways we organize our lives — our schedules, our interests, our finances, our loves — around the thing or things we believe will give our lives meaning, direction, and joy.”

1. How does that definition make you think about your regular life?

2. Based on that definition, what does it look

like to worship false gods like romantic love or money or being part of the inside social circle?

3. Can anyone give an example of an idol they've seen in their own life?

4. What were some lowercase-g gods in your family growing up?

5. What are some that you see in the culture around us?



Kyle offered several questions to help identify things that we might be turning to in worship. Questions like: What can you not imagine losing? What causes your biggest disappointments? What do you daydream about? How do you spend your time and money?

1. How do these questions strike you? Does any particular one really resonate with you?

2. How would it look different to worship the Living God?



*After some discussion on this question, ask someone to turn to **Romans 12** and read verses 1-2.*

1. What does this short passage have to say



about worship? What does it say about what it really means to be a living sacrifice? *The answer you should guide your group to should be along the lines of “not conforming to the pattern of this world, but being transformed.”*

2. Most importantly, what does it teach us about the motivation for our worship? *Guide your group to the answer, “We do it in response to God’s mercy.”*

Over the next several weeks, we are going to hear five stories of people who, whether they realized it or not, were conforming to the pattern of this world in one way or another. We are going to see their very real hurt, sorrow and even regret. We are also going to see them waking up to their idolatry and finding a whole new life in Jesus, even a whole new way of life. These stories are going to help us understand how idols actually take shape in life.

The goal of these meetings is that by studying and rejoicing in these stories of change, we will start to recognize our own idols and be filled with hope that they can be overthrown and replaced and that much of the damage and pain they have caused in us will be healed.

INTRODUCTION TO THE JOURNAL

As I mentioned earlier, this study comes with a journal. The

Journal is primarily designed to help you reflect through the week on the things we talk about together in group time. In doing so, you'll address something I'm sure we all have struggled with at some point and maybe even struggle with now. That thing is making it a habit to spend time specifically dwelling on God, on the Scriptures, on how God might be trying to shape our lives if we would be still long enough to listen for him.

I understand journaling isn't necessarily everyone's cup of tea, but I still encourage you to give it a shot. Sometimes doing something out of the ordinary, something out of our comfort zones, can be just disruptive enough to spark a change in us.

The basic gist of the Journal is that it follows the DVD series for six weeks, asking us to really search our hearts — but more importantly, to let the Word search our hearts — and identify the things that lure our worship away from God. After that, the journal offers to guide us through an intentional process to unseat an idol and replace it with the God who saved us.

I would guess we're all here because we want to have a strong relationship with our heavenly Father. The Journal can help. While the Journal itself doesn't contain magical answers, its challenge to set aside time to actively seek the Lord invites us to be in the right position for God to minister to us. And when you combine that personal time with our gatherings to talk with one another — where we learn about



both God and ourselves — then you pretty much have the exact formula that God has used for thousands of years to save people, change people and build up his church. So please consider trying the journal out. Give it a go this week and see what the Lord might do.

SENDING PRAYER

At the end of each meeting, we will spend time praying together and for each other. We call this a “sending prayer” because we want to be sent off with heartening thoughts about what we’ve learned here. We want to take this group time — time spent seeking God and building our little community of fellow Christians — and carry it with us. We don’t want to forget it all as soon as we get home and re-enter our weekly routine. Throughout the rest of our week, we want to remember each other and remember what God has shown us here. So this week let’s pray about what we hope to see happen over the next five weeks. Who would like to share some of their hopes for this study?

After some time sharing, spend 5-10 minutes praying for the specific hopes of the group. Feel free to lead the prayer, but also feel free to give others the opportunity to pray. Say something like, “I’m going to start our prayer, and feel free to pray as well.” You could then ask someone else to close the prayer. However, if the entire group is new to each other, it may be wise for you to close this week and then later start inviting others as you get to know everyone.