

Limitless

Pastor Doug Rumsford tells of a dinner party he went to. He found that the man and woman sitting near him were artists, potters to be exact. Wanting to be polite, he asked them what they were working on. "We're testing the limits of clay," they said. Doug had no idea what that meant, and their explanations were getting him nowhere. They invited him to their studio to see what this was all about.

The next day, Doug arrived at the studio and saw an enormous pot. It towered over him, rising several feet toward the high ceiling. "Pick it up," the potters said. Doug thought they were kidding him. This pot was enormous. But he placed his arms around it as best he could and gave a slight tug upwards. It floated off the floor in his hands. The potters told Doug that the pot contained only three pounds of clay, but was sturdy enough to stand a dozen feet tall. Through their artistry and skill, they were testing the limits of clay.

If we find the limits of clay surprising, imagine the surprise we experience as we ponder the limitlessness of God. As creative as some people are, they will never devise anything like Him. God himself is creative too. This week we will see that it is God who works his artistry in us to make us who he wants us to be, his works of art.

Monday – Casting Idols Aside

"Yet, if he would, man cannot live all to this world. If not religious, he will be superstitious. If he worships not the true God, he will have his idols." Theodore Parker, Critical and Miscellaneous Writings

1. Please read Exodus 20:1-6. What is the point of verse 4-6? How do you apply those verses in your life?
2. Compare verse 3 with verses 4-6 and consider how one informs the others.
3. Why do you think Exodus 20:22-23 cautions God's people against putting idols alongside God, even if not giving them precedence over God?

Making it Personal: Do you have any idols in your life? Ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24).

Tuesday – Divided Loyalty

"When men have gone so far as to talk as though their idols have come to life, it is time that someone broke them."

Richard H. Tawney, 20th c. British economist

1. Our culture does not tend to have actual hand carved idols, as many other cultures do. On the other hand, we have other things that assume places of affection and even reverence in our lives. What are some of those "idols"?
2. Please read Exodus 24:3-7. How would you describe the people's response to God's instructions?
3. According to Exodus 24:12-18, what did Moses tell Aaron and the other leaders to do while he remained on the mountain? How do you think their experience in verses 9-11 equipped them for this task?
4. What happened in Exodus 32:1-8? Why do you think the people and their leadership turned so quickly from their commitment to God?

Making it Personal: Like the Israelites we are easily tempted to turn from God? Pray for him to keep you close to him.

Wednesday – Falling Down

prop – *noun*: An object placed beneath or against a structure to keep it from falling or shaking.

American Heritage Dictionary

1. Please read Deuteronomy 27:14-15 and Isaiah 40:18-20. What does the word "topple" (used in the NIV) suggest to you about idols?
2. Please read 1 Samuel 4:1-11. In what ways did both the Israelites and the Philistines mistake the nature of the Ark for just another idol?
3. Finally, look at 1 Samuel 5:1-7. How did God show his superiority over the man-made idol of the Philistines?

Making it Personal: What idols do you need to stop propping up, allowing them to topple before God?

Thursday – Naaman's Lesson

"Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step toward disaster." William Bridges, 20th c. writer

1. Please read 2 Kings 5:1-12. Why do you think Naaman resisted giving up his own ways? How might you be like him?
2. Now read 2 Kings 5:13-19. What insight did Naaman gain about God and Rimmon?

Text Insight: In accompanying the King into the temple and helping him to bow before Rimmon, Naaman was doing his job as one of the officials responsible for the King's security; he was not joining in worship.

3. What does verse 1 tell us about God's work in Naaman's life, even before Naaman knew God?

Making it Personal: Like Naaman, make sure you do not bow down in worship to anyone or anything but God.

Friday – Pottery Clay

"I cannot dream that this watch exists and has no watchmaker." Voltaire, 18th c. French philosopher

1. Please read Isaiah 29:15-16, 45:9-12 and 64:8. Describe what is going on here between the potter and the clay. What actions/attitudes is the clay guilty of?
2. How do these passages from Isaiah serve as a commentary upon our present cultural situation?
3. How did Paul take the potter/clay metaphor and apply it to our lives (see Ephesians 2:10)?

Text Insight: The Greek word translated "workmanship" (or "masterpiece" in some translations) also gives us the English word "poem." The sense in Ephesians is that each one of us is a masterful work of God's artistry.

Making it Personal: What is hindering you from carrying out God's good works through you?

For the Weekend: Read Jeremiah 18:1-15. What idol(s) do you need to forsake? How can you cooperate with God in his efforts to mold you into his workmanship? Ask God to take you as you are and make you as you should be.