

Oct 25, 26 – Leader's Guide

Acts 19 "We Become What We Worship"

1. What are some of the things people in our culture look to for identity, security, significance, or hope? Why are these things so compelling? In what way do we become shaped by their patterns and desires?

We tend to think of idolatry as something belonging to the ancient world, but the difference between us and the Ephesians may simply be that their idols were easier to recognize. We may not bow before statues, but we still look to created things to give us what only God can ultimately provide.

Encourage the group to identify things such as career success, financial security, romantic relationships, physical appearance, reputation, achievement, comfort, family, or the approval of others. These things are compelling precisely because most of them are genuinely good. They promise to meet deep human longings: to be loved, to matter, to belong, to be secure, and to have hope for the future. The problem arises when we take something good and make it ultimate — when we begin to say, "If I have that, then my life will have meaning, worth, and security."

Explore how these things begin to shape us. If we look to money for security, we may become anxious about what we have and increasingly reluctant to be generous. If we look to achievement for significance, we may become driven, competitive, and unable to rest. If we look to the approval of others for our identity, we may compromise our convictions or become whatever others want us to be. If we look to comfort as our highest good, we may increasingly avoid sacrifice, inconvenience, and costly love.

The central insight is that worship is never simply something we do; it is something that shapes who we become. As we give something ultimate worth, we gradually take on its patterns, priorities, and desires. This is why the question of what we worship matters so profoundly. We become what we worship.

Read Acts 19:18–41 together.

2. What changes were taking place in Ephesus as people responded to Jesus (Acts 19:18–27)? Why did Demetrius see the Christian movement as such a threat?

Paul's sustained ministry led people away from magic and idols toward Jesus (vv. 18–20, 26). The change was not merely a private adjustment of beliefs; it disrupted an economy built around Artemis worship. Demetrius explicitly fears for his trade and for the honour of Artemis. Note how the transformation of a city begins with changed allegiances in individual lives. Encourage close attention to what Luke actually says.

3. What do Demetrius's words and the crowd's response (vv. 23–34) reveal about the relationship between what we worship and fear and anger?

Demetrius speaks of lost business and the goddess's prestige, and his appeal ignites fury. The crowd gathers in confusion, and the theatre rings with chants to Artemis. The sermon highlights the way a threatened ultimate good produces disproportionate fear or anger. Demetrius is a useful mirror: when we feel our identity or security slipping away, we often tighten our grip rather than release it.

4. When the town clerk calms the crowd (vv. 35–41), what is striking about where the Ephesians finally turn for reassurance? Where might we turn when something we rely on is threatened?

The clerk appeals to civic stability, established claims about Artemis, and the threat of Roman legal consequences—not to Artemis's ability to save them. This is a suggestive contrast: when one foundation feels shaky, people may reach for another. A career can give way to reputation, a relationship to another relationship, or the need to be needed to a new role. The question is not whether law and order are bad, but whether they can bear the ultimate weight of our hope.

5. The sermon suggested that our fears, anger, and sadness can reveal what we have made ultimate. How might these emotions help us recognize what has taken too large a place in our hearts?

Fear, anger, and sadness are normal responses to genuine goods being threatened, blocked, or lost. But paralyzing fear, consuming rage, or a collapse of all hope can prompt the question: Have I asked this good thing to tell me who I am? Avoid implying that strong emotions always prove idolatry; grief and distress can have

many causes. The aim is gentle discernment, not diagnosing one another.

6. Why is simply removing an idol, or replacing it with another source of identity unlikely to bring lasting freedom? What would it mean for a greater love to displace it?

Thomas Chalmers called this "the expulsive power of a new affection." We cannot simply shame ourselves out of loving something; the heart needs to see something more beautiful and worthy. Replacing career with children, or approval with achievement, merely moves the weight from one fragile thing to another. Christian transformation is not first moral rearrangement, but a reordering of love as we behold Jesus.

7. How does the gospel give us an identity, security, and future that our accomplishments, relationships, or possessions cannot provide? What aspect of Jesus's love do you most need to behold?

The sermon stresses that in Jesus we are God's beloved children and heirs of his future. His forgiveness covers shame more securely than reputation or achievement. His promises are not undone by failure, suffering, or even death. Help participants move from abstract truths to particular gospel promises they can return to in prayer. This is not a demand to feel differently on command, but an invitation to behold the one who is worthy.

8. As worship of Jesus changed lives in Ephesus, it began to change the city, and eventually an empire. What might become different in our relationships, priorities, generosity, or service as we increasingly worship Jesus?

The sermon points to the later testimony of Emperor Julian: Christians cared not only for their own poor but for others as well. The distinction is between imitating the outward fruit and being transformed at the roots by worship of the self-giving God. Handel's Messiah provides another illustration of contemplation flowing into generosity. Ask for concrete, modest responses: whom might we serve, what might we hold more loosely, and how might our use of time or money change? End by praying that the Spirit deepens our love for Jesus.