

***God Is So Good***  
**Week 6 Counterfeit Gods**  
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We've spent recent weeks exploring God's goodness in our lives.

I want to wrap-up this series by looking at a couple of counterfeit gods that can take us off track.

I confess that at some time or other I have struggled with each of these, and each time my life was diminished by them.

I worried more, obsessed more, but enjoyed less.

What you give your attention to profoundly affects you at a conscious and unconscious level so a *spiritual* life is an *aware* life ... aware of where we put our attention.

Did you happen to see the *Time* magazine article two years back about the rising concern that therapists are calling FoMO?

FoMO stands for Fear of Missing Out, and in recent years it's become a strong contributor to depression and anxiety because it is driven by social media.

Therapists have a formal definition:

“(FoMO) is the uneasy and sometimes all-consuming feeling that you're missing out – that your peers are doing, in the know about, or in possession of more or something better than you”.

Some studies estimate that nearly three quarters of young adults experience this phenomenon.

Fear of Missing Out sends us compulsively to our digital hamster wheels as we vainly try to keep up.

What we see is people we know always doing interesting things, always having fun, and always smiling.

“Geeze”, we think. “I wish my life were like theirs”.

Ironically, we turn to social media to feel connected but leave feeling more isolated, diminished and depressed.

Not good.

We all get it: we know that social media only shows a cherry-picked version of people’s lives.

But we are so prone to comparing and to judging ourselves unfavorably, that click by click our jealousy builds.

Erica Jong quips, “Jealousy is all the fun you think they had.”

So, FoMO reinforces our jealousy because our underlying fear is that our life is not measuring up.

The eighteenth-century French philosopher Montesquieu nailed it when he wrote,

“If one only wished to be happy, this could be easily accomplished; but we wish to be happier than other people, and this is always difficult, for we believe others to be happier than they are.”

Social media may be enflaming our jealousy and anxiety, but it’s nothing new.

2,000 years ago, the Bible warned,  
*Galatians 6:4-5 Don’t compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.*

Counterfeit gods are life-diminishing.

You and I were created for relationship with God, so we have something like a God-shaped hole at our core that only God can fill.

No matter what else we have accomplished or acquired, we carry a longing for wholeness ... but this wholeness only comes through a relationship with God.

Only God can fill that hole.

FoMO is a type of envy, which is one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

The lie of envy is that I will be whole and complete once I have what some other person possesses.

Cain's envy of Abel led to the first recorded case of murder.

Cain so longed for the blessing his brother had received that he could not enjoy his own good.

His envy grew so bitter that he destroyed his brother, and ultimately his own life as well.

Envy says, "I cannot enjoy my life while you have what I crave."

Proverbs 14:30 *It's healthy to be content, but envy will eat you up.*

The word "envy" comes from the Latin "to look with a malicious eye," from which we get the expression "evil eye."

Satan is the archetypal envier because not having the power and glory of God became so intolerable to him, that he rebelled against God and created his own realm in which he could reign.

Looking closely at the emotion of envy, we discover two things.

First, envy is not just a deep longing for something; it also carries despair of ever receiving the good things of life.

We might feel "I'm not good enough" for those things I desire.

Or, "I don't feel capable of acquiring those things on my own."

An eighteenth century Jewish thinker wrote:

“...the one who envies gains nothing for himself and deprives the one he envies of nothing. He only loses .... (because) he broods and worries and suffers to the point that his neighbor’s good prevents him from enjoying his own.”

The second thing we discover is that envy is always found wherever gratitude is absent.

While gratitude produces appreciation and love, envy generates anxiety and – eventually - hate.

The envious feel they have *nothing* because they don’t have *everything*, and so discount their own gifts.

Ecclesiastes 4:6, *It's better to be content with what you have than to always be struggling for more. That's like chasing the wind.*

When was the last time you found yourself going down the internet rabbit hole?

You intended to log on to buy concert tickets, but then your attention was grabbed by some click bait about Adele’s net worth (\$135-million by the way).

Then you clicked onto photos of Kanye West’s new home.

65-thousand people immediately “liked” his Tweet about his and Kim’s new mansion.

Then there was someone’s rant about Kanye’s recent statement about American slavery being a choice, and someone’s rant about the rant.

Billions of dollars are being spent to grab your eyeballs so marketers can stoke-up your envy so that you’ll become un-grateful for what you now have and go buy something else.

Envy is included in the Ten Commandments because it eats away at appreciation for the good life’s given us.

There is always someone who has more, and someone who has less.

So, envy is ultimately a rejection of God, who uniquely fashioned each of us and placed us into this world at this time.

The final counterfeit god I want to look at this morning is perfectionism.

Perfectionism is the false premise that I will gain value by being flawless.

I will feel good about myself once I get everything in perfect order.

Perfectionism is trying to make ourselves like God.

Perfectionism is a denial of our humanness because only God is flawless.

Instead of accepting our struggles and imperfections, we compulsively hide them from ourselves and others.

If we are driven to be pure and flawless, then we are unable to recognize our short-fallings or to learn from our mistakes.

Instead of being motivated to grow, perfectionists are motivated by fear of failure.

Often, they are hypersensitive about how others view them, and that attitude spills over to how they view others, too.

That's why perfectionists often are rigid, joyless and judgmental.

Perfectionists tend to put people with traits they admire onto pedestals, while projecting their own negative traits onto other people.

So, perfectionism is a counterfeit god that leaves no room for grace.

*2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

For grace to heal our perfectionism, we must approach life with humility.

Humility is simply accepting our creatureliness – creatureliness that God calls “good and very good”.

It is stepping down from our house of cards throne so that grace can move in.

*James 4:6 But God gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

This is the ultimate self-acceptance, but for perfectionists in particular this is hard.

We want to accept those parts of ourselves we judge as good, and discard those parts we consider undesirable.

But self-acceptance cannot be selective.

Self-acceptance is a package deal: accepting and loving the gift of this life ... all that we are, and all that we are not.

This being Mother’s Day, let me say that perfectionism can hamper our parenting.

Perfectionism turns our best intentions into over-controlling parenting because we feel afraid of failing.

Perfectionists may feel personally judged for the behaviors (especially the failures) of their children.

There are no perfect children; we must love them for who they are.

And, there are no perfect parents.

Sometimes our children make bad decisions and suffer the consequences.

We can guide them, love them, encourage them, empathize with them ... but just like God let Adam and Eve eat that apple, we ultimately have to step back and let our children go.

God neither calls us nor equips us to be perfect parents ... only “good enough” parents.

There is great healing in accepting that we are not perfect parents but good enough parents.

Good enough to have provided for our children, good enough to have loved and cared for them.

Similarly, we find healing by accepting our own flawed parents and letting go of the infantile demand that they had been perfect.

Forgiveness is giving up all hope for a perfect yesterday.

Forgiveness is giving up all hope for having had perfect parents.

My parents had big struggles.

My mother was in and out of psychiatric clinics, my father had his own demons.

For years I blamed my issues, my failures on them.

If only they could have provided a safer environment for me.

If only they had been healthy.

If only they had been perfect.

And then one day in church I heard my minister – Dr. Peggy Bassett – say in a sermon that it is time to grow up and accept that they were children of God: flawed, struggling and doing their best.

And after we became adults, we are no longer their responsibility, but God is right here by our sides to help us grow and heal from the very areas where they fell short – even where they damaged us.

This was a turning point in my life.

That is finding the goodness of God.

Our lives are blessed, we are loved, and we are good enough to have the rich, meaningful lives God intends for us.