

THREADS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, LESSON 6: GOD ALONE

“You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3, ESV)

CONCENTRATION, FOCUS, DEDICATION. These, we are often reminded, are the hallmarks of playing winning golf. The mechanics of excellent golf are so demanding that without single-mindedness, it’s pretty hard to pull off that coveted “repeatable swing” that produces reliable results under pressure.

Curiously, though, the playing field of our sport demands something different. Grasses vary, as does their length. Holes turn right then left; some rise, some fall. Wind blows, but since it is often coming through trees it can be hard to gauge. And putting surfaces undulate and change grain, requiring a recognition of distance and slope matched by a stroke able to conquer these adjustments from hole to hole. In other words, concentration meets its match in creativity. Both must be engaged in order to complete the job of a nice round of golf.

This leads us to the question of god-worship. That lower case *g* is intentional, because there *are* options.* That is, there are options if you want there to be. In God’s mind, there are none.

For this reason, the Lord opened the Ten Commandments—that central list of righteous living—with this directive: “You shall have no other gods before (or besides) me.” To suggest that the One True God can be worshipped as one among many is to lose track of the authenticity of the one and the inferiority of the others. How inferior? Consider Isaiah’s observation of the wayward lives of God’s people: “Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made” (Isaiah 2:8). The people had traded worship of the eternal God for worship of idols of their own making.

This is painfully informative. For idols were not just carved images set on a shelf in one’s home, prayed to like trinkets or talismans. They were representations of man’s own ingenuity set against the design of God. You sure don’t need to read that twice to recognize our own culpability in losing focus in our worship. We give time and attention to lesser things, and quite often things of our own “grand design.” Simply put, we usurp God.

God may be glorified by creative expression in our worship of him, but we can be certain that he is not honored when our creativity generates a loss of the singular affections we should be giving to him alone. God is for God; we must be, too.

*You may be interested to know that the original Hebrew most employed lower case *g* in referencing even the specific God of Scripture, e.g., *elohim*, *adonai*. God’s “name,” as it is, was never spoken by the Jews, and is rendered only with the consonants representing that name: YHWH. Written by Jeff Hopper ©2014 Links Players International. A 5-minute video accompanies today’s study at <http://youtu.be/RxFLZCzCQCU>

Opening questions Describe a recent golf scenario that demanded something out of the ordinary from you. What part creativity did it require, and what part concentration?

READING Isaiah 44:6-23

The folly of idols

What simple statement did God make about himself to close Isaiah 44:6?

What are the problems inherent in the gods people create (vv. 9-20)?

What sorts of idols do we craft with our own hands today? What do these promise to us? What ability do they have to deliver?

Upon what basis does God call the wayward to return to him (v. 22)?

According to verse 23, what should our worship of God look like?
