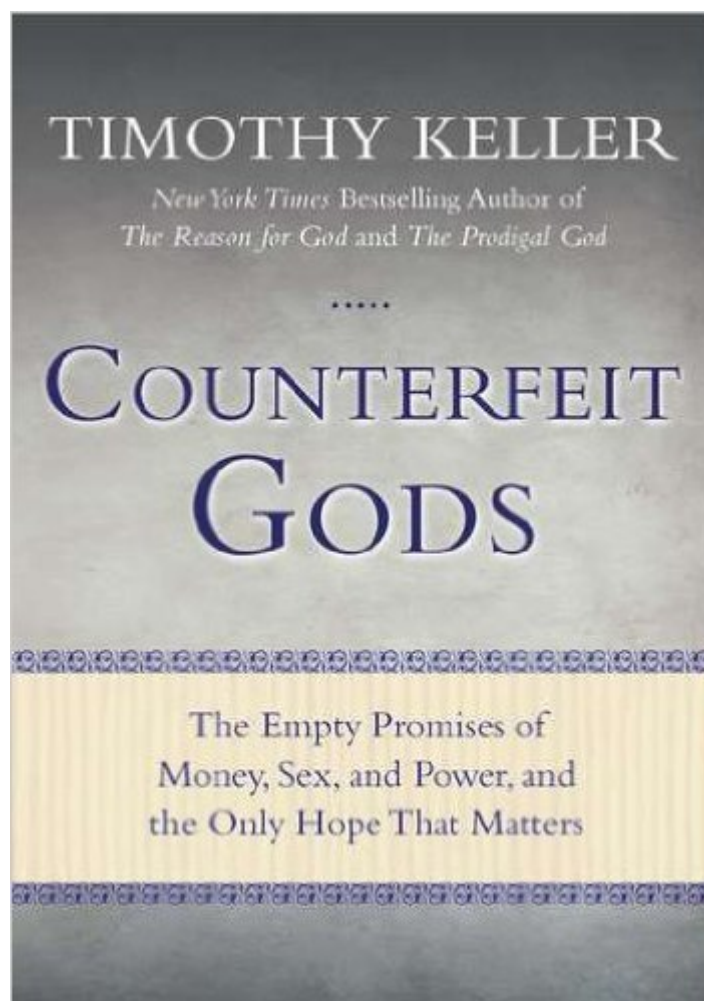


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# Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises Of Money, Sex, And Power, And The Only Hope That Matters



## Synopsis

New York Times's bestselling author of *The Songs of Jesus* and nationally renowned minister Timothy Keller exposes the error of making good things "ultimate" in this book, and shows readers a new path toward a hope that lasts. "Success, true love, and the life you've always wanted. Many of us placed our faith in these things, believing they held the key to happiness, but with a sneaking suspicion they might not deliver. No wonder we feel lost, alone, disenchanted, and resentful. There is only one God who can wholly satisfy our cravings—and now is the perfect time to meet Him again, or for the first time. In *Counterfeit Gods*, Timothy Keller shows how a proper understanding of the Bible reveals the unvarnished truth about societal ideals and our own hearts. This powerful message cements Keller's reputation as a critical thinker and pastor, and comes at a crucial time—for both the faithful and the skeptical.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tim Keller knows how to tell a Bible story. Like *The Prodigal God* before it, his latest book, *Counterfeit Gods* is built around them. And every time I read one of those stories, I feel like I am hearing it for the first time. I find myself lost in the story, anticipating how it could, how it might, end. In the back of my mind I know exactly how it will turn out, but somehow Keller takes me along for a ride as he tells these stories in such a fresh way. In *Counterfeit Gods* he tells of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Jonah and Zacchaeus. Each one of these characters and the stories of their lives are used to teach the reader about the prevalence of idolatry in the Bible and in the human

heart."The human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them." Thus anything can be an idol and, really, everything has been an idol to one person or another. The great deception of idols is we are prone to think that idols are only bad things. But evil is far more subtle than this. "We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes. Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the very best things in life."What then is an idol? "It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give." If anything in all the world is more fundamental than God to your happiness, to your meaning in life, then that thing has become an idol. It has supplanted God in your heart and in your affections. You will pursue that thing with an abandon and intensity that should be reserved for God alone.

Having introduced idolatry and its effects in the Introduction and first chapter, Keller uses chapters two through five to discuss idols that have a particularly strong grasp on people today, though perhaps they are idols that have always drawn the hearts of men. He discusses love (and sex), money, success and power (focusing particularly on political power). Having discussed such personal idols, he spends a chapter looking at some cultural and societal idols--ones that tend to be hidden from us because they are so prevalent, so normal. Finally, he looks to "The End of Counterfeit Gods" and here he offers hope for the idolatrous. "Is there any hope? Yes, if we begin to realize that idols cannot simply be removed. They must be replaced. If you try to uproot them, they grow back; but they can be supplanted. By what? By God himself, of course. ... What we need is a living encounter with God." He wraps things up in an Epilogue where he offers words that so helpfully answer the "now what?" questions. The trouble with exposing idols is that we realize that most of our idols really are good things that we've allowed to take on undue importance. We do not want to cast away these good things! "If we have made idols of work and family, we do not want to stop loving our work and family. Rather, we want to love Christ so much more that we are not enslaved by our attachments." The solution is not to love good things less, but to love the best thing more!

As always, Keller is eminently quotable and is a very skilled writer. The book is excellent not only in its big picture, but also in its component parts. More importantly, it turns always go the gospel. It never leaves the reader in despair but instead points him away from his idols and toward the idol-breaker, toward the one who demands and deserves the first place in our hearts. "The way forward, out of despair, is to discern the idols of our hearts and our culture. But that will not be enough. The only

way to free ourselves from the destructive influence of counterfeit gods is to turn back to the true one. The living God, who revealed himself both at Mount Sinai and on the Cross, is the only Lord who, if you find him, can truly fulfill you, and, if you fail him, can truly forgive you."Truly, the human heart is an idol factory. Counterfeit Gods points to Scripture to help root them out, turns to the Cross to find forgiveness and points to the gospel as the power to find ultimate freedom from them. This is an excellent book and one I hope to read again, perhaps in a group setting. It is easily one of the best books I've read this year and I commend it to you.

I was a big fan of Tim Keller's first 2 books, *The Reason for God*, and *The Prodigal God*. Speaking largely as an apologist in the former and a pastor in the latter, Keller demonstrated his immense intellect and knack for offering keen observations of culture as it relates to the gospel of Jesus Christ. These strengths are applied directly to his latest work, *Counterfeit Gods*. This is Tim Keller at his finest as he subtly, yet powerfully, points out the things people, and particularly Americans, tend to turn into idols that take the place of God in our lives. Taking on various arenas of life, Keller explains how even good things become bad things when they turn into God things. His working definition of an idol is simply anything that ascends to the place that only God should occupy in our lives, and he shows how career, money, sex, and even family can become idols in our lives, taking the place of God but lacking the ability to live up to the positions where we place them. For example, when a parent places their kids in the place of God and wraps their entire identity in a child, an enormous amount of pressure is placed on the child, a pressure they will inevitably fail to live up to. This causes disappointment for the parent and disillusionment for the child. This is because the child isn't God. He or she isn't ever-faithful, ever-loving, all-powerful, and perfect. Only God is. It's unfair to children and damaging to the parents when these situations occur. This idolatry can show up anywhere. I especially found Keller's chapter on power particularly helpful. When power is made into a God, it manifests itself in many places such as careers, parenting, and relationships; today, it mostly shows up in the political arena. People turn political parties, politicians, and ideologies into gods; subsequently, when their party loses, they are devastated. Their god has let them down, and now they do the only thing they can think of...they mock, ridicule, and blame the false political god that arose in its place. They lament the end of everything or complain about the status quo. The problem, of course, is that neither conservatism nor liberalism live up to god-status. Neither is perfect, but many convince themselves otherwise, believing that everything would be perfect if they could just elect the right person who embodies their values. Keller has chapter after chapter that points out these idols in our culture, applying his Paul-like style of reasoning. All of this would be for

naught, however, if people are not pointed to the true God. It's not enough to remove idols. People have to be pointed to God as fully-revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Keller does not back down from this one bit. He continually pulls our idol-fashioned foundations from underneath us, but he quickly replaces it with the true foundation, the Rock, Jesus Christ. This book should be required reading for all western Christians. Other cultures have their idols, but we in the West have truly made it an art form. The roots of this idolatry cannot be removed overnight, but this book is a powerful tool for attacking those roots and unashamedly and repeatedly reminding us what needs to exist in its place.

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