



## HAND IN HAND: At the center of things

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As most of us around here know, Julian is a special place.

The once-upon-a-time gold-mining village, now mountain resort, is a jewel atop the Cuyamaca Mountains.

And the mountains, even more than the town, are special ---- some of that Third Day work, if you happen to be a believer.

Walking along trails at the Whispering Winds retreat center south of Julian recently, it was easy to feel heaven's hand on the land.

The terrain was lush and green, the wild turkeys, rabbits, quail and deer abundant. Yet scarred trees were and are visible on the surrounding hillsides ---- reminders of the wildfires that ripped through the county several years ago.

I was with about 30 men gathered for a weekend of spiritual renewal at this Catholic retreat and conference center. (Our group isn't Catholic, but the good people at the retreat open it to all faiths and showered us with hospitality. The cook, Dave Rilling, is the finest camp chef I've had the good fortune to dine with).

Our speaker ---- [Geoff Hsu](#), a leadership coach for pastors at Rancho Bernardo Presbyterian Church ---- put forward the notion of how "counterfeit gods" come to occupy our hearts and what damage ensues from worshipping the wrong things.

The idea, based on a [book by that name by Timothy Keller](#), resonated deeply among his listeners.

Keller posits the notion that only one thing can occupy your center ---- and you get to choose.

The things we tend to put there vary. Things such as:

-- Man, I would do anything for that (fill in the blank: car, house, fame, fortune, lust, you name it), and the sell-out cripples the soul.

-- Do I dally at the office computer, my ephemeral career sights set so high, rather than hurrying home to play catch with my boy?

-- When I stew, savoring my indignation, over some decision above my pay grade (to use the president's phrase), does the poison seep into the next cubicle and the next and infect all around me?

-- Then there is the meta-issue: I am so proud to have put all those lesser gods out of my heart ---- I can take care of business, all by myself. Aren't I just the cat's meow.

Of course, then I am not.

The world and all its hard truths crash around me: Old age besets my knees. My dreams of fame and fortune crumble. A traffic accident or disease steals away someone I care about. You name it, life happens.

There is another way, but it takes putting something else, something worth it in the center.

And if you look around the Cuyamaca Mountains, the vistas, the pine trees, the flora and fauna, you know you are not seeing your own handiwork.

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