

Removing Idols from Our Lives

If you have spent any length of time in a church, you have probably heard some talk about idols. Not the American Idol sort, but the kind that people have worshipped throughout time.

The first place in Scripture where most people are exposed to the concept of idols is Exodus 20, where God is laying out the Ten Commandments for his fledgling nation, Israel, in the desert.

“You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. 6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands. (Exodus 20:4-5, NLT)”

If you have been in church for any length of time, you have also probably heard someone compare things in our modern lives to these physical idols talked about in the Bible. Christians sometimes think that they are far removed from the sort of idolatry for which Israel was condemned. But the truth of the matter is that, while we (most of us) no longer construct physical idols in the form of statues to be worshiped, we are nevertheless often guilty of setting up other objects of worship in our lives.

We just don't always realize it, because we have trouble identifying what an idol looks like today.

What does an idol look like?

Simply put, an idol is anything that pulls your attention away from pursuing God.

An idol can be a physical thing like property, it can be an intangible concept like wealth or fame, it can be a philosophy like self-reliance or atheism, it can be an activity or identity like sports or a club, it can even be a relationship with another person like your spouse or kids, or it can truly be another god like people worship in other religions.

Some things are idols for everyone, meaning that there is no way to incorporate those things into your life without it becoming an idol. This is the case with another religion.

Other things are not intrinsically idols for all people, but can become so when they work their way into our hearts in such a way that they become the focus of our desires.

Usually, the things that people idolize are good gifts that have taken on too much meaning in their lives. Often, the only way to identify these things is to ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of our idolatry.

But, when he does, we must also be willing to act – sometimes in radical ways – to remove the idols from our lives.

Why it matters to identify and remove idols in our lives

Jesus was crystal clear that it is impossible to serve God, when our desires are for other things. Using the example of money, that great Idol of all cultures, he said,

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. (Matthew 6:24, NLT)”

And money is just one example of the things which start out innocently enough, but can easily begin to consume our attention and wrestle our love away from God. When we begin to pursue these things instead of Jesus, we are guilty of idolatry, because we worship created things in place of our Creator.

Removing Idols One at a Time

For a long time now, I have wrestled with the realization that I have had some budding idols in my life. Some things that often pull my attention away from Jesus and what he would have me hear and do. They seemed innocuous enough that, at first, I ignored the affect they were having on me.

It was only when I tried to give these things less of a footprint in my life that I fully realized just how destructive they have become. And now that I see those distractions have created fractured desires in me, the only thing I can do is to root them out and remove them from my

life one at a time.

For me, the biggest culprit in my life – the thing that distracts me from hearing God’s voice more often than anything else at this moment in time is social media. If you have been reading this site for long, you know this has been an [ongoing struggle](#) for me. It is just one of many contributing factors in the [distraction](#) and [busyness](#) people consume themselves with in our culture. It isn’t intrinsically an idol, but it is the one thing that has a grip on me personally.

So, it is time to let it go. After trying multiple ways of reducing my use of social media and failing, I’m convinced that I need to completely sever the ties, if I am ever to fully focus on where God wants to speak into my life.

As of yesterday, I no longer have profiles on Twitter and Facebook (the biggest problems for me). I don’t know if I will ever be back on these services. I may be, but only once I have removed its place of influence in my life. At the very least, I sense God telling me to give them up for the rest of this year. After that we will see.

My sincere hope is that, in these coming months, I will develop a deep desire for seeking intimacy with God and more meaningful relationships with people in my sphere of influence, rather than wasting the time God has given me on superficial friendships and the pursuit of meaning, through an online persona.

Please hear me, I am not making a prescription for other Christians. You must reflect on your own life and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance on which things are vying for more and

more of your attention. But I urge you to take seriously what the Spirit reveals to you. Letting go of things – even good things – that are pulling your desire away from God is a necessary part of living as a disciple of Jesus.

The only irony of this decision for me is that few people will probably ever see this post, because the vast majority of my website traffic comes from social media. It is one reason I struggled so hard with letting go. But now that I have let go of relevance I can embrace obscurity in the arms of my Lord.

I'd say that is a pretty good trade.

Jesus must become greater; we must become less.