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**“Idols aren't just stone statues. No, idols are the thoughts, desires, longings, and expectations that we worship in the place of the true God. Idols cause us to ignore the true God in search of what we think we need.”**

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**Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, Idols of the Heart**

## **The Dangers of Goal Setting**

**By Scott C. Fraiser**

I grew up in small town Texas. Though it has grown substantially since my youth, it still had that small town vibe when I was growing up. Big trucks, everybody knows everybody, one high school, and people got excited when the Super Wal-Mart came to town.

Here's another thing about small town Texas. There are three top priorities – God, Guns & High School Football.

I loved football. I was obsessed with it. I grew up going to all the games, became a ball boy for the high school team, and got into contact football the minute my mom would let me. I lived and breathed football. Here's what I didn't realize as a young man. I didn't just love football, it was an idol, something I worshipped. There is nothing wrong with loving something, but there is a problem with worshipping anything other than God.

That's often how I feel about goals. They have a way of becoming all encompassing, engrossing even. That's why so many goals have a way of cultivating a religious like zealotry – it's a belief system that people start to worship. This income bracket, that platform, or the exact body fat percentage. There is a fine line between passionate pursuit of our goals and idolatry, but there is a line.

**When Our Goals Become Our Idols**

What is idolatry? The book that forever shaped my life on the topic was Counterfeit Gods by Dr. Tim Keller. He speaks to idolatry this way.

“[An idol] 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.”

“A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought.

An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure.’ There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship.”

We see this play out in Romans 1. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:25). When we worship the created thing rather than the Creator – it's false worship, or idolatry.

If would define idolatry this way – it's when a good thing becomes a god thing.

When your goals absorb your heart and mind more than God then you are idolizing your goals. If you spend most of your passion, energy, emotional and financial resources on your goals, then you are worshipping your pursuits. If you feel that your life will have greater meaning, value, significance or security if you achieved these goals, then these good things have become a god thing in your life.

### The Dangers of Goal Setting

When we idolize or worship our goals there are two major pitfalls – pride & despair

One of the dangers of worshipping your goals is pride. If you set goals and then accomplish all of them there is a tendency to believe that it is you and you alone who have accomplished these goals. It swells up our self-righteousness. The problem with this is that it creates a self-sufficiency. We believe that we don't need God or that God is simply there "just in case". Repeatedly, scripture speaks to God opposing the proud and raising up the humble. At the end of the day pride keeps us from being humble, which is a trait God desires from his people.

The danger on the other side is despair and discontentment. This is the camp where a lot of us who create resolutions end up. We don't attain our goals, or we do but it doesn't create the happiness that we thought it would bring. Our idols have a way of disappointing us. They are never enough. When we search for joy in the achievement of our goals and not in God, they will leave us empty and unsatisfied. Or as Keller says, "If we look to some created thing to give us the meaning, hope, and happiness that only God himself can give, it will eventually fail to deliver and break our hearts."

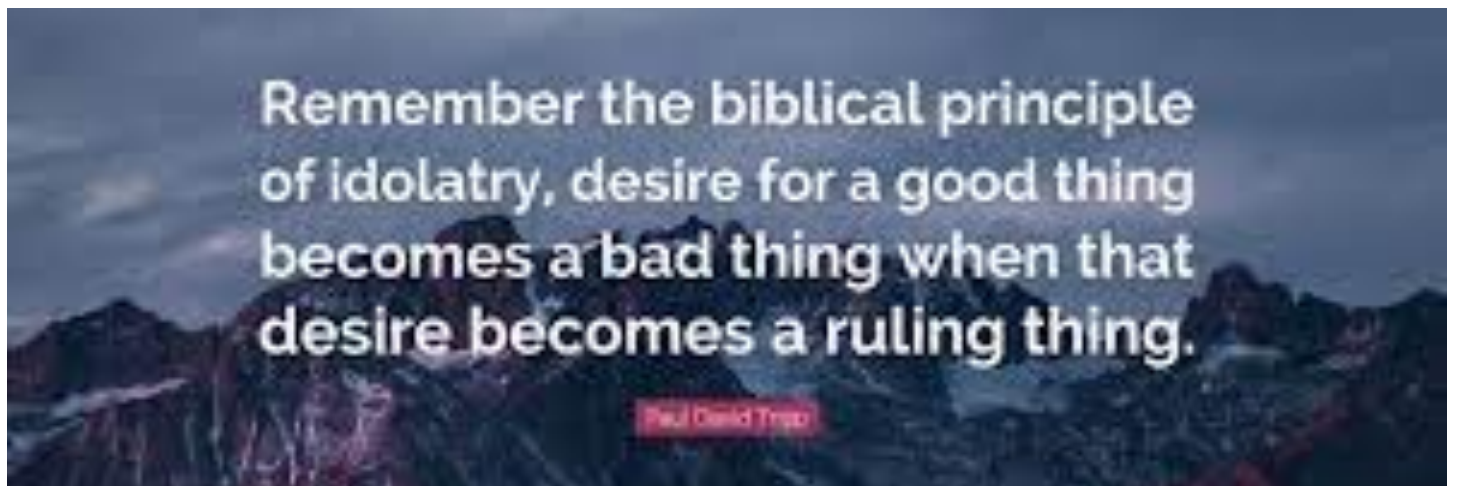
### Goal Setting on the Rock

Here's what's true. Goals can serve you, but they can not save you. They are great servants, but they are terrible gods. They are good things, but were never meant to be god things.

That's why one of my passions is to help people set Christ-centered goals. We need to view them appropriately. When used with the right perspective goals are a great tool to help us love God and love others more, but tools in untrained hands can be dangerous.

This is why we must pursue our goals while standing on the rock. If we build our goals with the foundation of Christ, then whether we achieve our goals or not, we still have joy because our joy is from God and not the things we attain. However, if we pursue our goals with our goals as the foundation then we are simply fools who built their houses on sand.

So pursue your goals, but let them be the good things they are and not the god things they were never meant to be.



Remember the biblical principle  
of idolatry, desire for a good thing  
becomes a bad thing when that  
desire becomes a ruling thing.

Paul David Tipton