

Identifying and Repenting of Idols of the Heart

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People by nature are worshippers. People are worshipping all around us every day.

The question is, "What or Whom are you worshipping?"

I. Why Is This a 'Big Deal'?

David Powlison says "Idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Scriptures... the relevance of massive chunks of Scripture hangs on our understanding of idolatry."

Definition: An idol is anything or anyone that begins to capture our hearts and minds and affections more than God.

Who or what you worship is 'What's on your mind.'

What you long for ~ wish for

What you have your heart set on

What's really important to you THAT'S WHAT YOU WORSHIP.

I John 5:21 "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."

Question: "Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken hold of the title of your heart? Is there something or someone else that holds your heart's trust... preoccupation... loyalty... service... fear... and delight?"

A. Any Idol Will Become a Snare in Your Life

Psa. 106:34-36 "They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them, but they mingled with the Gentiles and ***learned their works***; they served their idols, which ***became a snare*** to them."

B. Any Idol Will Ultimately Hinder Your Walk with the Lord

Ezek. 14:5b "... they are all estranged from Me by their idols"

C. Any Idol Will Block the Grace of God in Your Life

Jonah 2:8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs"

- To receive God's grace your hands need to be **empty**. Whatever you choose to put ahead of God and in first place in your life is an idol and will cause you to forfeit / give up the grace that could be yours.
- God is in fact committed to **frustrating** you to the point that you will be forced to **drop** those idols and turn to Him with open hands and open heart.

Jer. 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

II. So Where Do Idols Come From? How Do We Get Into Trouble In This Area? Why Does It Happen?

Ezek. 14:3-4,7 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols ***in their hearts***, and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces.... v.4 everyone of the house of Israel ...***sets up his idols in his heart***... I the Lord will answer him according to the ***multitude of his idols***..."

James 1:14 "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

Pressure causes temptation to flee to idolatry as a refuge. So 'idols' become a snare.

I Cor. 10:13-14 "There is no temptation that is overtaken you but such as is common to man, and God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but will with the temptation provide the way of escape, that you may be able to bear up under it... **v. 14** Therefore my beloved, flee from idolatry."

John Calvin said, "***The heart is a factory of idols.***" Our heart cranks out idols as fast as the flesh can set its sights on some new pleasure.

III. How Do You Spot an 'Idol' In Your Own Life?

A. Follow the Trail of Your Time, Money, and Affections

When there is an 'IDOL' you will:

- a. **Sacrifice** for it
 - b. **Spend Time** on it
 - c. **Spend Money** on it Matt. 6:21 "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also."
 - d. **Talk** about it Matt. 12:34 "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks..."
 - e. **Serve** it Matt. 6:24 "No one can serve two masters..."
 - f. **Protect** it / defend it
 - g. **Think** about it Prov. 23:7 "... as a man thinks in his heart, so is he."
 - h. **Worry** about it
 - i. Build Your **Schedule** around it
 - j. **Perfect** it
 - k. Get Angry if someone / something **blocks** you from it
 - l. Experience intense Fear / Anxiety if it is **threatened** in any way
 - m. Spiral into Despair / Depression (even suicidal) if you fail to **achieve** it
- 'IDOLS' that we worship take the throne of our heart from time to time. As you become a good listener to people, you'll hear their 'IDOLS.'
 - Idolatry is not so much wanting the wrong thing... but wanting even good things too much. You've lost sense of a biblical priority.
 - The Puritans referred to it as having an inordinate desire.

Romans 1:21-23, 25 "Because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator..."

“At the most basic level, idols are what we make out of the evidence for God within ourselves and in the world – if we do not want to face the face of God Himself in His majesty and holiness. Rather than look to the Creator and have to deal with His lordship, we orient our lives toward the creation, where we can be more free to control and shape our lives in our desired directions... However, since we were made to relate to God, but do not want to face Him, we forever inflate things in this world to religious proportions to fill the vacuum left by God’s exclusion.” Richard Keyes in *No God But God*, Os Guinness, p. 32

- Paul Tripp said, “Children are a gift but they make terrible trophies.”

“Joanna thought she had grown in her faith. The problem was that she had forgotten who she was, and it was not long before her identity in Christ was replaced by another identity. Joanna’s children became her new identity. They gave her meaning and purpose, and they really did give her hope and joy. The problem was that they were not sent by God to do any of that. Joanna lived vicariously through them, and the more she did, the more she became obsessed with their success. Although Joanna was just as faithful in her personal devotions and public worship, God was no longer at the center of who she was. All it took was Jimmy to mess it all up. With all his inner turmoil, Jimmy didn’t make a very good trophy. Being with him often meant unexpected confrontations and public embarrassment. The girls were forced to live in the wings of Jimmy’s drama and they didn’t turn out to be trophy children either. Now that they were adults, Joanna was lost... In their tumultuous launch into adulthood, the kids not only broke Joanna’s heart, but they also robbed her of her identity. She felt like it had all been for naught. When she looked in the mirror, she felt like she didn’t know the person she saw there.”

Lost in the Middle, Paul David Tripp, p. 275-276

B. Ask Heart Questions

Three Heart Diagnostic Questions

1. Am I willing to sin to Get it?
2. Am I willing to sin if I think I’m going to Lose it?
3. Do I run to it for ‘Refuge’ instead of turning to God?
 - shopping
 - Eating
 - Working on my car
 - Staying late at work
 - Watching movies or playing computer games

“A woman commits adultery, and repents. She and her husband rebuild the marriage, painstakingly, patiently. Eight months later the man finds himself plagued with subtle suspiciousness. The wife senses it, and feels a bit like she lives under FBI surveillance. The husband is grieved by his suspiciousness, because he has no objective reasons for suspicion. ‘I’ve forgiven her; we’ve rebuilt our marriage; we’ve never communicated better; why do I hold onto this mistrust?’ What finally emerges is that he is willing to forgive the past, but he is attempting to control the future. His craving could be stated this way: ‘I want to guarantee that betrayal never, ever happens again.’ The very intensity of his craving starts to poison the relationship; it places him in the stance of continually evaluating and judging his wife, rather than loving her. What he wants cannot be guaranteed this side of heaven. He sees the point, sees his inordinate desire to ensure the future. But he bursts out, ‘What’s wrong with wanting my wife to love me? What’s wrong with wanting her to remain faithful to our marriage?’ Here is where this truth is so sweet. **There is nothing wrong with the object of desire; there is everything wrong when it rules his life.** The process of restoring that marriage took a long step forward as he grasped a lesson his Shepherd had for him.”

David Powlison, “The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 6

C. Look for Chaos!

- We do not all respond to people and situations the same way because we do not all bring the SAME HEART to them (i.e. the talkative person that annoys you might be interesting to the person sitting next to you – the heart makes all the difference)
- James makes a huge connection between our desires, or what we want, and what makes us angry.
- All of us are filled with competing desires – James calls it the “desires that battle within you” And they battle for control.

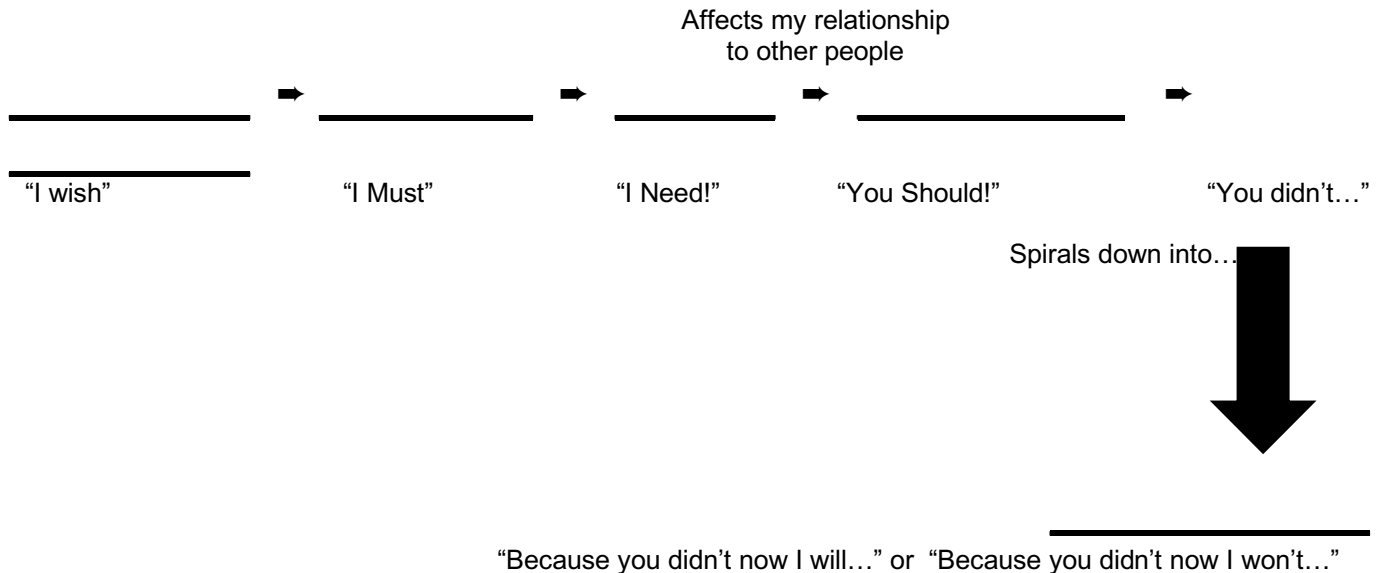
James 3:16 “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.”

Dave Powlison “It’s a serious mistake to engage in introspective ‘idol hunts,’ attempting to dig out and weigh every kink in the human soul. The Bible calls for a more straightforward form of self-examination: an outburst of anger invites reflection on what craving ruled the heart so that our repentance can be intelligent.”

Cravings underline conflicts!

Let's examine The Stages of the War for the heart

* Taken from Paul Tripp *
Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands



Demand – is the closing of my fists around a desire. I can no longer imagine a good life without this thing. So now I enter the room with a SILENT DEMAND – “You must help me get what I want.” If you are an obstacle I will be angry and impatient with you. **But here’s the real source of confusion:** You don’t know the rules of the game. I haven’t announced my demand to you because I myself am unaware that my heart is being controlled by it.

Need – I now view this thing I want as ESSENTIAL TO LIFE. This is one more step towards SLAVERY to desire. So... envy, discouragement, bitterness, and doubting God start to grow as we become convinced that we are being DENIED things we NEED to live life as it was meant to be lived. In our culture the word ‘Need’ is used fast and loose for everything.

Expectation – If I’m convinced I need it and you say you love me, then it seems right for me to expect you to help me get it. This NEED-DRIVEN expectation is the SOURCE of 90% of the conflict in relationships today. You start to see this thing as a RIGHT.

Disappointment – Sinful and demanding expectations SET US UP for disappointment. So much of our disappointment in relationships is not because people have ACTUALLY WRONGED us, but because we think they have failed to meet our expectations.

Punishment – We are hurt and disappointed in this person who says they love us, so we STRIKE BACK in a variety of ways to punish them. Basically we are angry because we’ve decided they have BROKEN THE LAWS OF **MY kingdom**. At this point I am no longer loving GOD and OTHER people, instead I LOVE THINGS and USE PEOPLE to try and get them.

C.S. Lewis – “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, “Hope.”

If my heart is ruled by a certain desire, there are only **TWO WAYS I can respond to you:**

1. If you are helping me get what I want, I will be happy with you
2. But if you stand in my way, I will be angry, frustrated, and discouraged when I am with you. There will be times when I wish you weren't in my life. You stand in the way of what I crave so I lash out at you.

D. Take Note of Your Heart during Suffering & Disappointment

Don't just push through the pain. Ask God to show you your own heart and the idols that are being exposed.

Suffering exposes our idols. If you'll learn to look for it God can help you see something besides the pain that you're in, so that you can actually learn a lot about your heart.

It takes heat to bring idols to the surface, so suffering is a great time to learn about your own heart.

IV. How Do You Repent of Idols in Your Life?

Identifying Personal Idols (worksheet – www.bradbigney.com)

Idolatry Repentance Plan (worksheet – www.bradbigney.com)

- Change your thinking (example worksheet – www.bradbigney.com)
- Change your actions

Identifying your idols is a great start but that's not the end. If you don't make specific plans for overcoming those idols you'll just keep right on living with them rumbling around in your life. Most people fail to change because they don't make specific plans to change.

Final Warning – Make sure you point your counselees to the cross... and Christ... and the Gospel during this process. Yes, we want them to spend time examining their heart... but don't ever let them lose sight of the fact that they're spending time examining their heart in the presence of their Savior... they're not alone... not on their own... not in isolation...

Otherwise these times of heart EXAMINATION will turn into obsessive CONDEMNATION. Don't let them do that!

Colossians 3:1–5 *NIV* “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

If you simply uproot some idols and fail to “plant” the love of Christ in their place those idols will grow back, and bring some others with them because your heart is still not delighting in and satisfied with Christ.

Ed Welch, “The path of change goes through the heart and continues on to the Gospel, where God chose to most fully reveal Himself in the death and resurrection of Christ.” Ed Welch, “Motives: Why Do I Do the Things I Do?” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 22, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 7.