

Idolatrous Habits

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Many of our habits are spiritually neutral, such as the way we brush our teeth or the route we drive to work.

Other life patterns clearly violate spiritual values, such as being addicted to drugs, alcohol or pornography, or reacting to correction with automatic anger or blame shifting.

There are also habits that may be spiritually neutral but could actually be symptoms of what the Bible calls idolatry. Two common examples are spending excessive time in front of an electronic screen (television, smart phone or video game) or eating unneeded or unhealthy food.



Television an idol? Food an idol? How can that be?

Most of us think of an idol as a statue of wood, stone, or metal worshiped by pagan people. But the concept of idolatry is much broader and far more common than that.

An idol is anything apart from God that we turn to in order to feel happy, fulfilled, relaxed or secure. In biblical terms it is something other than God that we set our heart on (Luke 12:29; 1Cor. 10:19), that motivates us (1Cor. 4:5), that masters and rules us (Ps. 119:133; Eph. 5:5), or that we trust, fear, or serve (Isa. 42:17; Matt. 6:24; Luke 12:4-5). In short, an idol is anything we love, pursue or depend on more than God (see Phil. 3:19).

Love. Fear. Trust. These are words of worship! Jesus commands us to love God, fear God, and trust God alone (Matt. 22:37; Luke 12:4-5; John 14:1). Anytime we long for something apart from God, fear something more than God, or trust in something other than God to make us feel happy, fulfilled or secure, we are worshiping a false god.

For example, if I am bored, restless, anxious or worried, and I turn to my television, smart phone, email, refrigerator or pantry more naturally and easily than I turn to God ... I have unwittingly shown that I believe that those created things will bring me more comfort than will He who is the "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3).

Deliverance from Idols

Habits rooted in idolatry are extremely difficult to change ... until we turn to God Himself, who loves to deliver people from their idols. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

God has provided the cure for our idolatry by sending His Son to pay the penalty for our sin and idolatry (1 Pet. 2:24). When we trust in Jesus, God not only forgives our idolatry but also brings us into His family, makes us

His children and heirs, and enables us to live a godly life (Galatians 4:4-7).

Yet there is more good news. God wants to deliver us not only from our general problem with sin and idolatry but also from the specific, day-to-day idols that fuel many of our

habits and other relational difficulties. Here are a few ways you can cooperate in this deliverance process:

Take full advantage of the three primary means of grace for spiritual growth: the Bible, which imparts wisdom and knowledge, the Holy Spirit, who gives us understanding and strength to change, and the church, where we find the fellowship, counsel and encouragement needed for genuine growth.

Pray daily that God would open your eyes to any idol-driven habits and to give you both the desire and strength to overcome them (Ps. 139:1).

Examine your habits by asking “X-Ray Questions” like: “What do I do most naturally when I’m bored, restless, anxious or worried?” “What do I turn to most frequently for comfort, relaxation, or pleasure?” “Do I turn to these things more naturally and frequently than I do to prayer, Scripture, *spiritual meditation*, or *Christian fellowship*?”

Once you’ve identified an idol-fueled habit, pray daily that God would change your heart so that you find less and less comfort in that idol and more and more delight in God himself (Ps. 37:4).

Plan a specific God-oriented routine you will follow whenever you experience the cue that typically triggered the idol-fueled behavior.

Describe to your spouse or an accountability partner the habits and idols you want to change and ask them to pray for you and gently confront you when they see signs that the idol is still controlling you.

Most of all, ask God to replace your idols with a growing love for Him and a consuming desire to worship Him and Him alone (more on this below).

You can find a more detailed explanation of how to break free from life-controlling idols in *Getting to the Heart of Conflict*. Next week we will return to the seven principles of habit change, which apply to every kind of habit, whether it’s spiritually neutral, patently sinful or fueled by an idol that God has graciously exposed.

Reflection Questions

- Examine your habits by asking “X-Ray Questions” like: “What do I do most naturally when I’m bored, restless, anxious or worried?” “What do I turn to most frequently for comfort, relaxation, or pleasure?” “Do I turn to these things more naturally and frequently than I do to prayer, Scripture, spiritual meditation, or Christian fellowship?”
- What specific God-oriented routine will you follow whenever you experience the cue that typically triggered the idol-fueled behavior?
- Who will you ask to serve as an encourager and accountability partner as you seek to conquer this idol and change this habit?

– Ken Sande

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