

focused that it leaves no room for you to see what God may be accomplishing in you and through you during this time. The focus on self leaves no room for worship of God. This self-focused desire is fed by ads in magazines, on billboards, and on television that lead you to believe it is not okay to feel sad, unhappy, or “bad.”

When the depression does not lift despite your pleadings with God, the focus on self becomes even more intense. You begin to question the goodness of God, the righteousness of God, and the sovereignty of God. He often uses internal pain to alert us to something that He wants to change in our hearts. We must not run from the pain. James says,

*Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow; for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.* James 1:2-4 (NLT)

#### Correcting the Idolatrous Heart

*And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God, while we look forward to that wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.* Titus 2:12-13 (NLT)

*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.* 1 Corinthians 10:14 (NKJV)

*Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.* 1 John 5:21 (NLT)

It may be difficult for you to see yourself as a person who has idols of the heart. We simply don't think that way unless the Word of God penetrates our self-deception and the Holy Spirit reveals it to us. Beloved, I have presented a good case for why a depressed person may fit in the category of an idolater; I would urge you to go to God right now and ask Him to reveal to you if indeed you are one who struggles with this sin.

If this is truly your desire, confess it to Him in prayer and then follow up your prayer with actions

that will demonstrate the fruit of your repentance. Try the following actions:

- Begin to admit the sin of idolatry exists in your heart. Admission is the first step, but removing the idols in your heart and life is an ongoing process. If you have struggled with idolatry for a long time, you have habits that are deeply ingrained. You will find yourself admitting and confessing this sin frequently, but do not be discouraged! Recognize that God is working to clean out the deception in your heart.
- Identify exactly what you want that you are not getting. Some examples would be feeling better or having a better day.
- Identify if your desire is biblical and be able to support it with Scripture (in context). This is important because emotions can lead us to justify our desire for certain things. Yet feelings prove unreliable as a method of living life to glorify God.
- Place your desires and wants on the altar of sacrifice to God.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will accept. When you think of what He has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is. Romans 12:1-2 (NLT)

God wants to change the way you think, which will change the way you live. Reject the thoughts of what you want and desire for each day. Begin to obey God by fulfilling the One Another commands in Scripture. Take your focus off yourself, begin to live for Christ and serve your family, church, or friends.

The more you begin to prayerfully desire to include the “one another's” in your life, the less your focus will be on indulging and worshipping yourself.

Ganschow, Julie. *Seeing Depression through the Eyes of Grace* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2006).



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## Idolatry

# The Heart of Idolatry



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The heart of idolatry is truly central to most of the issues we face in counseling. Just like the other sins with which we struggle, idolatry is rooted in the immaterial part of man we refer to as the heart. The heart contains your thoughts, beliefs, desires, mind, will, and emotions. This is why the heart can be referred to as the control center of your being. The heart of mankind is deceitful and wicked according to Jeremiah 17:9, and the sinful nature that we battle feeds the wicked desires of the heart.

*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group.* Galatians 5:19-20 (NLT, emphasis mine)

Each of us struggles with the horrendous sin of idolatry on a daily basis. As Galatians 5 tells us, idolatry is a desire of our sinful nature. It is reflected in our choices; our words, our use of time, what or who we spend our money on, and where. In our culture, we tend to think of idolatry as an eastern religious system such as Buddhism or Hinduism, or as pagan worship of the trees and animals. But the truth is, idolatry is not only bowing down to statues, it is the worship of anything that means more to you than God does. It is manifested when getting what you want has become more important than what God desires for you. Simply put, anything that you are loving, desiring, or serving more than God is an idol of the heart.

We are constantly being tempted to sin in this manner. While many technological advances exist in the world, including new things to idolize and worship, Satan uses the same tricks and methods to bait the trap that he has employed since the Garden of Eden. We can look back to Genesis Chapter 3 to see them.

*Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures the LORD God had made. “Really?” he asked the woman. “Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?”*

Satan planted doubt in the mind of the woman about what God had said.

*“Of course we may eat it,” the woman told him. “It’s only*

*the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die.”*

*“You won’t die!” the serpent hissed. “God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil.”*

The big lie occurs here, and the great temptation—*“You will be like God.”* Man has wanted to be his own god since that time. Being your own god means freedom from accountability.

The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband who was with her. Then he ate it too. At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they strung fig leaves together around their hips to cover themselves. Genesis 3:1-7 (NLT)

Thus they succumbed to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Sin and guilt entered the world, and to this day Satan uses the same tactics against us. We see this reiterated in John’s first epistle to the churches.

*For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world.* 1 John 2:16 (NLT)

Our idolatry takes many forms. Some people idolize money and possessions.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 1 Timothy 6:9 (NIV)

*Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* Luke 12:15 (NIV)

Others idolize people such as celebrities, sports figures, and musicians. Look at the popularity of the program **AMERICAN IDOL** and the millions of people who watch each week and vote for their “idol.” Criminal rap artists are held in high esteem by the younger generation, and the actions of high-priced athletes (who once were lauded for their abilities on the playing field but now are notorious for their antics off the field) are being emulated by high school players.

I have known mothers who idolize their children by building a child-centered home. These children grow up believing they are the center of the world and expect others to cater to their every need and whim. When the felt needs that were catered to as children are not met as adults, they become depressed because the constant praise and adoration of the parents is no longer present. No one is telling them how good they are and puffing up their pride.

The bottom line is simple—we were born to worship. We have been created to worship God, but our sinful lusts have driven us to worship and idolize the things of the world.

Thank God we have a High Priest who sympathizes with us in our weakness! After fasting for 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus Christ was presented by Satan with a choice to sin in idolatry:

*“Next the Devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. ‘I will give it all to you,’ he said, ‘if you will only kneel down and worship me.’ ‘Get out of here, Satan,’ Jesus told him. ‘For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God; serve only him.’”* Matthew 4:8-10 (NLT)

Serving only Him means that we deny our urge to idolize things and people. God made things available for you to enjoy and placed people in your life to love because this glorifies Him. You are not to worship or build your life around them, and those people and things certainly are not to replace your love for the Lord. As you may have already discovered, when your goals, dreams, and desires are in conflict with God’s, you will experience sorrow. God’s desire for you is to glorify Him; to live a life that honors and serves Him.

What you serve and obey is whatever you worship or place a high value on. God hates idolatry. Hundreds of verses in the Bible tell us of the hatred He has for those who worship anything or anyone other than Him.

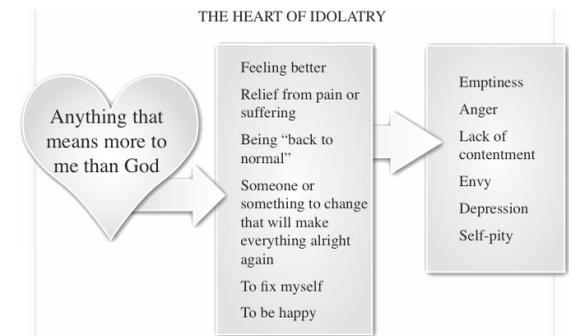
Isaiah 44 gives an exposition of how foolish we can be and how easily we are led into idolatry. In this passage we find the woodsman who plants a tree and tends to it. God provides the rich soil and rain to nourish the tree, and the sun provides the light it needs to grow strong and tall. The woodsman cuts down the tree and uses part of it for firewood to roast the game God provides.

Then he takes what’s left and makes his god: a carved idol! He falls down in front of it, worshipping and praying to it. “Rescue me!” he says. “You are my god!”

Such stupidity and ignorance! Their eyes are closed,

and they cannot see. Their minds are shut, and they can- not think. The person who made the idol never stops to reflect, “Why, it’s just a block of wood! I burned half of it for heat and used it to bake my bread and roast my meat. How can the rest of it be a god? Should I bow down to worship a chunk of wood?” The poor, deluded fool feeds on ashes. He is trusting something that can give him no help at all. Yet he cannot bring himself to ask, *Is this thing, this idol that I’m holding in my hand, a lie?* Isaiah 44:17-20 (NLT)

Are the things and people you hold onto intended to rescue you, meet your needs, and make you feel better? Are the things you worship really just ashes? Are they going to save you or provide your felt needs? You must begin to ask yourself whether what you are holding onto, this worship of self, is a lie.



These desires are not wrong, but they can become idols if they come to mean more to you than living your life to glorify, worship, and serve God, and to minister to others. A good definition of idolatry is when you are willing to sin to get what you want. Are you willing to sin to get relief from pain, to be happy, or to attain any of the other feelings mentioned above? If having your felt needs met has become so important to you that you are willing to violate God’s Word to have them, then you have crossed the line from desire to worship.

The one thing a person who struggles with depression idolizes above all else is self. That’s right; if you are depressed, the one person who means the most to you in the world is you. How can I say that?

People who are depressed typically have their whole focus on the desire to feel better. Feeling better is the focus of every day, and it becomes the goal of every day, the recurring thought, the overwhelming driving force. This desire is so self-