



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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## Confronting Our Idols

Do you remember the story of Rachel in **Genesis 31**? It's that familiar story of how she stole her father Laban's idols. In fact, it's the first time that idols are mentioned in the Bible. Jacob tells his Rachel that they are leaving Laban. Before leaving, Rachel goes in and steals all of Laban's gods—all his idols (**Genesis 31:19**). Later, when Laban questions her about this, she deceives him; she denies that she took his idols (**Genesis 31:33-35**). Why did she have to have those idols? Why did she have to take them with her?

To answer this question, we have to look at Rachel's life. Rachel was a beautiful woman (**Genesis 29:17**). She had the love of her husband (**Genesis 29:20**). Yet, there was something that Rachel dearly wanted – children. She had to sit by while her older sister gave birth to six sons while she remained barren. As Leah gave birth to these children, she must have felt that her favored position was slipping away from her.

In time, God graciously granted her a son. She felt temporary joy at the birth of this son. Yet, she wasn't content. **Genesis 30:24** reveals her heart, "And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son." Joseph's name means, "let Him add another." She wasn't satisfied in God's blessing her with Joseph. She wanted more.

Having another child was more important to her than anything else—even God Himself.

Now, back to our question. Why did Rachel steal those idols? Why did she want them? It's because she was an idolater. Even before she stole the idols, she was an idolater. She exalted her desire above the Lord God. She wanted a god she could carry with her and give her what she wanted. She longed for a god who could bless her in the way that she wanted. She desired a god who could be controlled and manipulated according to her desires.

This Old Testament story is given for our benefit (**1 Corinthians 10:11**). This story shows us that our hearts are "idol factories." We are constantly in danger of replacing God in our life with some desire, some possession, some dream, or someone. Idols aren't just stone statutes. They are ideas, longings, dreams, and possessions that become more important to us than God is. Idols are those things that cause us to push God aside and pursue other things.

In this issue of The Prayer Closet, we will look at the sin of idolatry. Idolatry is as real today as it was in Old Testament times. We will see how God feels about it, how to identify your idols, and how to deal with them.

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## The Sin Of Idolatry

In our nation, we don't have idols on every corner. There aren't days to burn incense and light lanterns to a god. For most people, idols are foreign. They are something that exist in temples in far away lands. In fact, in a Barna poll, 71% of Americans say that they consider themselves completely true to the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (**Exodus 20:3**).

Yet, we have to keep in mind that idolatry has to do with love. It is tied to what you desire. God calls us to love Him with all of our beings. He longs for us to desire Him above all things. When we love something or someone more than God, we have built an idol. When we desire something or someone more than God, we have erected an idol in our heart.

God makes His attitude toward idolatry known in the Word. He hates idolatry and will not tolerate it. The commandments against idolatry dominate Scripture. I don't have the space to list all of God's commandments against idolatry. I have picked out some from both the Old and New Testament.

### The Old Testament

- "Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God" (**Leviticus 19:4**).
- You shall not follow . . . any of the gods of the peoples who surround you" (**Deuteronomy 6:14**).
- "Let there be no strange god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god" (**Psalms 81:9**).
- "Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, who boast themselves of idols; worship Him, all you gods" (**Psalms 97:7**).
- "Yet I have been the LORD your God since the land of Egypt; and you were not to know any god except Me, for there is no savior besides Me" (**Hosea 13:4**).

### The New Testament

- "Then Jesus said to him, Go, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (**Matthew 4:10**).

- "I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is . . . an idolater" (**1 Corinthians 5:11**).
- "Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**).
- "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were" (**1 Corinthians 10:7**).
- "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" (**1 Corinthians 10:14**).
- "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident which are . . . idolatry" (**Galatians 5:19-20**).
- "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead . . . to idolatry" (**Colossians 3:5**).
- "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (**1 John 5:21**).

Do you see how dominant the theme of idolatry is in Scripture? God wants us to know that He will not tolerate any rivals. He will not accept any substitutes for Him in our lives.

In the first commandment, God says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (**Exodus 20:3**). It's interesting that God does not simply say, "Thou shalt have no other gods." He says "Thou shalt have no other gods *before me*." God emphasizes that idolatry is before Him. He takes notice when we erect idols in our life. He is greatly displeased when we love or desire anything or anyone above Him.

## The Wickedness Of Idolatry

We've already seen that God takes a hard line against idolatry. Idolatry is an exceedingly great wickedness. Why is idolatry so evil?

- ✓ *God has commanded you not to have any other gods.* This ought to settle the matter. God's command is clear – He is our great love and desire. We can allow nothing to claim this place in our life. This is His revealed will for us.
- ✓ *God is worthy.* Because of who God is, He can and ought to be your greatest love and desire. God is holy and perfect; the fountain of all love. He is exceedingly

lovable. He is the infinite and inexhaustible God. He is exceedingly desirable. There is no greater pursuit than the pursuit of knowing God and His ways.

- ✓ *God is your Source of satisfaction.* You will never find satisfaction in anything else than in your God. You may find temporary satisfaction in the passions, pleasures and pursuits of the world. There may be momentary relief in other people and relationships. Yet, true and lasting satisfaction is found only in knowing and walking with God. There is no substitute for Him.
- ✓ *You were created to know and love Him.* God made you for Himself. You were created for God's glory. He gave you life that You might know Him and worship Him above all other things and people. This is the reason for your existence.
- ✓ *God saved you to worship.* The purpose of your salvation was to deliver you from the worship of false gods to the worship of the true God, "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" (**1 Thessalonians 1:9**). Through Christ, you have come to know the true and living God. You have come to see and understand His greatness and His grace. The only proper response then is to love Him and desire Him above all things and people.
- ✓ *This distinguishes us from the lost world.* The fact that we have no other gods makes us stand out in a world of gods. While people around us pursue all kinds of gods, we trust in the true God. We find our greatest desires in Him. We are content in Him and His will for our life. By carrying out the first commandment, we manifest a difference. It opens the door for us to witness and proclaim why we love and desire the Lord God Almighty.
- ✓ *All other gods are false and unreliable.* God alone has the power, grace, and mercy to save, bless, keep, and sustain you. Everything else pales in comparison to Him. There is nothing that can equal Him. There is no desire, possession, or pursuit that will ever be greater and more glorious than

God. To pursue anything else is to head down a dead end street of disappointment and frustration.

## The Challenge To Faithfulness

We have already seen that idolatry is a sin that God hates. He is utterly opposed to it and will not tolerate any rivals. In addition, we have seen why it is exceedingly wicked. We ought to hate idolatry in our lives and all around us.

When attempting to confront the idols in your life, you will need to understand the challenges to your faithfulness to God. There are three enemies to your loving and desiring God above all other things and people. Those three enemies are the flesh, the world, and the devil. These will challenge any commitment you have to love and desire God supremely. They will work against your commitment in a variety of ways.

### The Flesh

How does the flesh work against your pursuit of faithfulness to God? The following are some ways that the flesh seeks to lead you away from God to idols:

- *The flesh will appeal to your natural weakness (**Matthew 26:41**).* The flesh takes advantage of our natural laziness. It entices us to lay aside the means of grace. It will strive to lead us away from the Word, prayer, church attendance, and worship. By doing these things, it will make you vulnerable to exalt something else your life above God. The flesh eats away at your love and desire for God like you would an elephant—one bite at a time. It will make us think that we can think less and less of Him. It will tempt us to think that we can do with less and less time in the Word and in prayer. It will strive to cause us to think that we can go through the motions of worship and fellowship without any harm to our walk with Him. If we are not diligent, over time we can drift from God to pursue all kinds of other gods.

- *The flesh will lead us into empty religious ritual (Hebrews 12:28-29).* The flesh will let you go through the motions of external worship without any fear and reverence of God. Idolatry grows fast and deep in the heart that does not earnestly worship God.
- *The flesh will lead us to make substitutes for our passion for God (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).* In this text, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians had been deceived. He feared that they had lost their pure devotion for Christ. He was afraid that they had substituted some other passion for the passion for Christ. This is one of the subtle works of the flesh. It will lead us to place some other passion above our passion for Him. It may be a religious, political, or moral cause. We need to have passion about a variety of issues. Nevertheless, nothing can substitute for a burning, supreme passion for God and His Word.
- *The flesh will use your pet sins to douse your love for Christ (Isaiah 59:1-2).* Unrepented of and cherished sin douses our love for God. You need to think of sin as a cold bucket of water. What happens when you pour cold water on a flame? It douses the flame. The same happens when you tolerate and cherish sin – it douses your love and passion for God.
- *The flesh will lead you to stuff your head and shrivel your heart.* In **1 Corinthians 8:1**, Paul teaches that the greater knowledge you have, the greater susceptibility that you have to pride. He does not suggest that they stop learning God's Word. Yet, he warns them to put the Word into practice. Gaining knowledge is not our primary goal. Growing in our understanding of God's Word is the means to growing in our walk with God. An increasing knowledge of God's Word should and ought to lead to greater faithfulness and trust in God. It should and ought to lead to deeper obedience to God. Paul here condemns a knowledge that seems to grow but never moves the heart or changes the life. A person can get to the point that he can sit under the teaching of God's Word and even delight in it for its intellectual beauty and yet not be changed.

When you get to this place, you are ripe for idolatry.

- *The flesh will seek to keep you away from private time alone with God.* The greatest deterrent to idolatry in your life is prayer. Idolatry loses its grip in your life as you spend time alone with your Father. It will have no power over you as you speak to and meditate on your God. When you don't take the time to get alone and get with your Father, it opens the door for other things to gain the priority in your life. The flesh hates prayer and will seek to lead you away from it in any way possible. The flesh will come up with every rationalization why you don't need to pray. It will encourage you to swap duties like staying busy with church activities in place of getting alone with God. Your flesh will make promise after promise that you will eventually get serious about prayer sometime. The flesh will scream that you need your rest and you can spend time in prayer some other time. The strength of the flesh withers in the presence of God; it will fight your desire to seek God for this reason.

### The World

The second enemy to your faithfulness to God is the world. The world will seek to entice you away from God to other gods. The love of God and the love of the world are extreme opposites, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (**1 John 2:15**). The world will point you to other gods in three distinct areas, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (**1 John 2:16**). The world will exalt gods in these areas – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

### *The Lust of the Flesh*

The world makes pleasure into a god. It exalts the pursuit of whatever you want as all consuming and important. The world will tempt you to pursue pleasure above God. It will strive to get you to the place that you place what you desire above what God wants. It will

encourage you to make your lusts more important than God.

### *The Lust of the Eyes*

The world will also tempt you with possessions. It will entice you to covet possessions. Covetousness is idolatry (**Colossians 3:5**). When you are more passionate about the purchase of possessions than you own relationship to God, you are an idolater. The world will pressure you to pursue possessions above your relationship to God.

### *The Pride of Life*

The pride of life refers to gaining certain positions in life. It has a variety of applications—gaining a desired promotion, earning a particular degree, attaining to a certain position in a church, or developing contacts and friendships. In and of themselves, these things are not evil. Yet, the world will tempt you to make them the driving passion of your life. The world will tell you that you should make these things the priority of your life. The pursuit of position can replace our seeking and surrendering to God and His will.

### **Satan**

Satan is our great enemy. He desires to lead us away from the true worship of God (**Matthew 4:8-10**). Satan hates God and would love nothing more than to see us pursue other gods. Nothing would delight him more than to see believers chase and pursue all kinds of gods. Satan is a skillful and treacherous enemy. He will use our flesh to tempt us to go after other gods. He will also use the world system to entice us to make the lusts of our flesh, the lusts of our eyes, and the pride of life our top priority – our primary gods. He knows how to use our flesh and the world to tempt us to replace God with a variety of other gods in our thoughts, hearts, and lives.

## **Naming Your Idols**

We've already discovered a number of things about idols. We have seen that God is utterly opposed to idolatry and that it is an

exceedingly great evil in His sight. We saw why God is worthy to be loved and worshipped above all others. We've also looked at the way the flesh, the world, and Satan will entice you to pursue other gods.

Now, we get down to work – the hard work of confronting the idols in our lives. It's not enough just to acknowledge that you have other gods. It's essential to move on to tearing those idols down that God might be the supreme love and desire of your life.

- *Ask God to open your eyes to your idols.* Ask Him to reveal to you anything that you have elevated above Him. Earnestly seek Him about this, confess that you don't want other gods above Him. Tell Him that you want to worship and love Him above all others. **Psalm 139:23-24** can aid you in this. I hope the following questions will assist you in discovering the gods of your life:

What do I want, desire, and wish for?  
 What do I fear? What do I worry about?  
 What or whom am I trusting in my life?  
 Who do I want to please? Whose opinion matters the most to me?  
 What goals and plans do you want to accomplish?

- *Confess to Him the foolishness and futility of pursuing other gods.* Agree with God and His Word concerning idolatry. Go back to the commands in the Old and New Testament against idolatry listed at the beginning of this newsletter. Announce that you agree with God; plead with Him to help you conform your life to His standard.
- *Write down what the Holy Spirit reveals to you.* As the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to the idols of your life, write them down. Whenever He shows you something or someone that you have exalted over the Lord your God, record it.
- *Confess and repent of your sin of idolatry to God.* Admit to God that you have elevated other things above Him. Name those idols from your life. Agree with God how evil this is. Make known your commitment to have Him as your greatest love and desire. Tell

- Him that you want the proper priorities in your life.
- *Seek for the power of the Holy Spirit.* Turning from idols and guarding our hearts from idols is impossible in our own strength. The power of the Holy Spirit is essential to dealing with and staying free from idols. The Spirit will lead you to love and desire God more than anything or anyone else. Pray for His work in this area of your life. Ask Him to help you guard your heart; making sure that your God is your first love and greatest desire.
- *Call on God to enable you to love Him with all your being.* The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our being (**Matthew 22:37-40**). This is God's desire for your life; it is His will for you. Plead with Him to strengthen and purify your love for Him. Call on Him to enable you to love Him with all your being.
- *Daily worship God.* The antidote to idolatry is spending time daily with God – speaking to Him, listening to Him, meditating on His character and His Word. Idolatry withers in the blazing fire of genuine worship of God.

## Pleading For A Hunger For God

Idolatry results from desiring something or somebody more than God. We believe that the possession, the position, or the person will meet a need or a longing in our life that God cannot. We replace Him with what we believe will make the difference in our life. At the heart of idolatry is the wrong desire – a desire for something or somebody other than our God.

In order to deal with idolatry in our lives, we must seek God for a hunger for Him. We must cry out to Him to produce in us a consuming desire for Him. This is our great need in ridding ourselves of and battling against this besetting sin.

The following Scripture prayers are designed to help you plead with God for a fresh hunger for Him. These prayers can aid you in crying out to God for a renewed passion for Him.

O God, You are my God. You have created me. You have preserved me. You have saved me. I love You and will seek You. Create within me a thirst for You. Living God, grant me a parched soul; I pray that I will not be satisfied with anything but You. O God, You are my God; grant me fresh longing for You and Your Word (**Psalms 63:1-5**).

Almighty God, as the deer pants for the water brooks, I ask that I will thirst for you. O living God, make me thirsty for You. Subdue my longings for the world and the desires of my flesh. With my desires for anything that would come before. O holy Father, teach me to desire You above all things (**Psalms 42:1-2**).

Father, I am continually with You. You hold me by my right hand. You are guiding me with Your Spirit and Word through this life and afterwards You will receive me into glory. Father, I plead that You will deliver me from allowing any desire or longing to take Your rightful place in my life. I want to be able to say as the psalmist did, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Make this a reality in my life. Help me to say and live these words. No matter what happens to me in this life, enable me to rest in You as the strength of my heart and my portion forever (**Psalms 73:23-25**).

O God, how I love Your Word! I confess and acknowledge that it is Your truth. Deepen my hunger for Your Word. As I read and study Your Word, increase my hunger for you. Deliver me from reading and studying the Bible for information. I ask that it would transform me and give me a greater hunger and longer for You (**Psalms 119:97**).

O God, I stretch forth my hands to You. I seek You with all my being. Give me a fresh thirsting for You. Have mercy on me God! Deliver me from my idols; work in me a consuming passion for You (**Psalms 143:6**).

Father, I plead that I will love You with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength. You are worthy of this.

Stir my heart to love You with all of my being. As never before in my relationship to You, empower me to adore You above all else

**Matthew 22:37-40).**

Father, create within me a clean heart. Wash away all the idols that I have set up in my heart. O God, renew a right spirit within me. I ask that my desires will be Your desires. O God, teach me to love what You love (**Psalm 51:10**).

Holy Father, deliver me from covetousness that is idolatry. Grant me the power and discernment to get my desires in the right order. Teach me to desire You above all else. Deeply convict me when this begins to change in my life (**Colossians 3:5**).

## Understanding God's Benefits

Passionate love and worship originate in understanding His benefits. To overcome idolatry you must come to understand the benefits that God grants to you. All other gods and their faint promises will pale in comparison to the greatness of God and of all the benefits that He gives. A heart that is filled with knowledge of God's benefits has no room for any counterfeits or substitutes.

**Ephesians 1** will help you begin the journey of understanding God's benefits in your life. Read this chapter and meditate on the following blessings that God grants to you as His child. Thank God for each of these blessings. Compare them to the empty promises that other "gods" will offer you. God's blessings are rich, unceasing, and unchanging.

- He provides you with grace and peace through your relationship to Him and His Son, Jesus (**1:2**).
- He blessed you with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (**1:3**).
- He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world (**1:4**).
- He predestinated you to be adopted as His own child through Christ (**1:5**).
- He has accepted you as His own through Jesus Christ (**1:6**).

- He has redeemed you and forgiven you through the blood of His own Son Jesus (**1:7**).
- He works in your life through His wisdom and prudence (**1:8**).
- He has made known to you the mystery of the gospel (**1:9**).
- God has determined to give you an eternal inheritance in heaven (**1:10**).
- God works all things out in your life according to His wise and eternal purpose (**1:10**).
- God has given you and sealed you with the Holy Spirit (**1:13**).
- He has given us the opportunity to know Him intimately (**1:17**).
- He has given us hope for this life and for the next (**1:18**).
- He has prepared a glorious inheritance in heaven (**1:18**).
- He provides us with His power – His power that was demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (**1:19**).
- He has made us a part of His body with Christ as our head (**1:20-23**).

## Praying The Descriptions of God

The following Scriptures can help you grow in your understanding of God and draw you closer to Him. This is not a comprehensive list of the descriptions of God. This is only a sample to help you get started in the journey of knowing God intimately.

Father, You are the eternal King; teach me to trust You for all the days of my life (**Jeremiah 10:10**).

Father, You are the Builder of heaven; sustain me and help to be faithful until I reach heaven (**Hebrews 11:10**).

O God, You are my Abba, Father; cause me to sense and know Your love for me (**Romans 8:15**).

Father, You are my ever-present Help; help me to rest in Your care for me each day (**Psalm 46:1**).

Father, You are the blessed and only Ruler, guide my life according to Your purpose (**1 Timothy 6:15**).

Father, You are my Gardener; prune from my life that which is displeasing to You (**John 15:1**).

God, You are the Father of the heavenly lights. Even though they change, You don't. Empower me to be faithful like You are (**James 1:17**).

God, You are the Father of compassion; strengthen me and sustain me in my sorrow and adversity (**2 Corinthians 1:3**).

Father, You are the Judge; enable me to prepare for the day when I will account to You (**Hebrews 12:23**).

Father, You are the Lawgiver; empower me to walk in Your commandments (**James 4:12**).

Father, You are the mighty Warrior; intervene and help me in the battles of my life (**Jeremiah 20:11**).

Father, You are my Keeper; preserve me from all my enemies (**Psalms 121:5**).

Father, You are the Potter; shape me according to Your holy purpose for me (**Isaiah 64:8**).

Father, You are my Refuge; teach me to trust in You when I am anxious, worried, or fearful (**Deuteronomy 33:27**).

Father, You are my Reward; deliver me from taking delight in anything or anybody above You (**Genesis 15:1**).

Father, You are my Teacher; teach me the truth of Your Word (**Psalms 27:11**).



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