

# Why is There Such a Stunning Loss of Meaning?

## The Loss of Meaning; the Problem of Idolatry—part 1

Feb. 26, 2023

### **DAY 1: The loss of meaning in everyday life**

*1 John 2:15-17 Do **not love** the world or the things of the world, for all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world. The world passes away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God finds real life.*

1. Something is happening in Western culture like a slow mudslide. The solid ground upon which Western civilization has flourished for centuries is sliding away. You sense it in everyday life—the erosion of common courtesy, common sense, and the utter disappearance of virtues like deference, thoughtfulness, and good will. In their place? Crassness, rudeness, and blaming.
2. What's easier to see are the national metrics of decline. Violent crime is up, murder rates are up, sexual assaults are up. Some crimes, like theft, are no longer even considered crimes, and will not be prosecuted as long as you steal less than \$950.
3. Families are facing the meltdown of marriages. This epidemic hits teenagers hardest. The break up of the home undermines what was a once-considered family and relational security.
4. Today's teenagers are getting a really rotten deal. What used to be important pieces of meaning are being taken off the table by our increasing foolish, postmodern, secular culture.
5. For millennia, people found meaning in God, getting married, raising children, and working to provide for their families and to help others because of their financial gain.
6. In today's secular culture, and spewing from many universities, is the scorn of all of these "old" ways of finding meaning. God, marriage, parenting, capitalism, and work (unless it is fulfilling to you, and makes a difference in the world) are all ridiculed as useless to finding meaning in the world. All that is left is sex, feelings, and making a difference.
7. We are being fed a constant diet of this post-modern worldview in movies, books, music videos, classrooms, teachers, friends, etc. If there is no God, there is no authority for right and wrong, no basis for morality or ethics. "There is no one who can dictate to me that what I am doing is wrong."
8. As this series will highlight, **there is no real meaning to life without God**. The best you can do is "create your own meaning," which sounds noble, but is as empty and nonsensical as a Dr. Seuss book. It appeals to our pride for a brief time, and then it vanishes. Meaning is slowly bleeding to death, a long slow bleed.
9. Idolatry is replacing God as the center of life with anything else. It is an exchange of first loves. (See 1 John 2:15-17, above).

The erosion of meaning is the natural consequence of idolatry.

These are all symptoms of what the OT calls idolatry.

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

## **DAY 2: The root cause of the loss of meaning: idolatry**

*Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself an image (an idol) in the form of **anything** in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*

The erosion of meaning is the natural consequence of idolatry.

1. Mention the word “idolatry” in the modern world and you immediately think of uneducated people several thousand years ago praying before manmade statuettes. You may think, “I would never do that. I’m too educated, too sophisticated for such nonsense.”
2. Yet, even a cursory study of the Old Testament reveals two obvious facts. (1) The problem of idolatry affected every nation, whether religious or not, and (2) everyone is an idolater, in one form or another, whether or not little statuettes were used.
3. Idolatry in antiquity has the same purpose as modern-day idolatry. It is the means by which people are pursuing the life they believe they want and need. The life we believe we want, need, and deserve is effect The cause is idolatry.
4. Idolatry is simply the means by which I get the life I want. Whatever it is I am trusting to get the life I want, that is my real idol.

- **The definition of idolatry**

Idolatry is the replacing of God with anything else at the center of our lives at any given moment

“Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God;  
trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol.” – Martin Luther.

5. Idols are those things or people on which our heart has placed its greatest hopes for immediate and long-term fulfillment.
6. Whatever your heart clings to for your sense of importance, value, identity, security, love, worth, etc. –that, and several “thats” are our true idols.
7. What is it that claims your ultimate loyalty? Upon what or whom are you really depending on for your sense of satisfaction?
8. Why is idolatry prohibited in Commandment #2? (Exodus 20:4). It’s because the exchange of anything or anyone for God cuts us off from the only ultimate source of our satisfaction, and all that is good (Exodus 20:1-3)
9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

### DAY 3: Everyday idolatry

*Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry.** <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming.*

1. It's easy to assume that idolatry was an Old Testament problem, *only*. But here, Paul equates coveting with idolatry.
2. Coveting is craving that which you don't have. Coveting is idolatry because it places whatever it is that you covet above God.

*Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*

3. As we can see in this verse, coveting takes many forms.
4. Coveting can involve a person (or people) a thing(s), or an outcome, with the expectation that whatever it is we covet will be what we most need, instead of God.
5. Everyone will place **someone, something, a feeling, or an outcome** as their **highest value** or highest hope. This is what is known as worship. Even atheists and agnostics worship something. Whatever has our highest loyalty, highest affection, whatever it is we are **relying on most for our sense of well-being** is what we worship.

6. If your meaning in life depends upon **you**, as your idol, you have just placed the greatest of weights upon your life. You will feel the inevitable pressure to produce, to achieve. You have turned yourself into a stress-making machine. Your sense of well-being now depends entirely on you. But it is a self-inflicted stress. Inevitably, no one can do enough to satisfy the search for meaning. The loss of personal meaning takes more hits.

7. If your meaning in life depends upon **someone** as the source of your well-being he or she becomes your idol. We do this as newlyweds with our spouse, with our children, with our in-laws, our boss, our co-workers, etc. Without realizing it we are depending upon their favorable responses for our sense of well-being. Each of these people become idols on any given day. The loss of personal meaning takes more hits.

8. When those folks are not enough we turn to **outcomes** for our sense of well-being. We make idols out of success, vacations, the party life, buying the big house, buying the impressive car, what we wear, our job title, how much we make, on and on and on it goes, all in the hopes of validating ourselves and the search for meaning in our lives. The loss of personal meaning takes more hits.

9. What strikes you from today's devotional?

#### **DAY 4: The warning about idolatry**

*Exodus 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

1. We can already assume that idolatry is a very serious sin. The first two of the 10 Commandments start right there.
  
2. The seriousness of this sin of idolatry is also seen in the severity of the punishment. The effects of this sin can continue down through generations. The sin is not just “on you.” It will inevitably affect your children, grandchildren, and so on.
  
3. But apparently, human nature ignores these commandments.
  
4. If these two commandments are vital, and yet people cavalierly dismiss them to their own demise and misery, what is God to do? He does what any parent would do when our kids cavalierly dismiss the most important commands of parents? “Tough love.”
  
5. God warns the people of receiving His punishment. You might think, “That’s awful.” But, if you’ve ever been a parent for very long, you understand this. We warn our children, repeatedly, for years, about crossing the street by looking both ways. We warn them because we love them, not hate them. And if they refuse to learn to look both ways, we punish them by keeping them inside when other children are out playing.
  
6. We warn out 16-year-olds about safety in driving. What happens when they get a speeding ticket. Dad punishes them by taking away their car privilege and car keys. In both cases, whether younger or teenagers, they are flirting with a danger they vastly underestimate let alone appreciate.

#### **Two kinds of modern-day idols:**

7. There are two kinds of idols:
  - (a) The turning of a good thing into the power of a god (a good marriage, parenting, health, etc.)
  - (b) It is the turning of the forbidden into a god (adultery, porn, lying, etc.)
  
8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

## DAY 5: The inevitable consequences of idolatry

### The false “hopes” of idolatry

1. There are four false hopes related to idolatry. They all happen simultaneously, and often, without our awareness.

- (a) “I know what I want and what I need.”
- (b) “I know how to get what I need.”
- (c) “I know how to get what I need from people.”
- (d) “I don’t need God.”

### 2. The problems with idolatry

(a) First, idolatry “promises” you the moon while only for short bursts giving you what we yearn for.

(b) Second, the law of diminishing returns takes place. What once satisfied you seems to satisfy you less and less.

(c) Third, eventually idolatry produces expectations on others, and self-imposed expectations upon yourself. Expectations are personal and relational killers. Expectations don’t kill us instantly. Expectations are like having the wind slowly taken out of your sails. The boat looks like a sailboat but is going nowhere. The loss of personal meaning takes more hits. What’s next?

(d) Consider, the rates of depression, hopelessness, suicide are all up. Suicide is now the second leading killer of teenagers.

(e) And you will turn to the forbidden like adultery or pornography, or the dangerous, like fentanyl. You will live to please yourself, and when that is not enough you will live to escape your pain.

### The inevitable consequence of idolatry.

*Ezekiel 6:9 Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me—how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. <sup>10</sup> And they will know that I am the LORD; I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them.*

3. The people in Ezekiel’s time were as hard-headed and proud as the people in our own time. God tells Ezekiel that they will have to learn these lessons the hard way.

4. The consequences, when they hit, will be brutal.

5. What strikes you from today’s devotional?