

“How to Wreck Your Life—Make it All About Love”

The idea behind this series is that the best way to wreck your life is to go chasing idols. **An idol is anything more important to you than God; anything you seek to give you what only God can give. An idol is anything so central and essential to your life that, if you lose it, it feels like life is not worth living.** The Apostle Paul gives a great description of idolatry saying that it's worshipping created things, instead of worshipping the Creator.

The problem with letting something become an idol is that it can't give you what you really need most in life. An idol can't give you purpose, it can't give you forgiveness, it can't bring justice, it can't hold you accountable, it can't offer you grace. Sometimes really smart people fall into the trap of idolatry because they think they can get those things without giving anything in return. Worshipping God, on the other hand, requires something of you, but God gives you life in return.

At first, idols seem to not ask anything of you, but ultimately they take everything. They will require sacrifices. When people put money and career in the place where God should be, they can perform a kind of child sacrifice, neglecting family in order to get a promotion, or more money and material possessions. The illusion is that our idols don't ask anything from us. The reality is they end up taking so much. Idols wreck our lives.

So this series is about knocking down the idols. But knocking down idols is not a one-time event in our lives, as it is like bowling. And you throw the ball down the alley and you knock the pins down, but the reset arm keeps coming back and putting them back up. This is something we have to keep working at all the time.

So far we've talked about how, if you want to wreck your life, make it all about money. And if you want to wreck your life, make it all about success. Today, we're going hit this one: **If you want to wreck your life, make it all about love.**

Now, that may be kind of jolting to hear in church on Sunday morning. Because love is at the heart and soul of Christianity! Jesus said that the two greatest commandments were to love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength AND to love others as yourself. John tells us that God is love. So how can love become an idol and wreck our lives?!

Love may be the sneakiest idol of all. Because we can take really good things and make them ultimate things—that's idolatry. And our world has exaggerated this God-given longing for love to an incredible degree. We worship love, rather than the source of that love.

Just look back to that first time you fell in love. And that person is all you could think about, and when they weren't around it was like your soul was dying, and life wouldn't be worth living without them. Most of us learn at a pretty young age that love can become an obsession.

So this morning, I want to look at two different forms of love that can become idols in our lives. I hope that at least one of them will annoy you and stick with you this week and make you think maybe there is a possibility you need to consider that you might have elevated it to an idol in your life.

The first kind of love-gone-wrong in our day is romance. Now listen, romance is a good thing. Lots of marriages need to work at building a little more romance. In fact last week Janet and I had romantic get away for a few days. The grandparents came and watched the kids, we had a little cabin in the woods, a fire place, a hot tub, cue the Barry White music! Yeah baby! That romantic love, that chemical, sexual love is a gift from a loving God! But we have gone crazy as a culture and taken this good thing, this gift and elevated it to status of an ultimate thing. We idolize romantic love.

A sure place to see this is in our music. For research purposes I watched the music videos of the top 10 love songs of 2011 as rated by yourtango.com. Rihanna topped the list with “We Found Love” which, after watching the video, seemed to be more about a sexual obsession, mixed with some drugs, and desire to self-destruct...but we found love!

Another was Katie Perry's, “The One That Got Away.” The video has an elderly woman looking back at her life, regretting the love she lost as young woman, thinking that her marriage of many, many years was pale in comparison to the love of her youth.

Another one was Lady Gaga's, "You and I." The video is a sweet, tender portrayal of healthy adult relationships. Oh wait, oops—I misread that. The video was a creepy, frightening, bizarre spectacle that gave me nightmares! Nothing like a little torture to say, "I love you. I REALLY love you." What is wrong with us?! These video show just how rampant this idolatry of love really is!

Check out some of the lyrics of love songs. Bruno Mars' Song, *It Will Rain* has these lyrics, "If you ever leave me, baby, Leave some morphine at my door, cause it would take a whole lot of medication to realize what we used to have, we don't have it anymore. There's no religion that could ever save me no matter how long my knees are on the floor, oh so keep in mind all the sacrifices I'm making to keep you by my side and keep you from walking out the door. Cause there'll be no sunlight if I lose you, baby there'll be no clear skies if I lose you, baby. Just like the clouds, my eyes will do the same if you walk away, everyday, it will rain, rain, rain." Really?!

Beyonce's song *Halo* has these words, "I found a way to let you in/ But I never really had a doubt/ Standing in the light of your halo/ I got my angel now. Everywhere I'm looking now/I'm surrounded by your embrace/Baby I can see your halo/You know you're my saving grace. You're everything I need and more/It's written all over your face/Baby I can feel your halo/Pray it won't fade away." Well, good luck with that!

Listen, romantic love is a gift from God, and it's a rush when we feel it. But when it becomes our sole quest in life, when it becomes our "saving grace", when we think that romantic feelings and sexual fulfillment are the most important thing, then love has become an idol and it will wreck your life.

Our culture is convinced that romantic, sexual love will bring fulfillment. We're fed the message over and over again, that our lives are simply empty and meaningless without it, and life really only begins when we find that special someone. The result is that single people feel this constant pressure to hook up and find somebody who will bring meaning to their lives. It's implied everywhere that something must be wrong with you if you're not doing everything in your power to find that one love.

Then married people feel the pressure of this idol too. Romantic love is that love that builds an attraction between two people. But it's not meant to be the foundation of a marriage. And so when romantic love fades, which it will do, you begin to think that something is wrong because you don't talk for hours on end like you did when you dated, and you're not obsessed like you used to be. So you start looking for that spark online, or you pursue a little flirting at work, or maybe start giving into that temptation to use pornography. Because we feel like we've got to have that spark! We've put romantic love in the place of God.

In the Bible there are a number of places when the great characters of the Bible got neck deep in the quicksand of this romantic love. One of those characters is Sampson. Samson was known for his strength, his power, his courage. But there is another theme running through his life and it's his idolatry of romantic love and it wrecks his life.

In Judges, chapter 14, in the second verse, when Samson came of age, one of the first things he said to his parents was, "**I have seen a Philistine woman...now, get her for me as my wife" (Judges 14:2).** This is a woman from a violent, barbaric culture, a woman that he was forbidden to marry, forbidden to have anything to do with. She's a woman who did not share his understanding of God, or his spiritual life. But this impulsive, demanding, driven love overtook his senses. And he marries her.

He is so blinded by his love goggles that he doesn't see how messed up she is, how dysfunctional her whole family is. What she brings to the relationship is hysteria, and manipulation, and bargaining, but he couldn't see it because he was idolizing love. He ends up abandoning her, then goes into a jealous rampage when she marries someone else. He ends up burning crops and killing people. This is how the idolatry of love will wreck your life...and the lives of others.

Later on, in Judges 16, Samson falls in love with a woman named Delilah. His enemies used Samson's love idolatry against him this time and it cost him everything. Because Delilah's only purpose was to undermine him and trap him. But he couldn't see it. Idolizing love keeps you from seeing the truth about people and situations. Samson is captured, they blind him and enslave him. He ends up killing himself and a whole bunch of his enemies all at once. Want to wreck your life? Make it all about love.

So why does idolizing love mess us up so bad? Because when we idolize love like this we we're saying to a person, "I want you to bring ultimate meaning to my life. I want you to fix my brokenness. I want you to carry me when I fall. I want you to heal everything that's messed up from my past. I want you to be my source of joy." But listen, no human being can sustain the weight of those expectations. Nobody can live up to that! And the end result is bitterness, and disappointment, and disillusionment. The carnage is everywhere from this form of idolatry. We focus on sexual gratification that never really fulfills, we end up having affairs and divorces that mess up parents, and kids, and friendships, and careers.

Our culture is becoming more and more secular and God is less and less a part of the equation for lots of people. But at the same time we still want to merge ourselves with some higher source of meaning. But if God's not in the equation, how are we going to do this? The answer for so many people today is the romantic solution. We long for deep, inner meaning, but instead of looking to God to fulfill that, we look to a love partner. When we elevate a human being into that place we're expecting that they will get rid of our faults, we hope they will get rid of our feelings of nothingness, we want to believe that our existence matters. We want that person to bring us redemption.

Why do so many relationships flounder, and struggle, and break up? Well, when we put this kind of pressure on them, is it any wonder? We are expecting from people what only God can give. And when a person, a love interest, let's us down, we think it was because they weren't the right person and we go looking for the next one, and the next one. Or we think that we're messed up, and so we beat ourselves up, and try to remake ourselves. And that doesn't really work either. All this because we've made romantic love an idol.

Let's take a minute and talk about another kind of love-gone-wrong we can put up on a pedestal, and this one might be a little harder to talk about. And it might surprise you, but the Bible says **it's possible for us to make the love of our children an idol.**

Tim Keller writes in his book *Counterfeit Gods* about a woman in his church who fell into this trap. For a number of years, she didn't think she'd be able to have children. Eventually she and her husband had three beautiful kids. But she had such an overpowering drive to give her children a perfect life that it made it almost impossible for her to actually enjoy them. It didn't take long for her whole life became wrapped up in her children. Her over-protectiveness, her fears and her anxiety and her need to control every detail of their lives began to choke her and them. Keller says, *"It's not so much that she loved her children too much, but rather that she loved God too little in relationship to them...her desire for her children to be successful and happy was actually selfish and really about her need to feel worthwhile and valuable."*

This is a hard one to talk about because we think, *"I'd give up my life for my kids to be happy and successful."* But it's dangerous to look to our kids to find fulfillment for ourselves. It's dangerous to look to our kids as our source of meaning in life. It's dangerous to look to our kids as our primary source of joy. Because listen, no kid was ever meant to bear the pressure of bringing you fulfillment, and meaning, and joy. Only God can bring those things. When our love for our kids becomes an idol, it wrecks their lives, and ours.

In 1 Samuel, chapter 2, we pick up the story of the priest, Eli who had two sons that served alongside of him in the Temple. He loved his sons more than he loved God, to the point that he didn't give them the guidance and discipline they needed. The Bible tells us, in verse 12, his sons were wicked men who had no regard for the Lord and when people would bring their sacrifices to the Temple, Eli's sons would steal those sacrifices for themselves, and give the leftovers to God. It talks about how they threatened people in the Temple. They had sex with the women who were serving in the Temple.

People kept telling Eli that he needed to do something about his sons and their evil ways, but he's like, "Boys will be boys!" But finally when Eli was really old, and he's heard so many complaints, he says to his sons, in verse 23 and 25, **"Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord's people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke...** (1 Samuel 2:23-25). It was too little, too late.

And then in verse 29, God says to Eli, **"Why do you honor your sons more than me...?" (1 Samuel 2:29).** The end result is that Eli's sons continue on a path of destruction and end up being brutally murdered.

If you want to wreck your life and the lives of your kids, love them more than you love God; honor them more than you honor God. We honor our kids more than God when choose sports, or academics, or convenience over their spiritual lives. Listen, I want my kids active in sports, but those always have to take a back seat to their spiritual lives. Parents, we've got to decide early that our kids learning about Christ, and knowing him personally is more important than anything, than traveling teams, and academic competitions. If you've got to be on a traveling team, then when you're away make the commitment to still find a place to be in worship. And that makes it all the more important that kids are connected on Wednesday nights here, or somewhere. Their spiritual lives are more important than our comfort and convenience.

Put God as number one in your life. And show that to your kids by praying with your kids every day. Pray **for** your kids every day. Talk about your spiritual life with them and around them. You don't have to have it all together to model a journey with Jesus. When you show them that **you** are trying to love God first and foremost that helps **them** to love God first and foremost.

Listen, your window of time to help your kids connect to Jesus is smaller than you think. Make sure they are connected to kids' ministries, or a youth group, or a Bible study. Parents, God is counting on you to take primary responsibility for your kids' spiritual lives. Do your part, we as a church will do ours.

Eli loved his kids more than he loved God, he turned his love of his kids into an idol and it wrecked all their lives. I'm not trying to beat us down as parents, or make us feel guilty, there's enough of that in the world. But we've got to see this for what it is.

Paul wrote, **"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him...They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:21-25)**. Our kids are wonderful, beautiful, amazing and fantastic. But it's imperative for us to worship the one who created them, and not them.

The Hebrew language has a word, **hesed, that's was very unusual. It means an unfailing love.** In the Bible, it's only used to describe God. But, it speaks of a love we are longing for and looking for, but can only find in the face of our loving God. When we put God in that rightful place, it frees us up to love others in their rightful place and not up in the idol place.

I love my wife, but I love her best when I love God first. And I love my kids, but I love them best, when I love God first.

This week, while you're going about life, listen to some music and listen to the lyrics. You'll get a glimpse of the idolatry of love. And then turn that into a prayer of saying to God, "I want to love you first so that I can truly love others, myself, my kids."

And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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