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# Household Idols

**The pace of modern life makes it more challenging to raise a family without giving in to culture's pet idolatries.**



by Bob Hostetler

Many fine Christian families today are in a situation like Jacob's when he left Paddan Aram. God told Jacob to leave the land of his father-in-law, Laban, and return to his ancestral home (Genesis 31:3). So Jacob made his escape. But his caravan included cargo Jacob didn't know about: Laban's household gods, secretly taken by Jacob's wife Rachel (Genesis 31:19). God had blessed Jacob, and God was preparing him for yet greater things. But pagan idols had slipped into Jacob's household.

So it is in many of our homes today. We haven't turned our backs on God; we haven't stopped worshipping Him or enjoying His favor. Nonetheless, idols have been brought into our households. Sometimes we have lugged them in ourselves, adopting — or adapting — some of the pagan idols that surround us.

## *Misplaced worship*

The idols in our homes aren't like the little clay statues Rachel hid in her saddlebags. We don't bow to golden calves in our living rooms or chant prayers to an image, but that doesn't mean we are free of idols. It may just mean our idols are more subtle or we worship in ignorance, like the ancient Athenians (Acts 17:23).

The pace of modern life makes it more challenging to raise a family without giving in to culture's pet idolatries. Here are a few common household idols:

**Convenience.** As Christians, we are commanded to do far more than care for our children; we are called to train them, carefully and strategically (Proverbs 22:6). But it's just so easy to stick our kids in front of the TV for hours while we "get things done." It's so easy to use video games as baby sitters instead of engaging children in constructive activities. It's so easy to keep them occupied in the minivan by playing a DVD instead of playing road games together. It's so easy to grab dinner at the drive-through instead of eating together at home. Sure, being a parent is time-consuming and exhausting, but we can get so busy that we don't realize our use of modern conveniences is resulting in neglect and poor modeling.

**Consumerism.** Our submission to the idol of convenience often fuels the idol of consumerism. Before entering first grade, most children will have absorbed 30,000 advertisements, primarily from TV. Little wonder, then, that parents face a challenge in countering that influence. Our kids crave the coolest toys, the trendiest clothes, the hippest music and the latest technology. But parents can make matters worse by trying to keep up with playmates' or classmates' families. Rather than teaching our children to budget, spend wisely and be content with what they've been given, we bow at the altar of consumerism, which breeds greed and gluttony.

**Celebrity adulation.** Our homes (and our children's bedroom walls) reveal that Christians are just as prone to celebrity worship as everyone else. We idolize famous authors, famous preachers, famous singers . . . and not always because of how God is using them, but often just because they're famous. And worse, we impart such celebrity worship to our children, encouraging their worship of the latest Christian star or singing group. Marva Dawn, in her book *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, writes:

*Several years ago a teenager heard me speak at a youth convention, saw me in a store and begged for my autograph. I asked her why my signature was more valuable than hers. We are all equally significant members of the Body of Christ, are we not? We all have crucial parts to play in the church's ministry to the world. The church should be the last place where anyone is more important than anyone else.*

**Instant gratification.** My wife and I were once foster parents to six teenage boys. Our boys had come to us from the juvenile court system for various reasons, but ultimately each had the same inability to postpone gratification. Given the choice between obtaining or enjoying something now or later, they were virtually untrained and unable to choose later.

So it is in many of the finest Christian homes today. Our children have become so accustomed to getting what they want when they want it that they find it nearly impossible to postpone gratification. Too often, they become like us. We buy things on credit simply because we want them now. We give up if we don't see quick results in dieting, studying or saving. And we are prone to take shortcuts, make decisions too quickly and value instantaneous satisfaction more than quality.

## ***Toss false gods***

These are just some of the idols we worship. They may be harder to recognize than a golden calf or a stone idol. They may also be harder to correct. But our modern American idols are as abhorrent to God as the idols that tempted and afflicted ancient Israel. If we don't do something about them, they will corrupt us just as they did the Israelites.

So how do we cast down our idols? The first step is acknowledgment. We must let God show us those idols we have adopted — or adapted. And when we recognize an idol, we must choose humility and repentance (instead of defensiveness), call our pet idolatries by their proper name, *sin*, and confess each one to God.

Once we are aware of an idol, we must not only refuse to bow to it any longer, but also avoid reinforcing it. We must clearly and consciously "set apart Christ as Lord" (1 Peter 3:15) in our lives and our parenting decisions.

Finally, casting down our idols will mean giving ourselves anew to prayer and devoting ourselves to the cultivation of new behaviors. We must beg God to replace our false gods with His sufficiency. We must yield to God our allegiance to convenience. We must ask Him to cleanse us of consumerism and celebrity worship, so we might be better examples to our children. We must seek God's help in countering our

children's attachment to instant gratification.

Such steps may not be easy. But they will bear fruit in children who "shine like stars" in the midst of an otherwise "crooked and depraved generation" (Philippians 2:15).

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Bob Hostetler's 21 books include *American Idols*. He and his wife, Robin, live in Ohio and have two adult children.

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