

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to American Idols and I'm not Ryan Seacrest. How many of you have never seen the show or even a clip from American Idol? God bless you! You're going against the flow because for the past five seasons American Idol has been the most watched show on television. It's a singing competition and theoretically anyone can audition. Auditions are held in cities across America. The first round of auditions is judged by a producer or two, not the three celebrity judges. Of the several thousand who audition at this first level, only about 100 from each city make it to the next round to appear before Randy, Paula, and Simon. I've watched a few of those early auditions and I'm convinced the producers allow a few really bad singers to make it before the three judges. American Idols has proven there are a lot of people out there singing into a hairbrush in front of their mirror who really *think* they can sing—but they are awful. If you want to see what I mean, search YouTube for "American Idol bad auditions."

But there are always some unknown singers who are talented enough to make it all the way to the final stage of competition in Hollywood. The viewers vote for the winners by calling in or texting their votes. There have been eight seasons of American Idol and the winners have been: Kelly Clarkson, Ruben Studdard, Fantasia Barrino, Carrie Underwood, Taylor Hicks, Jordin Sparks, David Cook, and this year's winner was Kris Allen, who used to lead praise and worship at his home church in Conway, Arkansas. Idol contestants who didn't win, but have found musical success are Clay Aiken, Jennifer Hudson, Kellie Pickler, and Chris Daughtry.

The show averages about 25 million viewers per episode and in this year's final there were over 100 million votes cast in the two hours after the broadcast. To give you a feel for that number, during the Presidential election last November, Americans went to polls and voted at a rate of about 10 million votes per hour. In the two hours following the American Idol final this spring, Americans voted at a rate of 50 million votes per hour! Americans idolize American Idol!

In the 21st century whenever we talk about idols, we usually visualize ancient religious icons or statues that pagans worshipped—like Baal in the Old Testament or the totem poles of native Americans. Or we think of people in other countries bowing down before statues of Buddha, or Krishna and offering them food and flowers to gain their favor. But the New Testament teaches that there is a different kind of idolatry.

Colossians 3:1-5: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."

An idol doesn't have to be a thing, it can an attitude or a desire. So don't think of idolatry as bowing down to a statue or a stick. In her excellent book, *Breaking Free*, Beth Moore provides a good definition of a modern idol: "Anything we try to put in a place where God belongs is an idol." (p. 67) Saint Augustine said idolatry is "worshiping anything that should be used and using anything that should be worshiped."

Last week, I surveyed some of my friends about what they thought are the most dangerous American Idols. I want to share some of their comments with you. Based upon this survey, here are the top five idols that Americans worship:

(1) AMERICANS WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF MONEY

There's no doubt the most popular American god is the almighty dollar and the stuff we can get by spending money. Holly Rand wrote "America's #1 idol is Money! It leads to selfishness, competition, envy; it makes people boastful, jealous, arrogant, insecure; it is abused more than understood and most forget that it all really belongs to God."

People don't actually bow down to money, they just worship the things money can buy—that's called materialism. Dr. John English wrote that the most dangerous American idol is: "Materialism. Because you can never get enough, therefore you can never be truly happy. Someone always has more. Anxiety brought on by debt and money issues from spending too much is one of the greatest problems I see every day."

Jerry Cline wrote: "Suzie and I once visited the Corvette museum in Bowling Green, KY, and I was surprised to hear the narrator in the video about the museum call it a 'shrine.' Idols need places of worship, don't they?" For many Americans, gold is their god and greed is their creed. The Bible says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

(2) AMERICANS WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF SELF

Americans basically are in love with themselves. Jesus said we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. And indeed, we should have a healthy love for ourselves, but we shouldn't be in love with ourselves. Some people are so in love with themselves that they stand in front of the mirror and sing, "How great thou art!"

I was surprised at how many people wrote that "SELF" is the biggest American idol. For instance, Chelsey English wrote: "I think we tend to idolize ourselves. We use money, status, power, etc. to call attention to us—we are a lover of self."

John Strain wrote: "Self is the biggest idol I see. Everything is 'about me.' We may be the most narcissistic culture in American history."

Emily Weesner wrote: "I'm gonna have to vote 'SELF'—always looking out for #1 is our top priority. Americans are overindulged with themselves."

Don't be surprised that self is one of our most popular American idols. 2 Timothy 3:4 predicts that in the last days before Jesus returns people would be lovers of self more than lovers of God.

(3) AMERICANS WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF SUCCESS AND POWER

Americans are enamored with position and power. They want people to know they have a job making more money than you do, with more perks than you have. Carrie Hunt wrote that success is an idol: "We allow ourselves to believe all we are and all we have or will ever have is from our own abilities. It's why success is so important; if we're highly successful, then we're more valuable somehow. People don't want to believe God, don't want to give Him praise for all He's done because it would mean it's not about them or due to their own efforts."

Millions of Americans spend their lives blindly climbing their way to the top of the ladder of success—only to discover late in life that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall!

(4) AMERICANS WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF RECREATION AND SPORTS

I love playing and watching sports, but some people worship sports and physical fitness. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we should keep it in good physical condition, but we all know people who have gotten so far into exercise and physical fitness that it dominates their life and has become an unhealthy obsession. It's taken the place of God, and thus it has become an idol.

Jim Parnell wrote: "Physical fitness can become an idol. The amount of time and resources given to the right look is astounding. Weight, hair, clothes, muscles (abs), surgery, nails. It seems most people are dissatisfied, 'I'm too heavy, too skinny, too short, too tall, hair too curly, too straight, wrong color eyes, etc.' Physical appearance is a cruel master/idol because in the end age and gravity get us all."

Spectator sports have become the main obsession with many Americans. Some of you will head over to Dallas this season to watch football in the new Cowboys Stadium. In a July 30, 2009 article *Tyler Paper* Sportswriter, Travis Yoesting, described the new stadium. Listen to the religious words he used: "Jerry Jones' new Cowboys Stadium is a \$1.15 billion football cathedral, a sports Mecca that will be the end voyage of many a pilgrimage in the coming years." He's right. The original estimated cost to build the stadium was \$650 million but it ended up costing \$1.15 billion. The video screen hanging in the center is the largest HD screen in the world. It is 160 feet long and 72 feet wide. (I know some of you guys are salivating on your Bibles.) Guess how much the video screen alone cost? \$40 million. When I read that, I couldn't help but chuckle. We're spending the same amount—\$40 million—to construct facilities to reach and train followers of Jesus Christ to change the world, and some people complain about how much money we're spending. How many people are complaining about a \$40 million television at the Cowboys stadium? None. That's another indication of how we've mixed up our priorities.

(5) AMERICANS WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF BEAUTY AND FAME

Many Americans are obsessed with physical beauty and the beautiful people who are the celebrities. Susie Robb wrote: "Maybe our biggest idol is beauty...beautiful faces, beautiful bodies, beautiful homes, cars, clothes, jewelry all in an effort to find self esteem...to feel special we concentrate solely on ourselves not God!"

Americans are addicted to stars—movie stars, rock stars and sports stars. In fact Carrie Gill simply said America's greatest idol is "Hollywood." Joyce Shook agreed and elaborated. She

wrote: "HOLLYWOOD!!! They teach us that right is wrong and wrong is right!! We accept their indoctrination to whatever they want us to believe as truth, most of what they promote on the big screen is totally UNGODLY!!!"

A youth minister wrote about taking a group of teenagers to Memphis on a mission trip. They worked in the inner city ministering to underprivileged kids. The youth minister said no trip to Memphis is complete without a visit to Graceland, so one afternoon they visited Elvis' shrine. As they were walking past a wall at Graceland they saw hundreds of tributes fans from all over the world had written about Elvis. Some were funny, others were moving, but there was one that got the attention of the teenagers. It simply said, "Elvis is my Jesus." The students started talking about that and got upset. One of the guys said, "This is idolatry—plain and simple. I'm leaving, who's with me?" The entire youth group stormed out of Graceland without finishing their tour. They complained to their youth minister for taking them to such an ungodly place. The youth minister said, "Hey, I need you guys to 'Love Me Tender.' I'm *glad* you recognized that as an example of idolatry. You learned a great lesson. We should worship the King of Kings *only*, not the King of rock and roll."

Celebrity worship is more widespread than we want to admit. If you know more about the personal lives of Brad and Angelina than you do about Boaz and Ruth, then you may be guilty of celebrity idolatry!

So what are we gonna do about these American idols? Should we go out into the streets and burn all the banks, break all the mirrors, and torch the new Cowboys stadium? Absolutely not. We don't have to tear down the idols. In order to defeat them, we simply have to start worshipping the One True God in spirit and in truth. When we worship Him for Who He really is, these American idols will crumble.

Let me tell you an Old Testament story about idols. In 1 Samuel 5 we read that the Israelites were at war against the Philistines. The Philistines captured the Ark of God. It was just a box containing the 10 Commandments, a bowl of manna, and Aaron's rod, but it represented the presence and power of Jehovah. The Philistines didn't really know what to do with the Ark, so they placed it next to their main idol, Dagon in Ashdod. Pictures of Dagon show him as a statue that was half man and half fish—sort of a merman. Since Ashdod was on the Mediterranean coast, they probably worshiped Dagon hoping to catch more fish.

After they placed the Ark next to Dagon, they went to bed. When they awoke the next morning, the statue of Dagon had fallen to the ground on its face. They picked Dagon back up, brushed him off, and placed him back on his shrine. The next morning, Dagon had fallen again, but this time, his head and arms had broken off. By this time, the Philistines decided they didn't want anything to do with the Ark of the God of the Israelites. They took the Ark to another city, but that city didn't want it! They kept shuffling it around until finally they gave it back to Israel saying, "Here, your God is too powerful for us!"

The lesson we learn about idols is that if we will worship the one true God in the right way, all our idols will fall, just like Dagon. In order to worship God correctly, you must know His name. Actually, you must know His names. A God as awesome as ours can't be restricted to just one

name! In fact, there are five special names for God that exactly crush and counteract the five American idols I've identified.

(1) THE MONEY IDOL CRUMBLES WHEN I WORSHIP GOD AS JEHOVAH-JIREH

(Genesis 22:14). He is my Provider—NOT money! When Abraham took Isaac up on Mt. Moriah he was ready to sacrifice him. But at the last moment, God spared Isaac and provided a ram to be used as a substitute. That's a beautiful picture of how God has supplied the Lamb of God, Jesus, to be our substitute. Abraham called God Jehovah-Jireh, which means, "My God will provide." Jehovah-Jireh will supply all your needs a lot better than money ever can.

I get hungry sometimes, don't you? I need food to eat. But if I need bread to eat, I don't pull a dollar out of my pocket. The first thing I do is look to God and say, "Give us this day our daily bread." In other words, it's not that dollar that gives me bread, it is God. If God wants to give me a dollar to buy the bread, that's great. Or He may have someone bake me a loaf of homemade bread, or He may place manna on the ground. But the point is God is my source, not money, so I'm not going to bow down before money.

Do you have bills to pay? Sure. But money is not your source for your mortgage payment, God is. If you think money is your source, you'll run after money. But when you know God is your source you'll worship Him as Jehovah-Jireh and that money idol will crumble.

(2) THE SELF IDOL CRUMBLES WHEN I WORSHIP GOD AS JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU

(Jeremiah 23:6) That name means He is my righteousness—NOT my goodness. The idol of self always promotes itself as being good enough. But the Bible says our very best deeds—our self-righteousness—are like filthy rags compared to the holiness of God. The self idol makes us say, "It's all about me, myself, and I." True worship says "It's all about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!" When Isaiah saw God lifted up, he fell down before Him and said, "Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips." (Isaiah 6:5) But God touched his lips and cleansed him with fire. Self is always pulling us away from God, trying to climb onto the throne of our lives. But true worship denies self and enthrones Jesus. You don't have to attack self, just worship God as your righteousness and you'll say, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

(3) THE SUCCESS IDOL CRUMBLES WHEN I WORSHIP GOD AS JEHOVAH-NISSI

(Exodus 17:15) He is my strength—NOT human promotion! The world teaches that you can earn success and victory by your intelligence and hard work. But God teaches that His strength is what matters. In Exodus 17 the Israelites were outnumbered by Amalekites. Moses sat on a mountain overlooking the battle. Whenever he raised his staff, representing God's strength, the Israelites prevailed and when he lowered it, the enemy prevailed. He finally figured out that the outcome of the battle didn't depend on what was happening down there, but by what was happening on the mountain. When his arms got tired, Aaron and Hur stood on either side and held up his arms. The Israelites won the battle. So they built an altar and called it "Jehovah-Nissi" which means "the Lord is my victory banner."

If you want to win the war of life, the battle isn't really taking place down here; it is taking place in the place of worship and prayer. When you know that your strength comes from God alone, you no longer have to compete in the rat race to get ahead.

(4) THE RECREATION IDOL CRUMBLES I WORSHIP GOD AS JEHOVAH-ROPHE

(Jeremiah 30:17) He is my health—NOT recreation! In Exodus 15 the children of Israel got sick from drinking the bitter waters at Marah. But God healed them and He said, "I am Jehovah-Rophe, the God who heals you." (Exodus 15:26) Through the prophet Jeremiah God says, "I will restore you to health and heal your wounds." His name is the Lord who heals. So who or what are you trusting for health? Your exercise regimen or Jehovah-Rophe? Are you trusting your medicine, or Jehovah-Rophe?

Since I was diagnosed with prostate cancer last spring, I've been exercising more, and trying to eat better, and I'm taking medicine. And when someone asks me what I'm doing about my cancer, my answer is that I'm calling on God as Jehovah-Rophe, the God who heals!

(5) THE BEAUTY IDOL CRUMBLES WHEN I WORSHIP GOD AS JEHOVAH-M'KADESH

He is my beauty—NOT cosmetics! In Leviticus 20:8 God says, "I am the Lord who makes you holy." To God the only kind of beauty that registers is the beauty of holiness. The Bible says, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2) Our prayer shouldn't be for God to make us happy, but for Him to make us holy. Don't just seek to be beautiful on the outside, seek inner beauty which is called holiness. We are so obsessed with outward appearance but God looks on the heart.

CONCLUSION

In America we're surrounded by idols. Mark Driscoll is a pastor in Seattle and he talks about a visit he made to East India. When he was there he was shocked to see the hundreds of shrines and idols the Indian people worshiped. One shrine had chicken feathers and chicken blood everywhere, indicating that chickens were killed there. While at this chicken shrine, Mark was talking to the wife of one of the Indian pastors who was planting a church. He asked her, "Do you think you'll ever visit America?" She said, "I did once, but I have no desire to go back." He said, "Why not?" She said, "I couldn't stomach all the idolatry in America." Mark said as he was standing there next to the altar where chickens were whacked to the chicken god thinking, "That wasn't the answer I was expecting." So he asked her, "Where are the shrines and the idol worship happening in America?" She said, "Your god is your stomach and you have restaurants everywhere. Your god is your sports teams and you build multi-million dollar stadiums to house them. Your god is your television and all the chairs in your homes are lined up toward that god so all the family members can worship that god." Mark said he realized idolatry is what we see in someone else's culture—and in our culture, we just see the Bass Pro Shop, the mall, as places you go to—not as something religious and certainly not as idolatry. Americans are guilty of idolatry every day.

The reason Americans are worshiping idols is because of dissatisfaction with their lives. If I had to use one word to describe the human condition I would say, "Dissatisfied." We are all born with a hole in our hearts and we're trying to fill it. Adam and Eve were dissatisfied in the Garden of Eden and they disobeyed God to try to fill that emptiness. Generations of people since then have been doing the same thing—trying to satisfy this longing. Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones expressed it this way: "I can't get no satisfaction." Bono and U2 tried a lot of things, but he had to admit, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for." And a current group named Carolina Liar sing a song that says: "Show me what I'm looking for. Save me, I'm lost; Oh, Lord, I've been waiting for you; I'll pay any cost; Save me from being confused; Show me what I'm looking for."

Those lyrics represent a world of dissatisfied people who don't even really know what it is they're looking for. I believe God creates a nagging dissatisfaction in every person. He created us with a need that only He can meet. Why? According to 2 Peter 3:9 He doesn't want anyone to perish. So dissatisfaction isn't a bad thing, it's a God thing. There is a God-shaped hole in your heart, and you will be restless and dissatisfied until you find rest in Him alone.

So watch out for American idols. But you don't have to torch your idols, just turn your heart toward heaven and worship the one true God.

OUTLINE

"Anything we try to put in a place where God belongs is an idol." *Beth Moore*

1. AMERICANS WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF:

- 1) Money
- 2) Self
- 3) Success and Power
- 4) Recreation and Sports
- 5) Beauty and Fame

2. MY IDOLS CRUMBLE WHEN I WORSHIP GOD AS:

- 1) *Jehovah-Jireh* (Genesis 22:14)
He is my Provider—NOT money!
- 2) *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (Jeremiah 23:6)
He is my righteousness—NOT my goodness!
- 3) *Jehovah-Nissi* (Exodus 17:15)
He is my strength—NOT human promotion!
- 4) *Jehovah-Rophe* (Jeremiah 30:17)
He is my health—NOT recreation!
- 5) *Jehovah-M'Kaddesh* (Leviticus 20:8)
He is my beauty—NOT cosmetics!



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes