

## **Modern Idols**

### **10 Ways to a Better Life series**

**by Chris Famisaran**

All right. Good morning, everybody. How are y' all doing? Good. I hope you had a better week than I did. I'm kidding.

Before I begin, I want to share something really quick. So sometime last year, late in the fall, the region that we belong to, the LA metro region, had an assessment done for me. I asked a number of you in the congregation to please truthfully tell the region how you really feel about me. And in terms of the assessment, I did fine. I didn't fail.

But there's a few areas that I guess I could have some more improvement. And so in talking with the region director and then also talking with the board, one option was to have an individual to come help and deal with the strategic mission and vision of our church going forward. And so late fall last year, we decided to have a consultant come in that the region is providing for. We're not paying. And so, Dr. Kress, I don't know where you're at. If you want to wave your hand real quick, briefly, she is going to. For the next six to eight months, we're going to be meeting once a month to talk about the past as a church overall, where it's at right now, where it's headed, and then how can we formulate, create a formula for Downey Adventist Church to move forward? We're going to be looking at the vision, the mission, and ultimately strategy of how we are going to work together. And so this is an initiative that has been brought forward from the board. And also we've asked a few other people, lay people. And also I kind of wanted to throw in our young adults, because I know we say they're the future of the church, but that is wrong, in my opinion, because they're not the future. They are now. Amen. Okay, if y' all didn't say that, I've got more work to do. They are leaders now. Even Victoria, you see her, she's leading the congregation. Amen.

So now, what does that mean? Part of the work that we're going to be doing, though, is our little homework is our team is going to be going to the congregation. And from time to time, we may ask for your input.

And what I want to ask from you, as your pastor is pleased, share honestly. Okay. What do you think? And as we move forward, we'll be able to create a bigger picture, a vision of where we want to head as Downing Church. Amen. Can you do that for me? All right. So over the next six to eight months, that's what we're going to be doing. At the very end, We'll come back and share with you all how we're going to move forward.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to gathered together once again as a church family. Lord, we're learning about 10 ways to a better life. And as we focus on the second commandment today, lead and guide us in Jesus name. Amen.

The term idols, when you hear that term, what comes to mind? All right, maybe you'll think of... Well, the thing that I immediately think to is the movie Raiders of Lost Ark. One of the opening scenes. What does Indy do? He goes into this place. It's dark and dreary, full of booby traps. And at the very end, after he's risked his life, there's this golden little idol and he takes this little bag of sand and he tries to swap it, right? Those of you who've seen that movie, remember that what happens, he has to run. Eventually he runs through the arrows and overcomes the pit that he almost fell in with this rope and this huge ball. If you've ever ridden the ride at Indiana Jones at Disney, you know what I'm talking about.

So that's one example. Maybe you think of a ceramic image, maybe something carved of wood. If we go to modern times, what do we think? Maybe some of you are thinking American Idol, literally, right? Idols. What are idols? Why do we have idols? Should we have idols? No, let's just start off with that.

Let's go to, I want to go to the book of Exodus. Okay, let's go to book of Exodus. Here's some of the verses we're going to be looking at today. If we have time, we'll get to all of them. Exodus 20, verses 4 through 6. Also in Deuteronomy, 5:8-10. That is Deuteronomy's version of the Ten Commandments that Moses has to reiterate later to remind them. And we're looking at this perspective. Remember, as we're in a. God is trying to create a covenant relationship with Israel.

They've spent most of their lives in Egypt. They're starting all over again. And you see, in. In Egypt, it was not uncommon to have different images carved. This was nothing new, this idea of having idols to the Israelites. But now we see that God is saying, hey, shall have no other gods before me. And now I don't want you to make anything literal or figurative that can have control or sway or influence in your life.

*So 20, verse 4, you shall not make for yourself an image in the form of Anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below, you shall not bow to them or worship them. For I, the Lord, am a God, your God. And I am a what? A jealous God. Punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Okay, now again, there's this language of, Lord, I am your God. Okay, we recognize that the first couple of commandments are dealing with our vertical relationship with God. And as we've seen in scripture, we're to love the Lord with what, just a little bit or with everything?. Okay. With all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your might. Everything.

And as we see that God is trying to reframe, trying to renew a sense in their purpose, and why is it important that we should not have other idols in our life? Okay, we're going to come to that later. But you see, it says, don't make anything that represents the heavens, like the stars or the trees or the birds or anything here on Earth. Because as we learned last week, there is nothing that can take the place of God's power, majesty, might, supremacy. Amen. Okay.

But also, I just kind of love this idea that God's a little jealous. You know what that means? We're wanted. Have you ever felt not wanted? That's a bummer. I hate that feeling. You are wanted. You are loved.

And of course, it says, Lord God, I'm a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents of the third and the fourth generation. We'll get into that a little bit later, okay? I think oftentimes, though, when it comes to the Ten Commandments, this one, and maybe also the one where it says you shouldn't, you know, you shouldn't kill each other. They're probably pretty

easy to keep. You know, the other's a little more harder to maintain. So we think, Right, but you think, well, I don't have anything. I don't have any idols in front of me. I don't try to murder other people. But the others a little harder to follow, or are there things in our lives that can take the place of God?

My Buddy Tim Kress, Dr. Karen's son Tim, once said, we all try and shrink God down into something that is manageable, visible, and controllable. See, the thing, though, is, can we be insecure as human beings? Can we try when we don't know the outcome. Do you ever try to game the situation? Do you ever try to control the situation, that it benefits what you want to get your desired outcome? Oh, we're silent on this one. Nobody wants to admit that they can be a control freak or try to be controlling parents. Have you ever tried to game the situation with your kids? You're tired, it's late, and you just want to get them in bed so you can have five minutes of peace. All right? You know what I'm talking about? All right. Maybe there's something very important that you want to try to manage and control.

But if we're truly going to trust God with our life, with everything, it means we have to let go. Go and trust God. That God will provide. That God will provide us an outcome that is overall going to be good for us. Cause, I mean, if you look through the Bible, when there are individuals who try to take control of God's situation and God's position and try to do things on their own, how did it work out for them? Not very well. Right. But in an attempt to try to control and think, they make an idol. In fact, if you continue to read the story of the Israelites later on, when Moses is on the mountain and it takes them a while to get back, what happens to the hearts of the people? They start to get anxious. They start to get worried. Where is our leader? Even though Moses, brother Aaron was there, he had been there. Could they not have gone to him for advice? Peer pressure got to Aaron. And what did they create? They created a golden calf. Did God appreciate that? No. We sometimes try to put things in our lives that we can try to control. It tries to bring us maybe a measure of comfort and security.

The reality, though, is that we are confronted with the idea, okay, **we are confronted with the idea that anything we place between us and God is a. What? A substitute.** Have you ever gone to the. Actually, no. Have you ever made an order online to, let's say, Target or doordash, whatever, and they give

you that option if they don't have that item, if it's out of stock, you can get a substitution, a substitute item. Right. So let's say, for instance, if I wanted to order Sprite. I love Sprite, but they run out of Sprite. What can I get? I can get Sprite zero. Okay. Or even worse, Diet Sprite. Yes. I am sorry. I do not like diet anything. It just does not taste right to me. No, hate. I just. I do not like anything diet. And even though I put Diet Sprite zero As a substitute. And when my order gets, you know, in the car or they drop it off at home and I look and see, please let it be regular Sprite. Let it be regular Sprite. And it's Sprite Zero. It's not the same. In my younger days when I drank Coke and sometimes I still have a Coke, one of the greatest things on a hot summer day was to have a freezing can of Coke or Sprite and guzzle it down. And it gave me that sugary chemical rush in my head and body, and it felt so good. Amen. It's okay. You can admit it tasted good. Is it good for you? No. But you can admit it tasted good, right? And now when I drink a Sprite Zero or a Coke Zero, it just does not have that same feeling. It's a substitute. And I want the real thing.

Why do we place substitutes in our life when we have the right thing, the real thing right before us? As somebody once told me, we want the real McCoy, the real thing.

Now, when we think about God, okay, let's also think about this. The image of God. Where in scripture does. Do we get a full reality, full description of God's figure? Think about that. Really think about that. Because, for instance, in Daniel 7 and Revelation 1, there's some brief ideas of how it describes God. And. And let's just. We understand that Jesus also was God. But overall, Take all of that aside. What does God really look like? Do we really know?

Let's look at this Exodus. Let's go to Exodus, Exodus 33. Okay, hold on to Exodus 20, but let's jump over to Exodus 33, Exodus 33. And I want to go to verse 18. Exodus 33:18. Okay.

Moses has the bold audacity to say, Moses, sorry, Exodus 33. 18. *Then Moses said, now show me your glory.* Essentially, reveal yourself to me, God. And think about that.

We know how big God is, right? Okay, verse 19. *And the Lord said, I will cause all of my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the*

*Lord in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and what? live. Okay, goes on to say. Then the Lord said, there is a rock near me when you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock, cover you with my hand until I have passed by, and then I will remove my Hand and you will see my back, but my face must not be seen. The majesty and the glory of God is so much.*

What could it have done to Moses? God is too big. God is too powerful. Why do we try to limit it to something in our hands potentially and try to make a substitute? And so we see that God is trying to help the Israelites see that nothing you try to create or place is going to equalize what I have to offer. I am the best you got. Don't try to put a substitute. Don't try to put Sprite zero okay? Don't try to do that to me. I am the ultimate Sprite. Way better than Sprite. Whatever.

**So God's sovereignty and supremacy is beyond any human thought that we can grasp** as well. Right? God is bigger than we could ever think or dream or imagine.

And God doesn't list these 10 commandments to be mean, to be evil, or to ruin our lives. There are new expectations on how we can live our lives to find freedom. If we truly follow this principle, how is it going to petter better our lives? What promises can we find? We'll get to that in a second.

Parents, going back to you. Okay, Those of you who are parents or those of you who've been in charge of people, especially parents, there's a portion of your day during the school year that they're not in your vicinity, they're at school. And throughout the early childhood. Childhood, you're trying to teach them, you're trying to mentor, you're trying to disciple, you're trying to help them grow to be awesome human beings and followers of Jesus. But there's a point where you have to release and let them go to school. And at school, they're open to a lot of things. And you have to trust that what they will make the right decision, that they will learn, they will grow, they will try to treat other people well, that they'll be protected.

And do we live in a perfect world? We don't. imagine, where God gives these principles to the Israelites, but now they have to go and live. And if God could do anything, could God try to game everything he could? But is that true love? We all have the power to choose, make decisions. Are we gonna be faithful and honorable to God, or are we gonna be faithful and honorable to what I want to do or what I'm being influenced by?

Who are you being influenced by? And so I think, you know, as parents or people who are in charge of caring for somebody or a group of people, you do your best and I can understand now why God is a little bit jealous. Because God only wants the best. For what? For us. And so when God says, hey, I'm the biggest, there ain't nobody above me, don't have these other idols, Please treat each other well. Take some time with me on Sabbath, right? I'm just briefly breaking down the ten Commandments. They aren't just like, hey, I'm going to make sure you live by this. No. These are ways to have a better and more fulfilling life that leads towards freedom if you truly, truly listen and follow these principles.

So **God desires to be in a real and exclusive relationship with you.** That can be challenging, though. For instance, when maybe, maybe. Hey, you gain a lot of money. Oh, money itself. Okay, I don't have my wallet with me. I was going to pull a \$20 bill out. But that \$20 bill, is it evil by itself? No, it's just a piece of paper with green ink and everything on it. But we attach value to that piece of paper, right? And 20 bucks. Now, man, \$20 is not what it was 30 years ago. You go to Taco Bell twice, maybe three times, and have a full meal. Now you get one and a half, maybe, okay, you can get a comfortable meal for one person.

So we attach value to money, whether it's a dollar or a billion dollars. How are you going to allow that money to influence you? Are you going to work really hard? Are you going to try to inherit so that you can provide and get everything you want? And with money, you can become comfortable. Does God want us to be totally comfortable all the time? I don't think so. Do you know why? What happens when you get comfortable? You get complacent. Dare I say, you may get lazy and you don't What? you do not grow. Growth only comes from being uncomfortable. All of the highs and the wins that I or you have experienced has most likely come from a period of challenge or

becoming uncomfortable in dealing with that which we really don't want to, but still do.

I don't remember if it was here or I was talking to somebody, but courage doesn't mean that you're afraid. Courage means you do something in spite of your fear or of it being uncomfortable because you know it's the right thing to do.

So I think that there's this idea of we want to be comfortable. Society tells, here's how you can make your life easier. I love the dishwasher. It's awesome, right? It ensures that I can get my dishes done efficiently or a washer and dryer. Imagine trying to wash all of your clothes by hand and hanging it on a rack outside. No, I ain't going to do that. Right. We have all these modern luxuries. We have cars that have air conditioning. We can listen to any kind of music we want. Dare I say, you could even probably watch a movie. Don't recommend that. Okay, please don't do that. You have the most capable sound system. You have the most capable air conditioning. Some cars you don't even need to drive. Well, that's a scary thought right now. Okay, we're comfortable. Does God want us to be comfortable? I think that God, in some ways, yes, we can be comfortable in God's presence, but I don't think God necessarily wants us to be comfortable where it could become a bad thing.

We were talking about American Idol, and what does that really ultimately lead to? You sign up to sing, and with that comes what? Fame, notoriety, Maybe a contract with money. But you know what that also comes with? People now pay attention to you, everything you do. And we have the ability to tell you what we think. How many would love that pressure? to have instant messages or DMs and saying, you're great, you're horrible. I hate your voice, you look ugly. Your spouse to your kid, this and that. Some people can put it off and other people like, I don't want that. I just want to be left alone. Some people love it.

Maybe politics. I'm not saying this a side. This is for both sides. For any side. Maybe you turn politics into your own mini idol where you're more worried about making sure that your person wins and you trust that God will see us through. I don't know.

Tim Keller talks about work as well. Okay, And I want to talk about this. **We can live with the free heart and in the love of grace of God.** Tim Keller talks about work. Sometimes work can become an idol because what does work bring?

Well, it can bring a lot of money. And again, money's not bad as long as you provide and pay your bills and everything. Or you can do good with money. But when you make it your identity, when you make it your identity and nothing else, what can happen? Maybe you're married, but your spouse then feels, well, you're working all the time. Your children, I never see you. Who are you? It's important to maybe, yes, provide company, provide a living. But we're also called to minister to our families first. Amen. And look, I'm a pastor. I love my job. I love you all. And yes, ministry is part of who I am. But deep down, I'm Chris. I'm a child of God. I love the Lord, I'm a husband, and I'm a minister. I don't want to have ministry be my everything. Because, yes, I follow and serve the Lord with everything. But I don't want my identity just to be a pastor. Maybe you're a firefighter, you're an accountant, you're a doctor, you're a lawyer, you are a sanitation technician. Whatever it may be, do it with everything and use it as an opportunity to serve.

But don't necessarily make it be your identity. Because once that thing is done, when that thing is gone, who are you? When you can no longer be a doctor, when you can no longer be a lawyer, when you can no longer be an accountant, whatever it may be, we're all called to do something, to be a steward. I'm a steward right now. Literally. That's what I was talking with Gustavo about this. I'm a steward of this church. And somebody eventually will come in later on. Not anytime soon. I don't want to scare you, but I will leave at some point, hopefully not for a long time. I'm simply a steward. And I'm called to do what God wants me to do here, along with you all alongside. I don't own this church. And at one point, if the Lord doesn't come back, I'm going to retire. And yes, I'm going to continue to serve, but I'm a steward. It's not mine.

And so when we talk about identity, do we focus everything on what I want or what I want to do? Or do I want to trust what God wants for me? And am I going to try to place these things in my life that become a stumbling block between me and God, or you and God?

Tim Keller says, speaking to a secular audience on MSNBC on the Morning Joe Show. He says, “When you make your work your identity, if you're successful, it destroys you because it goes to your head. If you're not successful, it destroys you because it goes to your heart. It destroys your self worth. Faith in Christ gives you an identity that's not in work or in accomplishment, but that gives you insulation against the weather changes. If you're successful, you stay humble. If you're unsuccessful, you have some ballast. Work is a great thing when it is a servant instead of a Lord.”

So you can work hard, but if you're chasing titles, if you're chasing prestige, eventually you can succeed and get those things. But what does it really provide if you're trying to find fulfillment in a job. You're a CEO. Guess what? You're replaceable. You could get sick. You may need to leave. We're called to serve where we work. If you're trying to find validity in your job, woe, if it happens that you lose that job, put your faith and identity in Christ.

Now, when we love God with everything, okay, we can live with a free heart because there are no other obstacles. We have a straight relationship with God, with a God who loves us, who cares for us, who is jealous for us, doesn't wanna share. Remember we talked about this when you got married? Did you wanna share your spouse with other people? Uh, okay. No sharesies. My wife is mine and I am hers. And so God wants to have an exclusive relationship with you. And when you find that purpose, when you are one with the Lord and you follow the Lord, the Lord will be with you in the good times and the challenging times, wherever you may be at in life. So serve the Lord and don't allow other substitutes to come into your life.

So my question for you all, as you reflect on this. **What are the substitutes that you create in your life that get in the way of your relationship with God?** I want you to ponder that for a second. What are some of the things that is in your life that has become a sense of security, Something that you can try to control to make you feel perhaps better, secure, less anxious?

This week, **I want you to address one substitute.** I'm not going to ask you to do all 10 or 15 or 3 or whatever. Let's just start with one.

I'm going to go out on a limb. I'm going to be very vulnerable with you. All right now. Okay, how many of you have checked your screen time in the last week? If you have an iPhone, you can easily do that. How many minutes or how many hours did you spend on your phone a day? I looked and I was appalled at what my screen time was this last week. It is horrendous. And I realized, and it's not like I was glued to my screen like this, but, you know, I drive a lot, and so I listen to a lot of books. But I realized something's got to change. And I was listening to a podcast, of all things, talking about trying to take your time back. So here is what my substitute can be is my phone. I don't want to challenge you. Those of you who would like. I'm going to limit my screen time to. I was going to say an hour, but because I drive a lot and I need my WAYZ. I'm going to put it to an hour and a half this week. Who will be so bold to want to try to limit their screen time to an hour, to an hour and a half a week? Don't raise your hands unless you're bold, all right? If you think you could do it, you raise and you shake your fist at me, all right? Okay, here's what we're gonna do. We're out of agreement, okay? One to one and a half hours a day, max, this week. We'll come back this week. Next week. We're gonna have an accounting next week. Okay? Can we do that? All right, now, you don't have to do this. Address your substitute, all right? So **address that substitute. Make an intentional plan to not let it take the place of God.** Amen. Amen.

Lord, as we end this part of the service, Lord, give us courage. Help us not to put substitutes in our place, In your place, Lord, may you be. May we seek you with everything and all that we do. You are good and your mercy endures forever. We love you, Lord. Amen.