

Object Lessons for Biblical Counseling (Idols) By Wendy Wood

This is part two of a series on object lessons for biblical counseling. My hope is that these ideas will give you another tool in your toolkit to help counselees understand biblical principles by using visual aids to explain biblical truths. Idols of the heart are a key focus on biblical counseling. An idol is anything or anyone who takes the place of God in our hearts as our greatest desire. John Calvin called our hearts idol factories. We are constantly making other people or other things too important in our lives to the neglect of God. As you help your counselee discover what their idols are, this object lesson will help them see and understand how their idol is impacting different relationships and situations throughout each day. (Some helpful means to help counselees identify idols is through the booklet "Motives" by Ed Welch, use the "struggle journal" to track thoughts, emotions and desires for a couple of weeks, or read through Dynamic Heart by Jeremy Pierre, or watch these videos on the [heart](#) and [idols](#).)

Start by setting the scene before reading the entire text of Ezekiel 14:1-8. Ezekiel is addressing elders of the Israelites. He explains the seriousness of sin and idols by saying we take them into our hearts. The very core of our being is impacted by our desires that have grown too big. Ezekiel warns the elders of the serious consequences of allowing sin to keep growing.

Ezekiel 14:1-8 "Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. 2 And the word of the Lord came to me: 3 "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? 4 Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, 5 that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself. 8 And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

Materials: some kind of glasses (I used safety goggle type glasses)

Dry erase marker

Cloth or sock to erase the dry erase marker



After reading the text, go back and emphasize verse 3. **“Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?”** Make sure your counselee takes note that the idols are “in their heart”. The idols have affected the desires, emotions, and thoughts of the counselee. When their desire for this idol is not satisfied, they feel angry or hurt, anxious or fearful. They are doubting God in their thoughts (even if not voiced aloud) that God is good or caring for them well. They will act sinfully to get this desired outcome.

The next important part to notice is the stumbling block of their iniquity (sin) before their faces. This idol is blinding them to the reality of God and His purposes in their situation. Instead of viewing life through the lens of God’s character, Word, and promises, they are blinded by their own sinful desires. And God says, **“Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?”** God calls us to love Him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. He will not be a god among gods. He is God, and there is none like Him. God is warning these elders, and us (1 Corinthians 10) that we must repent of our idols and turn away from them to God.

If you have a pretty good idea of what your counselee tends to struggle with in terms of idols, use those words to write on the glasses. If you are unsure of what your counselee idolizes, control, power, comfort, and approval are usually the big ones.

On the glasses, write the name of the idol across both lenses. If the idol is “approval” write APPROVAL across both lenses of the glasses. Have your counselee put on the glasses and describe how that changes what they see. They may not be able to make out the letters or read the word, but it impacts how they see everything in the room. Then, use some examples of situations that you have heard them talk about over the last few weeks of counseling. For example, maybe your counselee had a conversation with their boss and because of their approval idol, they didn’t speak the truth and left angry that they had not asked for the time off or request for fear their boss would be unhappy. Another situation may be when their spouse said something that they took offense over, instead of asking questions and seeking to reconcile the situation, your counselee spent several hours being silent in the other room out of fear of rejection. Maybe your counselee listens to gossip rather than confronting it because she fears her friends will think she’s a prude for not joining in.

Maybe your counselee idolizes “comfort” and you need to write COMFORT over both lenses. As your counselee has the glasses on, talk about how when your counselee comes home from work he sits grumpily in his chair watching sports and gets upset if kids interrupt him because he’s worked hard all day. Maybe your counselee turns to television, shopping, or exercise to feel comfort after a lonely day rather than turning to the Lord.

If your counselee idolizes CONTROL, give some scenarios where they have experienced anxiety or frustration over conversations or circumstances that have not turned out as they had expected. Maybe your counselee has shared how they have relationship issues with kids and their spouse because they get upset when they are running late or chores aren’t done up to their standard.

Then, erase the dry erase marker and write “GOD” or “2 Cor 5:9” or something that will show your counselee the idea that we are to live life to the glory of God. God should be the lens that we view life through. Everything we think, say, and do should be viewed with the aim to please God.

Go back through the scenarios you discussed with idols. Show how the responses would change if God was being worshipped above the idol. Scripture and the truths of God’s attributes and promises should be the lens that life is viewed through. As the desire to please God informs our thoughts and emotions, we will, through the power of the Holy Spirit, be able to love and serve others from a heart that loves God above all else. Only when we repent and turn away from our idols, can we aim to please God in every way.