

# ***IDOL LIES: FACING THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR DEEPEST DESIRES***

## **Q & A with Author DEE BRESTIN**

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**Q: How do “soul idols” develop? Help us understand the importance of identifying soul idolatry.**

**A:** Any time our deepest desire is for something other than God because we think that will satisfy or rescue us, a dangerous “soul idol” is forming. We may idolize the approval of people, our own comfort, or maintaining control. All of these things can become “idol lies” – things we value more than God. I’ll share with you an image that has been helpful to others and to me on this journey: soul idolatry is like cancer, especially the silent cancers. My husband did not know he had a tumor in his colon, but he did know that his stomach was often upset and that he felt unusually tired. He told me that he might have an ulcer and that he would check that out, but he believed that he really just needed a good vacation. He did not know a malignant tumor was in his body, growing, destroying—and that it would take him from our five children and me in his prime. Tumors are hard lumps like stones. What is so frightening about them is that, left unchecked, they grow. The sooner we discover them, the better our chance of rescue. The same is true about our soul idols.

**Q: Why do you call Jesus the “Stonecutter”?**

**A:** I call Jesus the Stonecutter because He can reveal, remove, and replace our heart idols with Himself. I discovered I had idols in my heart that were blocking my intimacy with God, bringing friction in key relationships, and destroying my joy. Yet because soul idols are invisible, I didn’t even know they were there. I had deceived myself about the darkness lurking in my heart. I told myself I was a good boss. But I wasn’t. A friend’s comment about “the pattern in my life” helped me see my “stone,” my calcifying tumor. I wanted this malignancy out so badly that I submitted to the work of the Stonecutter. And though the surgery was hard, my color is coming back, and I see a radical difference in my relationships. I am experiencing the healing that comes after a successful surgery, when a foreign body is removed and living flesh can thrive again. Jesus the Stonecutter can transform your life as well.

**Q: How does one begin this process of stone extraction?**

**A:** Every believer needs to be set free, and it begins with getting past our denial, seeing what we really idolize, and admitting this to God and to others. We may think, for example, that our deepest desire is for God, but in reality we are running to food, friendship, or Facebook to fill up our souls. We may think that our identity is in Christ, but in reality it may be in the success of our ministry, mothering, or marriage. Just as the only hope an alcoholic has of being set free is seeing and confessing his real problem, so it is with us. And so I stand before you and confess: “My name is Dee and I am an idolater” – That confession began the process.

**Q: How do good gifts from God often become idols?**

**A:** When a person allows a good gift from God—like sweets, friendship, wine, romance, or money—and allows it to become too important to her, it can lead to destruction. God intends for us to enjoy gifts when He gives them, to keep them in moderation, and to let them draw us to thank and worship Him. But because our hearts are “idol-making factories,” we find ourselves worshipping the gift and forgetting God. We are idolaters at heart.

**Q: How did your daughter help you address the idol of control in a challenging family relationship?**

**A:** I was going to be with a relative over the holidays with whom I tend to clash. Honestly, I want to control him; I want to change his thinking. I want him to be different; I want him to be like me. It’s my control idol. I often find myself wanting to zing him with a remark about what I see as his warped theology or behavior. This time we were going to be together for three days, and I wondered if I would make it. I asked my youngest daughter to pray for me. She said: “Mom, it isn’t enough to stop being mean—you have to really love him.”

I was amazed at how much Annie’s advice helped me with this relative. When an unkind or manipulative thought came to me, I didn’t just not say it; I asked God to help me say something kind and true. And He did. I made an effort to have the special foods on hand that I know this relative likes, and I expressed appreciation for the strong points on an essay he’d written. As I began to see him differently, I realized I had been building up a stereotype of him in my mind instead of seeing him as a person with hurts and needs. I had believed a lie. He saw me differently too. But then, I was different! When he left, he hugged me sincerely and said, “It’s been really good to be with you.” He’s never said that before.

**Q: How has God used the account of Jesus’ healing of the blind man in your life?**

**A:** In that Biblical story, the blind man at first saw people as “walking trees” once he was healed. I think this represents how our idols can keep us from seeing people as Jesus would have us see them. Instead of perceiving others as having hurts and needs, we use them, viewing them as a way to meet our own needs. In my own life, my relationships are changing. Instead of seeing others as “walking trees,” I am seeing them more and more as God does. He loves them, recognizes their hurts, and knows their vulnerability to idolatry, but He

also envisions the beautiful beings they could become. The new grace in my heart flows like a healing stream, bringing life to others and to myself. People find more life than they used to by being with me. I am experiencing more of the amazing presence of God, and even the stiff neck that used to plague me has disappeared. This is all because of Christ.

**Q: What is your understanding of the power of metaphor in the Bible?**

A: Metaphors can slip past our natural defenses and help us understand the heart of God. God knows us. He knows how we justify our sins, how we close our eyes to our stones, and how badly we need to be awakened. So He uses an absolutely shocking analogy to bring us to our senses; He tells us we are guilty of adultery. When we practice soul idolatry by running to things other than God to meet our needs, we betray our One True Lover. And this intimate metaphor of sexuality, used repeatedly in Scripture, is rich, nuanced, and powerful. God uses this metaphor to help us see both a negative truth and a positive truth: 1) The negative—sin is not breaking rules but breaking God’s heart. 2) The positive—He will come to us, confide in us, and fill us with His presence when we truly turn away from our false lovers and run to Him.

**Q: Idolatry and adultery: why do these two go hand in hand?**

A: Idolatry is about what we love. Do we love God? Or do we use Him to try to get what we really love? Both idolatry and adultery are powerful word pictures because this language awakens us to the truth that sin is not breaking rules but breaking God’s heart. It doesn’t seem so terrible to “break a rule.” But realizing that our idolatry breaks God’s heart is an important step toward returning to the One who saves us.

**Q: True worship of Jesus trumps idol worship. What does worship mean to you?**

A: The word *worship* means giving something the weight it deserves. Jesus is real—and worshiping Him means giving Him weight over the things that charm us most. It means choosing what will draw us closer to Him and avoiding the things that will draw us away. When my husband died, my world was so shaken that out of sheer survival I began to sing hymns to my soul each night. For two years, I sang all the verses to “Be Still My Soul” every night. I started praying through the Psalms so that I was not just pouring out my own thoughts but using the very words of God. I spent more time outdoors, praising the wisdom of the One who covers the woods with forget-me-nots, causes the sun to take the earth by its edges, and shows the hawk how to soar. These ordinary means of grace kept me moving toward Jesus. But there was something else, even more important: I began to gaze inwardly upon God. My mind would go to Him, thinking of Him. This, more than anything, brought me into His arms. My senses awakened. I became more alert to God’s voice and to the people who came across my path. I was worshiping, giving Jesus more and more of the weight He deserves. Slowly He drew me through the icy river of grief and into His arms. I do not want to stop. I want to be alert all day for my idols. I want Him to keep changing me.

**Q: Can we really turn from our idols? How does this happen?**

A: Depending on idols is always an attempt to solve a problem. The idols promise to be our saviors, but they cannot be. Beholding the beauty of the gospel so that we can arise, leave our idols, and follow Jesus is the only answer. Idols are how we replace God. Peering into the gospel is how we replace idols. Peering into the richness of the gospel, as Peter tells us angels long to do (1 Peter 1:12), can help us have the faith to open our hearts to God and let Him replace our idols with Himself. Then He moves in and sets us free from those biding chains. However, what we often do instead of completely surrendering our idols is to “manage” them. We are still so vulnerable to believing the lies of the enemy: Jesus won’t be enough. He doesn’t love You that much. He won’t do what is best for You. Yet the more we know Him, the more we see Him as He really is, and the more the truth of the gospel defeats the enemy. As we spend time with Him, as we go to Him in our minds and hearts, He comes closer. As Psalm 25:14 tells us, He confides His secrets in those who are intimate with Him, bringing them higher up and deeper in. We find we are able to unclasp our hands from the treasures of this world, for we have something so much better.

**Q: What does the daily battle against our idols look like?**

A: Every time something bad comes out of your mouth or your life, ask yourself: What is the idol lie I am believing? Recognize it and repent, knowing your idol will put up a fight, continuing to spew out lies. There will be pain in turning away, but there is such greater pain if you give in. And remember this: every death leads to a glorious resurrection. After the winter of death comes life, comes a glorious spring. So turn and behold the Lover of your Soul, who is the Truth. He is standing with open arms calling to you: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.” (Song of Songs 2:10) Don’t look back; don’t take your eyes off Him; but run, right into the shelter of His arms.

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