

Recognizing the Idols in our Lives

I. Introduction

Same Case Study as Lesson 1, continuing the discussion with different application questions.

Robert and Emily, adult siblings, disagree on how to provide care for their elderly mother, Esther. Esther has been living alone in her home, but her health has been declining over the last few years. Five weeks ago she fell and broke her hip. After a week in the hospital, she has been in a recovery center receiving care and therapy. Esther is ready to be released but cannot stay in her home alone anymore.

Years before (while Dad was living), Robert promised both his parents that he would never put them into a nursing home. Robert wants Mom to live with her children trading every other month – one month with Robert and his wife, and the next month with Emily and her husband. Emily believes that Mom should be moved into a permanent nursing facility where she can receive 24-hour care. Emily is worried that neither of them can provide the kind of care their mother needs. Esther wants to move back into her home. She knows that is not possible now, but she hopes that soon she can return home.

Emily and Robert have had a number of disagreements over the care of their mother, but on the day before Esther was to be released, they both lost their tempers in front of the social worker. Emily called her brother stupid and unrealistic. Robert accused his sister of being non-caring and unwilling to sacrifice for their mother. No decision was reached, and they left the social worker's office still bickering.

Esther, Robert and his wife, and Emily and her husband are all Christians.

For the Case Study, put yourself into either Robert's or Emily's shoes.

Use the questions below to understand his or her idols. For personal application, consider a conflict where you may have felt one of the following: anger, bitterness, pride, fear, judgmental attitude, jealousy, or defensiveness.

Reflect on the following questions to identify your underlying idols.

1. Improper desires for physical pleasure

- a. What physical pleasure did you find yourself thinking about much of the time?
- b. When a certain desire or expectation was not met, did you feel frustration, resentment, bitterness, or anger?
- c. What was unsatisfying about the gifts God has given you?
- d. How did you get even with the other person when you did not get what you wanted from him/her?

2. Pride and arrogance

- a. How are your expectations of the other person magnifying your demands on him/her and your disappointment in his/her failure to meet your desires?
- b. How are you judging the other person when your desires are not met?
- c. How are you getting even with the other person when your desires are not met?
- d. How have you communicated to the other person what you feel he/she must do?
- e. How have you threatened the other person? (“Give me what I want or you will pay!”)

3. Love of money or material possessions

- a. What preoccupies your thoughts? (What is the first thing on your mind in the morning and/or the last thing at night?)
- b. Fill in this blank: “If only I had _____, then I would be happy, fulfilled, and secure.” What does this suggest to you about your trust in God for what you desire?
- c. When a certain desire or expectation is not met, do you feel frustration, resentment, bitterness, or anger?

4. Fear of man

- a. Whose approval do you want most of all?
- b. Whom are you seeking to please at almost any cost?
- c. What do you want to preserve or avoid about your reputation?
- d. In this situation, what or whom do you fear most?

5. Good things that I want too much

- a. What do you find yourself thinking about much of the time?
- b. What causes you the most worry? How has your anxiety replaced your trust in God?
- c. Fill in this blank: “If only _____, then I would be happy, fulfilled, and secure.” What does this suggest to you about your trust in God for what you desire?
- d. When a certain desire or expectation is not met, do you feel frustration, resentment, bitterness, or anger?

Fear/Desire/Trust

