

Are You Worshipping Idols in Church?

Have you ever asked yourself, *do I worship something or someone other than God?* It's a great question to ask and a great heart check.

I'll stick my neck out and suggest that you do have idols you worship instead of God. At least I do. Once you identify them and root them out, you'll become a better leader.

You're an Idol Factory

I get challenged about my personal and leadership idols every year when I read through the middle part of the book of Isaiah.

Chapter 44, for example, is all about the futility of worshipping idols, which in those days were mostly wood or stone carvings.

So what's an idol today? You don't need wood or stone to create one. An idol is anything that takes our focus and reliance off of God.

John Calvin was dead on when he said, "Man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols." Discard one, and you'll simply create another.

8 Idols Church Leaders Still Worship Today:

The list could be much longer than eight because Calvin was right. But here are eight with which I struggle or have seen other leaders struggle. These are in no particular order because, well, any idol is bad enough to be No. 1:

1. Strategy. So I'm a strategy wonk. If you read this blog, you know that. I think many churches fail for lack of a clear,

coherent strategy. I wrote in detail about how mission, vision and strategy interrelate here.

But strategy is no substitute for trust. As valuable as strategy is (and it is), no strategy is a substitute for trusting God. Strategy makes an excellent servant and a terrible master.

2. Skill. By all means, get better at what you do. Learn, listen, polish and perfect your skills. Skill alone can get you far, but the church is a supernatural thing.

God changes hearts. You can't. I can't.

You know what's better than a skill set? A *surrendered* skill set. Having a B-level set of skills that's surrendered is better than an A-level set of skills you're trying to use without God.

3. Size. There is no merit in size. Some leaders think only bigger is better. But idolizing big can be a thin mask for ego. (Your self-worth rises and falls with big.)

Some idolize the romanticism of small. Yet idolizing small can be a thin mask for insecurity. (You love small only because you will never be big.)

There is no magic to size. Focus on getting healthy, and size will take care of itself.

Or to switch metaphors, pull some weeds, till the soil, plant some seeds and trust God to grow things at the pace and to the size He wants.

4. Stats. I love stats too much. I watch attendance, baptisms, givings, group participation and volunteer rates like a hawk and then am disappointed if they don't meet my exaggerated expectations.

I watch my blog and podcast stats too much, and—if I'm not

careful—I'll even allow them to dictate my emotions.

Before you gloat a little, *ignoring* stats can be another idol. Being the slacker-who-doesn't-care/I'm-too-hip-for-that leader can close you off to God as readily as being the leader who rises and falls with the numbers.

Stats tell you things. But they don't measure your worth, nor do they measure God's faithfulness. Watch them. But don't believe they're a barometer on how awesome (or awful) you might be.

5. Alliances. I wish I had a better title for this, but "alliances" simply refers to the group with which we do ministry.

In some cases it's your denomination or a church planting group. Or in my case, as a North Point Strategic Partner, it's North Point Church.

Alliances are often strategic and helpful. They have been for me. But they are not your savior.

It's tempting to think, "If we join X group, our church would take off." No ... it probably wouldn't. Just so you know.

Alliances help. But they will not save. God does that.

6. More. Too many times, I've caught myself worshipping the idol of more. If I had more staff ... more money ... more lights ... more team ... more square footage ... more fill-in-the-blank-with-whatever-your-current-obsession-is, then our church would be awesome.

Nope. God is awesome.

And again, there's nothing wrong with having more. It's just that *more* will not be your salvation.

Faithfulness is measured in what you do with what you have.

And if you steward what you have well, guess what? Often (not always, but often), you eventually end up with more.

Focus on what you have, not on what you don't have. That's better leadership.

7. Progress. I seem to be far more addicted to progress than God appears to be. Or at least what *I* would define as progress. (I'm quite sure God makes more progress on things than I do.)

I often think I would be the worst biblical character. I would not be good with being in prison for years like Joseph or Paul; or wandering the desert for 40 years like Moses while people complained; or waiting to be king for what must have seemed like an eternity to David.

If every graph is not up and to the right, I get worried.

But God seems to use wilderness seasons in your life and in the life of your church to grow your character.

Besides, if your platform ever outgrows your character, you're doomed anyway (I wrote about that here).

I know God has used seasons when I'm frustrated with progress to grow me.

I am still a reluctant convert to patience and trust. But I am thankful God is patient with me, even when I am not patient with God.

8. Balance. Some of you may be frustrated by now because this appears to be yet another leadership post written by yet another driven leader.

I know. I get that. Those are my demons.

But there is another idol lurking under the guise of work-life *balance* that's worth identifying.

Often, in the pursuit of a “balanced” life people can lose passion and commitment.

Don’t get me wrong: I am all for rest, balance, margin and a life that doesn’t drain the life out of you.

But balance can become code for barely working. Balance can become a synonym for not throwing your heart or weight into *anything*. (I wrote more about the trap of work-life balance [here](#).)

If that’s a temptation, just understand that’s an idol too.

We have a God who asked us to love Him with *all* our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Most of the people I know who have accomplished significant things are not balanced people.

They are *passionate* people.

So be passionate in your work, in your family life, in your rest and in all you do.

When you do, you will glorify God.

Those are eight idols I see and often struggle with in leadership. What do you see?

*In addition to serving as Lead Pastor at Connexus Community Church north of Toronto, Canada, **Carey Nieuwhof** speaks at conferences and churches throughout North America on leadership, family, parenting and personal renewal.*

For the original article, visit [here](#).