

## What Does Idolatry Look Like Today?

[Hosea 4:12-19](#)

Hosea, Day 11

*My people inquire of a piece of wood,  
and their walking staff gives them oracles.  
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,  
and they have left their God to play the whore.  
They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains  
and burn offerings on the hills,  
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,  
because their shade is good.*

- Hosea 4:12-13. ESV

My son, Jeremiah, loved Chinese food but hated going to the Chinese buffet. More specifically, he hated walking past the statue of Buddha behind the cash register. I asked him what was wrong. He replied, "That's an idol, Daddy. I don't want to be tempted to worship it."

My guess is that you're not seriously tempted to pause and pay homage to Buddha at your local Chinese restaurant. But does that mean that you're free from the temptation to idolatry? Was Jeremiah only faced with the reality of idolatry at the Chinese buffet, or did he also face it when his sister wanted to play with his Legos?

In Hosea 4, God condemns His people for inquiring of a piece of wood and for sacrificing on the tops of mountains. I don't think we're seriously contemplating doing either of those things anytime soon, but does that make us innocent of idolatry? No, of course not! So, what does idolatry look like today for us?

At its heart, idolatry is a question of worship, and worship is a matter of faith. In other words, who do you trust? Whose promises are you believing? In America, we tend to believe in success and to put a lot of faith in the economy and the American Dream. Most parents say they just want their kids to be happy and successful. We think happiness comes from success, and we think happiness is the most important thing to have.

Idolatry isn't just a matter of trusting false promises and putting your hopes in the wrong things. All idols require sacrifices of some kind to attain the things they promise: Work hard, do well in school, get a good job, spend extra hours in the office, neglect your family, compromise your integrity, cut some corners, spread some gossip, hurt someone's feelings, and generally do whatever it takes to satisfy the demands of the idol and get what it's promising.

Two sad realities accompany this idolatry: As you give yourself to an idol, it demands more and more and gives you back less and less. At first, the idol seems to be keeping its promises, but before long you're trapped and feeling cheated.

Also, if you're a believer, you end up dragging God into your idolatry in some way. Hosea 4:15 tells us that the people of Israel would swear "As the Lord lives," even as they engaged in idolatry. How often has American Christianity acted like Jesus and the American Dream are two sides of the same coin? It's not just prosperity preachers on TV, but even "good" evangelicals can be led to subtly believe that, if I'm obedient and I trust God, I'll be successful. We can even quote Bible verses to prop up our idolatry.

Whatever outward form our idolatry takes, the heart of it is an abomination to God. It is a stubborn refusal to trust God, submit to God, and follow God. Instead, we turn aside to the promises and guidance of others. Our

hearts are so given to this foolishness, we need to return to the Lord in repentance again and again. Thankfully, He is always ready to forgive, renew, and restore us.