

mike slaughter

shiny gods

finding freedom from things
that distract us



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shiny gods



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Mike Slaughter

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shiny gods:
finding freedom from things that distract us

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INTRODUCTION

A JOURNEY OF HOPE



I believe that when a person becomes Christian, there is one new birth yet many conversions. I became a new person in Jesus in 1969, but I wasn't converted in my wallet until 1976.

I was in seminary at the time. About two weeks before graduation, one of my professors pulled me aside. He said, "Mike, if you are not tithing, please do not go into ministry. Don't pollute the church. Go teach school or something. We don't need any more people in the church who preach, 'Do what I say, not what I do.'"

That simple conversation hit me hard. I was converted. I realized that loving God is not about saying

the right words, accepting an abstract ideal, or claiming an emotion. Loving God is an intentional commitment to self-sacrifice for the well-being of others.

God's word on the subject is clear. Proverbs 3:9-10 reminds us to "honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first of all your crops. Then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will burst with wine." In 2 Corinthians 9:11 we read, "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way."

And yet, in spite of clear guidance from the God of abundance, our giving is often limited to the leftovers of our perceived scarcity. We need a conversion in our thinking about finances! We need to rediscover that we are designed to be the producers of God's blessings in the lives of others, not simply the consumers of stuff.

There's an old story about a conversation between a chicken and a pig. The chicken says, "Let's do breakfast." The pig replies, "That's easy for you to say. You just make a donation. For me, it's a total life sacrifice." If we are to be followers of Jesus, then we

are the pig, not the chicken. We have to move from donation to sacrifice, from consuming to investing.

Tony is one of our young staff members at Ginghamburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio, where I am senior pastor. Tony is an Army veteran with a beautiful wife and three young children. He and his wife Karen have a great story to tell about learning to live out God's principles for their finances.

When our church hires staff, we do a criminal background and credit check, so we knew that Tony and Karen were carrying about \$32,000 in consumer debt, including a car loan, credit card debt, and medical expenses. They also had mortgage debt on their home as well as on a rental property. They had a comfortable income, but they were still living paycheck to paycheck.

Tony and Karen were encouraged to see where their money was going. Tony is a gregarious guy who loves to entertain, and the family found it convenient to eat out frequently. They were absolutely floored to find out they were spending \$650 each month on

restaurant meals. They developed a budget, began a debt reduction plan, and started trusting God in the tithe. Within fourteen months they had paid off \$23,000 of their consumer debt, and they expect to pay off the other \$9,000 this year. They recently refinanced their home to a 15-year mortgage at a 2.75% interest rate, so they will own their home free and clear by the time they are fifty years old. They have put together an emergency fund, and now they pay cash for everything. Any extra money that comes into their hands—tax refund, pay increase, bonus—goes immediately against the remaining debt.

It hasn't always been easy, but Tony and Karen have persevered. They plan and work on their finances together. Does that save a lot of heated arguments? You bet. Tony's best advice for others? Seek help and get started. Tony also shared recently with me that tithing has transformed his relationship with God. He says, "You know, it's one thing to be a believer; it's altogether another to be truly committed to the relationship."

I'm also inspired by the story of Kim and her husband John. When Kim was six months into her first pregnancy, she lost her job. As she put it, "One day I was employed; the next day I wasn't. And finding a new job is virtually impossible when you are six months along." It meant an immediate loss of \$30,000 in annual income.

Kim, desperate to save money, turned to coupons and rebates. Soon she was collecting so many free or low-cost items that her family couldn't use them all. In fact, John joked that she just needed to stop. Instead, Kim started donating the extra coupons and rebates to our New Path food pantry. Kim offered her gifts and knowledge of couponing to others at Ginghamburg Church. At first there was little interest, but when the recession hit, people suddenly wanted to hear more.

Kim and John, even though it didn't seem to make sense on paper, also committed themselves to the full tithe. At one point they wrote a tithe check, knowing there might not be sufficient funds to cover it. Yet that same day, in one of those inexplicable God miracles, an

unexpected check from their escrow account appeared in the mailbox with the exact amount needed.

These days, Kim has turned her couponing talent into a ministry for others. She and some of her first students were inspired to start ClipShopShare, a ministry dedicated to teaching others how to do more with less through couponing and rebates. ClipShopShare has a second mission as well; it has donated over \$57,000 of food, toiletries, and household items to our New Path Outreach Ministries through couponing strategies.

Then there is Shannon, a young single woman in our congregation who took one of our financial classes. Prior to then, she too had been living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to support herself with an \$18,000 annual income and \$7,000 in unsecured debt. After completing the class, Shannon developed a three-month equivalent emergency fund, started living on a detailed budget, and paid off all of her debt within fourteen months. Committing to the full tithe was also part of Shannon's process. She actively serves at our two urban campuses in socioeconomically challenged neighborhoods of

Dayton and has become a certified instructor in one of our financial classes. In fact, Shannon leads the financial ministries team for Ginghamburg.

Why I am I telling you these stories? I want you to have hope. In this book I'll challenge you to do hard things. You will be asked to:

- reject the “shiny gods” or idols that lead you away from God, keep you in debt, and render you ineffective in serving the Kingdom;
- see work as a gift, not a curse, and deploy it powerfully, not just to earn an income but to bring about God's desired outcome;
- eliminate debt, living simply within your means;
- fully release all your resources—time, money, and talents—into God's hands for his purposes.

It's a long journey from shiny gods to a life well lived and a world well served. It isn't a journey for the faint of heart, but it is a journey of hope. Tony, Kim, and Shannon can tell you all about it.

Let's get started.

1.

NAMING OUR IDOLS

1. NAMING OUR IDOLS



Chances are when you hear the word *idol*, the first thing that comes to mind is Ryan Seacrest, or possibly a shiny gold statue of a calf. Idolatry isn't a new problem, but it is at the core of the “shiny god” distractions in our lives—distractions that keep us from experiencing the financial freedom and grace-giving generosity for which God designed us.

Let me give you my definition of an idol: anything, or anyone, that receives the primary focus of my energy or resources, which should first belong to God. The Bible calls this having a divided heart.

Instead of making it our primary life passion to worship the Lord our God and to serve only him, we begin to separate our spiritual life from the practical aspects of life. We use our idols, instead of God, to provide identity or meaning in our lives. This is especially easy to do when those idols are positive things, or even people we love. The danger is that even our virtues can become vices—or idols—if they are not directed toward God.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF IDOLATRY

Idolatry is not a new problem for the human race. In ancient times Baal, the Canaanite deity associated with agriculture, was considered the giver of life, with absolute control over nature and people. Baal worship practices included sexual rites, religious prostitution, and human sacrifice. In order to earn Baal's favor, for example, it was not uncommon for worshipers to kill young children and bury them in the foundation of a new building as it was constructed. In 1 Kings 16:30-34, we read that in the days of King Ahab of Israel, the builder of

Jericho sacrificed and entombed his first-born son in the city walls and his youngest son in the city gates. Ahab himself built a temple to Baal that housed a wooden idol where human sacrifice and ritual sexual acts could have been commonplace.

Jump ahead about eighteen centuries to the 1300s and the rise of Aztec culture in what is now central Mexico. Religion, in the form of idol worship, was extremely important to the Aztec people. Their idols represented dozens of gods and goddesses that controlled one or more important aspects of life. The Aztecs believed that their deities needed to be appeased with gifts, which often resulted in human sacrifice. An Aztec idol might be made out of wood, stone, or dough, or it might instead be a human dressed up and decked out to serve as a god's representative, then sacrificed as the ultimate appeasement. Historians believe that Aztecs sacrificed human victims during each of their eighteen annual festivals. The victims killed at just one festival could number in the thousands. Makes me glad to be a follower of

Jesus Christ! Idol worship is not only a distraction; it's also deadly.

Of course, King Ahab was not the first example of God's chosen people turning away from the one true God to idols. One of the earliest accounts is in the Book of Exodus. After fleeing the slavery of Egypt through the parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites were on their forty-year journey through the desert wilderness toward the Promised Land. God had warned Moses not to allow the Israelites to become distracted by idols and had promised great blessings if the people worshiped God with an undivided heart.

The LORD said to Moses: "Say this to the Israelites: You saw for yourselves how I spoke with you from heaven. Don't make alongside me gods of silver or gold for yourselves. Make for me an altar from fertile soil on which to sacrifice your entirely burned offerings, your well-being sacrifices, your sheep, and your oxen. I will come to you and bless you in every place where I make sure my name is remembered."
(Exodus 20:22-24)

People at that time didn't have money like we do. They didn't have dollar bills. Farmers used grain as their method of exchange. Herders used sheep and oxen. But no matter what form our money takes, what we do with it demonstrates the highest value in our lives. We can see from the passage above that God expected the Israelites to invest their means into their relationship with him. However, it didn't take long after God's promise for the idol worship to become a big problem. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God's own hand, his brother Aaron, who served as the associate pastor to Moses, was intimidated by the people's grumbling and their desire to return to Egypt. So, he gave them what they wanted.

Aaron said to them, "All right, take out the gold rings from the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took out the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. He collected them and tied them up in a cloth. Then he made a metal image of a bull

calf, and the people declared, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”
(Exodus 32:2-4)

When Moses returned, carrying God’s law written on two tablets, he found the people actively celebrating the golden calf. Furious, Moses dashed the precious tablets to the ground, shattering them. Ironically, the people possessed the gold used to create the idol only because God had arranged for them to plunder the Egyptians before their desert exodus. The people were now worshiping the gift instead of the giver.

OUR IDOLS

Are you having trouble relating? Can’t you see yourself as having a problem with idol worship? I am lead pastor at Ginghamburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio, the southwestern part of the state. Can you guess what happens to our attendance at Saturday night worship when the Ohio State Buckeyes play a televised football game? Our attendance goes down

by about 300 people. Do you know what can happen on a Sunday morning when the Cincinnati Bengals are playing early that afternoon? You guessed it.

Clearly in the case of football, our demonstrated passions are out of alignment with our stated beliefs. Pick any NFL stadium that you want, and during game time there will be far more people in the stands than in the pews of any church in America. Ohio State hosts about 105,000 people in its football stadium, the Horseshoe, for a single game. Joel Osteen's church in Houston, the largest in America, doesn't have a third as many people at worship. I mean, "Go, Bucks!" But come on. Do you see what I mean?

I love a video that illustrates the "idol worship" of football in the United States. Check out the preview of this video at *YouTube*: "Idol Worship," by the Skit Guys. Clearly, though, the issue of sports worship isn't confined to America. Just follow the World Soccer Cup the next time it rolls around. As the video narrator concludes: "Idol worship—it's not just about golden calves any more."

Recently I asked my Facebook friends, “What idols do you wrestle with in your life?” What I discovered was that almost all our idols are really good gifts from God to which we assign a wrong priority. One person said the idol she struggles with most is her husband and children—constantly placing their interests above God’s interests. Isn’t that easy to do? Relationships are a gift from God. But what happens when we begin to worship the gift instead of the giver?

Another friend named food as an idol. What an incredible gift from God! I mean, if all we needed were nutrition, then God could have come up with some kind of powder to mix with water, like what the astronauts used in the 1960s. I always note the diversity of God’s provision when I walk through the produce department of the grocery store. Talk about God’s candy! Bananas, apples, grapes, strawberries—God came up with all this good stuff. But what happens when we begin to worship the gift instead of the giver? Food can become an addiction.

Think about sex, another great gift from God! If all God wanted was procreation, he could have come up with something like mixing earwax on a cotton swab, right? Instead he made this incredible, bonding, mystical experience between a husband and wife. Once again, when we begin to worship the gift over the giver, it can become an addiction.

I wrestle with the idol of material possessions. I spend too much money on clothes. And every time I pass a new Camaro convertible, I want one! I don't like the hard top; I want a convertible. It takes me back to 1968. I say to my wife Carolyn, "I would love one of those." But if I got one, I'm afraid that for much of the year it would just be a toy in my garage. Camaros don't handle well in snow. I have a friend who owns a Mustang convertible in Kansas. He has to keep an old Jeep around to use in winter.

Technology is another idol I wrestle with. I love anything with an "i" in it. I have the iPhone, and it is great. Want to see my grandkids' pictures? They are

on my phone. I have an iPad. I love the Internet and Facebook—all the technology gadgets.

I confess that I struggle with materialism, but I am not alone. Many of us create a god in the image of possessions, values, and traditions we have brought with us from the slavery of the past. We easily hook back into materialism, creating a god who serves our materialistic interests. It's called "prosperity theology." Have you heard of it? Name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it. We also attempt to serve a god based on our political traditions. How many of us, if we are Democrat or Republican, make God a member of our party? We create a god in the image of our values.

Another Facebook friend said her idol is planning out her own life. I constantly hear from recent college graduates about their future plans. They say things like, "Pastor Mike, I am graduating from college this year in engineering and already have a job with a contractor at the Air Force base. I am getting married next June. How can I know God's will for

my life?” I respond, “It doesn’t sound like you want to know God’s will; you want to know how God can bless *your* will.”

Even our family can become an idol, and Jesus gives many examples of people prioritizing family over God’s call. Now, family is a good thing. But in Matthew 8:21-22 we read about a disciple asking if he can first go and bury his father before following Jesus. Jesus’ response? No. “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” Many of us would say that a dad’s burial is a pretty good excuse to stay home. But Jesus reminds us that we can’t place even family above our love for God.

We also need to understand that you and I become what we worship. Food is a great example. If we worship food, we become fat. This holds for other idols as well, as described in Psalm 135:15-18:

The nations’ idols are just silver and gold—things made by human hands. They have mouths, but they can’t speak. They have eyes, but they can’t see. They have ears, but they can’t listen. No, there’s no breath in their

lungs! Let the people who made these idols and all who trust in them become just like them!

God wants our exclusive devotion. We are not to place any other gods—any other priorities that get prime-time usage of our time, energy, or resources—before him. We read in 2 Kings 17:38-41:

Don't forget the covenant that I made with you. Don't worship other gods. Instead, worship only the LORD your God. He will rescue you from your enemies' power. But they wouldn't listen. Instead, they continued doing their former religious practices. So these nations worship the LORD, but they also serve their idols. The children and the grandchildren are doing the very same thing their parents did. And that's how things still are today.

Giving God our exclusive devotion is not only great spiritual wisdom; it also has wide-ranging practical application. When God has the right priority in my life, I am not tempted to become enslaved to debt again. (We will return to this topic later.)

COVENANT

In the passage from 2 Kings, notice the key word *covenant*. In this context, what is a covenant? Let's look at an example from my own life.

Last fall, Carolyn and I were at our mountain cabin in North Carolina. We had been enjoying the view of the beautiful mountains, but it was starting to get dark. We flipped on the television and turned it to the TV Guide Channel. At our cabin, most of the channels are out of Atlanta. I noticed that the World Series was on Channel 5, and I am an avid baseball guy. Carolyn, on the other hand, noticed that one of her favorite shows, *Dancing with the Stars*, was on Channel 3. I had never, ever seen *Dancing with the Stars*—never wanted to. Shows like that make me wonder what has happened to our culture. To me, watching them is just painful. It takes me back to the late 1950s, when I would stay at my grandparents' house on Saturday night and have to suffer through *The Lawrence Welk Show*. I imagined myself going through some type of time warp, only

now the show was in living color. So, what did we do? We watched *Dancing with the Stars*. It made Carolyn happy. That's really what marriage is all about.

The Bible uses the word *covenant* for marriage. Marriage is an exclusive commitment to one person. Within the covenant relationship, you are called to demonstrate your spouse's value in God's eyes, affirming that he or she is fearfully and wonderfully made. Your spouse demonstrates that back to you. Covenant is about serving another person's interests above your own. It also reflects what worship is all about. Whether we come together corporately as a church, or privately when we pray or worship in our own homes, we should do a heart check on our most important covenant, our exclusive commitment to God. Are we serving God's priorities and interests, or are we serving our own?

Scripture frequently uses marriage as an analogy for our relationship with God. Let's look at a few examples:

I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Corinthians 11:2b TNIV)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (Ephesians 5:25 TNIV)

Because the LORD chose Jacob as his own, God chose Israel as his treasured possession. (Psalms 135:4 CEB)

Note in the Psalms passage that “treasured possession” means chosen exclusively and set apart to be a spouse to one another. We are God’s treasured possession! Unfortunately, when we place our idols ahead of God, we are headed for divorce. Go back to 2 Kings 17:41 (TNIV): “Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols.” When we have multiple lovers, it’s called adultery! We are breaking our covenant and, in effect, cheating on God.

The Book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament has been described by some scholars as a kind of covenant. They believe that during the time when Deuteronomy was written, Israel became monotheistic, dropping the pluralistic gods of its surrounding neighbors. Worship was dedicated to Yahweh, as noted in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD!”

Read the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, and you will see that the commandments emphasize our fidelity to God in an intimate relationship.

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Deuteronomy 5:6-10 TNIV)

That word *jealous* in verse 9 is very interesting. In the Bible, the Hebrew word translated here as *jealous* has a more complex meaning and is sometimes translated as *passionate*. It's an intense relationship between God and Israel of devotion, protection, loyalty, and care.

A number of years ago Carolyn and I were attending the Pumpkin Festival that's held in a small town near our home. Our daughter, a high school cheerleader at the time, had a commitment to fulfill at the festival. So Carolyn and I were walking down the street, just kind of taking in the experience. Then about five big, rough-looking guys came by us—perhaps in their twenties based on our initial perception. We could tell they had been drinking, because we could smell the alcohol on them. Suddenly, one of the guys took a handful of confetti (confetti was a Pumpkin Festival tradition) and flung it directly into Carolyn's face. It hit her eyes, messed up her contacts, and even went into her mouth. She went down onto her knees in pain. What did I do? I reacted immediately, without thinking. I was ready to take on

all five guys. I grabbed the culprit by the throat—he was a good fifty pounds heavier and twenty years younger than I was—and said, “What the @\$*#%! do you think you’re doing?!” There must have been a demonic glare in my eyes, because they all took off running! Now, I don’t recommend my actions as the right response, but to me they convey the feeling of what it means to be jealous. It’s irrational. God is so jealously in love with you and me that he sacrificed his own son for us.

Look back at 2 Kings 17:39: “Instead, worship only the LORD your God. He will rescue you from your enemies’ power.” Within this covenant, this passionate, jealous love that God has for you and me, he promises our protection and our provision. When I entered into the covenant of marriage with Carolyn, I also assumed partnership for the provision of her needs. I will never forget the first time I fully realized this. Two weeks after we got married, I received a bill from her gynecologist with my name on it, Mr. Michael Slaughter. I wasn’t even sure yet what a gynecologist was. I realized at

that moment that I was liable; I was responsible for this covenant that I had made.

Being in covenant relationship with God also means giving God our true worship. Too often we reduce our definition of worship to a one-hour-a-week activity in which we come together to honor God through song, prayer, and the study of God's word. But in the Bible, worship means something much more holistic. Worship comes from the word *worth*. Worship, or "worth-ship," is to be a 24/7 activity, a constant demonstration of the first value and first priority of God in our lives.

IDOLS AND OUR CHILDREN

Idolatry, or failure to demonstrate the "worth-ship" of God in our lives, has another negative impact as well. It rubs off on our children. Let's return to the 2 Kings 17 passage, starting in verse 40.

But they wouldn't listen. Instead, they continued doing their former religious practices. So these

nations worship the LORD, but they also serve their idols. The children and the grandchildren are doing the very same thing their parents did. And that's how things still are today. (2 Kings 17:40-41)

Even while these people were worshipping God, they were still serving their idols. In their time and in ours, there are consequences: our kids and grandkids will do the same things we do! Parents and grandparents, your children will not adopt your stated beliefs; they will adopt your passions. That's a significant problem when passions are out of alignment with beliefs. You don't have to tell your children what your passions are—they will smell them out!

I am an absolute nut about baseball. In 2012, I think Carolyn and I watched eighty or ninety Cincinnati Reds games on TV. (In my defense, they did have a great season until the playoffs!) We even went to the opening game. I was four years old when I went to my first Reds game with my dad and grandfather. It was a doubleheader at old Crosley Field. They had to drag me out, kicking and screaming, after the sixth inning

in the second game, because they had to go to work early the next day. I wasn't much of a player myself, but I did play some softball, and my son Jonathan used to watch all the games eagerly. He went on to play baseball for the University of Pennsylvania, a Division I team, throughout his undergraduate years.

Jonathan clearly adopted my passions, but he could have missed out on adopting my beliefs. Look at the enthusiasm that people show in football arenas and baseball stadiums, then look at the lack of passion they demonstrate about the most important and eternal dimension of life. It was my job to make sure Jonathan got it right. So, when he was little, I took him on mission trips with me. When he was twenty-five, he spent Father's Day in a war zone with me in Darfur, Sudan, where Ginghamburg Church has invested \$6 million into sustainable humanitarian projects.

We have got to understand that our children smell out our passions and adopt them as their own. What priority and passion is your life demonstrating to your own children or other young people around you? You

don't have to be a parent to influence future generations. I think of a woman in our congregation who doesn't have children but who cleans extra houses every Christmas to raise at least \$1000 for our work in the Sudan. Because of her passion, there will be generations of people in the Sudan who wouldn't be there if it weren't for her.

When the parents at Ginghamsburg save and give money each Christmas by living more simply during the holidays, not making Jesus' birth an idol of consumerism but an occasion for sacrificial giving, miracles happen. In the process, our children see that passion and, in turn, live out their Christ-given purpose in the world.

A HEART CHECK

Are you ready to do a heart check on your priorities? The first indicator of what we truly worship is how we spend our time. So, look at your calendar. I recently said to a friend, "Hey I haven't seen you in worship in a while, and you used to come to Wednesday night

Bible study.” He replied, “Well, there are a lot of softball tournaments on the weekend, and on Wednesday nights I’m in a softball league.” Check your calendar, because it helps to reveal what you worship. We make time for what we deem most important.

Also remember, though, that simply filling our calendars with church activities or appointments is not what God wants either. Jesus is more concerned about our covenant relationship with him, the retaining of our first love. As he says to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:2 (TNIV), “I know your deeds.” In our case, he might go on to say, “You’re doing so many great things. You are working in the Sudan and the inner city, as well as stocking the local food pantry. Your doctrine is good, and you study your Bible every week. You’ve done all of these good things but this I hold against you—you have lost your first love, you have lost your first passion, for me.” Remember, our virtues become vices when they aren’t directed toward Jesus.

Your second priority check is your bank statement or checkbook. Money is one of the truest indicators

of faith. Jesus said it himself: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). It is noteworthy that Jesus talked about money more than any other single topic except faith. Sixteen of his thirty-eight parables dealt with money or possessions. Of course, you might glance at your checkbook register and say you are simply paying your bills. Well, the follow-up question is: How many of those bills have come about because of a possession you felt that you just had to have in your life?

In our idolatry, we have allowed ourselves to become the center of our universe. We evaluate all our interests—whether family, friends, money, job, or possessions—through how well they serve self. We search for significance in everything but God. We may have a little space for Jesus in our lives, but he is far from the center.

What Jesus calls living abundantly comes when Christ is the center and is the deciding factor for everything in our lives. This is why every morning, I begin by studying Scripture to align my thoughts with God’s.

When Christ is in control, it means that my allegiance to Jesus supersedes all other commitments or values in my life. It even supersedes my commitment to Carolyn. But guess what—she likes it that way. She knows that if my allegiance to Jesus supersedes my commitment to her, she is in a pretty good place.

We have to pay attention to this divided heart issue. When we pursue the shiny gods of the culture, we spend our lives conjugating three verbs: to want, to have, to achieve. Jesus leads us in a better way. He tells us to conjugate one verb: to love. “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart [your passion], with all your being, with all your strength [work], and with all your mind...*” (Luke 10:27).

It’s like watching *Dancing with the Stars*. You don’t necessarily have to like every minute of it, but you do it because it demonstrates your passion and your covenant commitment. (I would invite you, though, to join me in praying for Carolyn’s conversion away from that show.)

