

A Series on Ephesians
“Let Down by Idols”
(Ephesians 4:17-24)
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by Mark Lee



I think one of the best ways you can get to know someone is by getting to know the music he/ she listens to, especially the music they listened to during their formative years. So this morning I want to share a song with you by one of bands that I really enjoy to introduce myself and today's message.

(play Let Down)

Have you ever been let down? Not in a minor way but a major way? Have you ever been so let down that you really do feel like a bug crushed in the ground?

ILLUSTRATION: Those of you that know me know that I went to seminary and served as a youth pastor for several years, but what none of you know (and I made the effort to keep it that way) was that I was theatre major in college. Does that surprise you? I know it surprised my dad when I called him that one day to tell him that I was changing my major from international marketing to theatre. When I told him that I wanted to do theatre he said “but you’re ugly”. Well after college I decided that I really wanted to get into the film industry as a director and my plan was to create a portfolio and some short films and apply to the NYU Film school.

I pursued this dream for a couple of years. I was taking some writing classes, writing one act plays to try to showcase myself and some of my actor friends, trying to save enough money to buy a decent enough camera and editing equipment so I could make a portfolio impressive enough that it would get me in... but I noticed during this time in my life I was completely filled with this overwhelming desire to make it but at the same time it created such an anxiety in me that it changed my state of being.

I remember a conversation I had with my youngest brother that really brought the issue to attention. He and I were in the car and we were kinda having an argument, and he said “you know Mark, you have no joy in your life.” It made me really question why I was feeling so anxious, so burdened, and critical all the time. Then I realized that I was living in fear. I was so afraid of not getting into film school. I was so afraid that my plan wasn't going to work out. I had invested so much of myself into this plan that if it didn't work my world would have fallen apart. I had built my life around this desire to get into film school that if I wasn't accepted I truly would have been left a bug crushed on the ground.

The desire to get into film school permeated everything in my life. This desire controlled my life. I was a slave to it.

In today's passage Paul addresses this type of desire, a desire that controls how you view yourself and your life.

(Turn to Ephesians 4:17-24)

So for a while we have been hearing how we are the Body of Christ and the life we have been called to. And in the beginning of chapter 4 Paul begins to instruct them on how to live out that calling. **But in Ephesians 4.17-24 Paul tells the church what they are called from/ called out of and what not to practice anymore.**

(read Ephesians 4:17-24)

The key verse here is verse 22, in this verse he shares the essence of the kind of life that we are called out of: he says we are to put off our old self, which is corrupt through **deceitful desires**.

The original Greek word for desire here is **epithumiai** which means inordinate desire, or excessive desire. It's a desire that has power over us. It's the desire that dictates how we live our lives. It's the desire that supersedes all other desires. We can read this as "deceitful excessive desires".

Paul calls these desires **deceitful** because they appear as if they will lead us to true fulfillment.

These desires lead us to believe that we will have the **IDEAL life**, the **GOOD life** if we just attain the object of our desire.

ILLUSTRATION: This is the power of ad agencies. They get to create an image of what the Ideal life looks like for consumers. I know because I've felt the excessive desire for Apple products. [When my phone contract w/ Verizon was due. My desire for the **Iphone**. I felt like my life wouldn't be as good, as convenient without it. I would try to get Eunice excited about it but she really saw it for what it was, a ploy. I had bought into their image of what the good life looked like.]

There is a story in scripture where we actually see the GOOD LIFE, the IDEAL LIFE. It's in the way beginning- in Genesis. When God first creates everything. Everything was "GOOD". Everything is the way it should be. God was even hanging out with us.- God walking through the Garden.

The world was perfect. Things were awesome. Adam and Eve were actually enjoying the Ideal Life, the Good Life. But what happens?

(Read Genesis 3:1-6)

The deceiver, the father of lies- Satan comes to Eve and asks her a questions that make her begin to feel that there is something else besides God that will fulfill them. He begins to make them doubt God's word. He begins to make them think that God was keeping something from them that would make life even better.

But what happens? The tree of knowledge, the desire for wisdom lets them down, it crushes them. They see their nakedness. The picture of what life would be like if they ate the fruit was not what they were experiencing. They were utterly let down. Not only were they let down but all of creation was changed forever so all that people would want in their life were things that were only going to lead to more let downs.

But God had a plan to counter this. He was going to use a people group, a nation to help bring back the Ideal Life. He was going to use the nation of Israel to show what the Good life could look like. It wasn't going to be exactly like the Garden, but it was

going to be pretty good because God was going to setup a community where there was **shalom**. Shalom is a Hebrew word that means peace. But it's more than the peace that we think of.

The idea behind it is that of total harmony. Harmony among the people, Harmony among the people and the land, and even with God...it's essentially The Ideal Life, the Good life.

In the book of Exodus we see God carrying out this plan.

First, he frees them from slavery.

Then He wants to give them a land where they will be able to live out this Shalom community.

But before they get there God needs to set up some policies in order for them to live in shalom. They're called the Ten Commandments.

(read Exodus 20:1-17)

If you notice the list begins with two commandments against idolatry- giving our allegiance to anything other than God.

Have you ever wondered why God gave it in this order?

It's because the fundamental problem in law breaking is idolatry. We never break commandments three through ten without breaking one and two. When we break laws three through ten it is because something other than God has become more important in our lives.

God knew that this is what Adam and Eve fell into, they made the desire for wisdom, the desire to be like God more important than God himself. And that is what destroyed the harmony God had with his creation. So God here sets up these laws so that Israel won't fall into the same trap.

Falling into idolatry is the way that we destroy any chance for shalom, the real good life, for our individual lives and for our community.

Paul understands this. He knows that idolatry is the sin that leads to all other sins. And that idolatry will lead to the destruction of shalom in the Church. That is why he pleads with the believers to put off their old self- the old life that chased after idols.

Have you ever asked yourself why do I lie, hurt others, live selfishly and so on?

You may just answer it with "Because we are sinful."

True, we have to understand that there is more to it than that.

If you really search yourself you'll see that in each of us we have this feeling that we need something other than Jesus in order to be happy. We all feel like we need something else to have shalom in our life, we need that one thing, that _____ in order to have the good life.

Most of us have idols and we don't even know it because our idols don't look like what we think idols should look like. We usually equate idols to things that can be easily recognized as bad or unhealthy.

Not many of us are going to have an excessive desire for cannibalism or bestiality. That's part of the deception. Our idols don't look evil, they actually look good and wholesome.

But when that good and wholesome thing becomes the one thing that gives you purpose and meaning then it has become your idol.

For example financial security for my family is a good thing. But when I begin to desire it excessively it becomes my idol. When I believe that when I have complete financial security then I will be truly happy and have the Ideal Life I am committing idolatry.

So when financial security becomes the most important thing in my life it might lead me to look for loopholes so I can get away with not paying taxes, or I might start looking for ways to cut wages for my employees so we can save money, or I might just outright steal from the company. Because financial security is what I need most I will do whatever it takes to attain it.

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself to help identify your idols:

1. What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?
2. What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go badly or become difficult?
3. What makes me feel the most self worth? What am I the proudest of?
4. What do I want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?
How do you define the Good life?
5. What do you like to daydream about?

ILLUSTRATION: A few weeks back I think the California Lottery had a jackpot for over \$150 million. I was never one to play the lottery, but I would catch myself daydreaming about what I would do if I won it. At first the daydreaming was harmless but I began to daydream about it more and more, and the daydreaming would become more elaborate, I began to figure out whether or not I wanted to get paid with the reduced lump sum or get the entire amount in monthly installments. Then I decided that I would keep my current job because I work for a non profit and that would make me feel better about having that much money, and then I calculated the actual amount I would need to tithe and whether or not to use a personal check or get a cashiers check for the tithe. I would go on and on. I realized that I enjoyed daydreaming about winning the lottery because I loved the idea of living in comfort and having the freedom to do whatever I wanted whenever I wanted. That is what was really at the core of my daydreaming. I was desiring after comfort and freedom.

Actually, a lot of our idolatry can be boiled down to four things:

1. Power (success, winning, influence)
2. Approval (affirmation, love, relationships)
3. Comfort (privacy, lack of stress, freedom)
4. Control (self-discipline, certainty, standards)

So, when you excessively desire that prestigious career, or that perfect wife. Or you spend thousands of dollars on plastic surgery, countless hours at the gym...you are really trying to gain any combinations of these four.

EXAMPLE: When I wanted that film career I wanted power and the approval of people. I wanted people to look at me and think “wow, I wish I could be him.”

When these things, power, approval, comfort, and control become the source of our identity, the meaning for our existence, if these are what we give our allegiance to, in the end we will be disappointed people clinging onto bottles, let down, crushed like a bug in the ground.

This is the old self that Paul is telling us to put off. But he doesn't just tell us to put this off, he instructs us to put on the new self and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

What might that mean? What does it mean to put on the new self?

Well, in order to talk about the new self I need to go back to God's plan of dealing with the world that lets down.

So God calls Israel to be a community where there the ideal life is lived out, where people are in shalom. But the problem is that none of them have the ability to keep the first two commandments. No one really seeks after God. Even when they say they do they really end up seeking him for either power, comfort, control, or approval. So no one gets the good life.

No one can have the true shalom- that is, eternal life in his presence.

But the funny thing is that God knew this. He knew that no one would be able to follow rules 1 and 2 and thus they wouldn't be able to follow rules 3-10. So what does he do?

He gives it to us anyway.

He gives it by coming down to earth himself, in the person of Jesus.

He sends Jesus to die on the cross, to experience the ultimate eternal let down so that we won't have to.

So what does it mean to put on the new self?

Simply, we put on Christ. We put on his righteousness, his identity by faith alone. We make his identity become our identity by simply believing that is how God sees us.

This is what it means to renew our minds. When we do this it will change the way we look at ourselves and the people around us. We will begin to see the world the way Jesus sees the world. Then we can really begin to see power, comfort, approval, and control as they are- idols that let down.