

first
stone

newsletter

"Let him who is without sin cast the First Stone"
And Jesus also said, "Go and sin no more." – John 8

MINISTRIES

What Competes for Our Hearts? The Trouble with Idols

The Danger of Divided Devotion



**Bronwyn
Welch,
Women's
Minister**

Not everyone worships God as He instructs, but all of us worship something or someone. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly teaches His people how to worship Him and warns them to turn away from idols. His instructions and examples are abundant, direct, and clear.

Jesus makes the issue personal, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37 NASB). This raises a powerful question: Do I disrespect or disobey God just to please my mother, father, son, daughter, or anyone else for that matter? Do I pursue the approval of others more than I pursue loving God? It is so easy to do. We must watch out for this.

This call for wholehearted devotion is not new. In the Ten Commandments, God said: "You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods" (Exodus 20:3b-6a, NLT). These two passages are sobering reminders that God calls for our wholehearted devotion.

What is idol worship? Loving anything more than God. What is the problem? Idolatry divides our allegiance and draws our hearts away from trusting God. The Old Testament illustrates the severe consequences of idol worship. The loss of closeness in our friendship with God and protection and guidance found in walking in His ways are just some of those consequences.

But God also shows us how uselessness and empty idols really are. "The idols of the nations are merely things of silver and gold, shaped by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak, and eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, and mouths but cannot breathe. And those who make idols are just like them, as are all who trust in them" (Psalm 135:15-18, NLT). This makes me

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Regaining the Lost Voice of My Childhood

Editor's note: This article reflects Joseph's personal experience with Husband Material Academy. We are grateful for the ways God has used this process in his healing journey. As with any ministry or counseling resource, readers should prayerfully discern what is appropriate for their own needs and circumstances.



**Joseph
Thiessen,**
Office
Admin

While sitting in a workshop at a Husband Material retreat, I heard these words in my spirit, "I want you to give your childhood self his voice back."

It seemed like a strange request, and I had no clue how a person would even begin to do this; however, I acknowledged God's desire for me to pursue this goal, knowing He would also help me get there.

I was taking a biblical counseling course through my church at the time, and as I learned about the various counseling models, I began looking for a counselor who could help me.

In December of 2025, my counselor and I talked about my goals for the coming year. I wanted to join Husband Material's support group called Husband Material Academy (HMA) but wondered if some other combination of activities would suffice instead—I didn't want to be overwhelmed. After much prayer and processing, I signed up. HMA's focus on building healthy emotional well-being in men turned out to describe exactly what I was about to encounter.

Soon after beginning the program, someone asked the community whether he was missing something: in his experience with other men's ministry groups, this was the first he'd found where no one asked him accountability questions.

A lay leader answered that HMA's purpose is to build healthy emotional wellbeing in men—other ministries have their own purposes, and this one is Husband Material's. That turned out to describe exactly what I was about to encounter.

Right at the beginning was the chapter entitled *Hello Childhood* where I was invited to find a childhood photo of myself and imagine going to him to introduce myself. I had never been asked to do anything remotely like it. I thought back to where I liked to play, and what came to mind was the edge of the garden in the dirt with my brother's Tonka trucks. I enjoyed making trenches and roads, filling the trenches with water, and watching how the water flowed. Through prayer and

imagination, I began meeting my younger self as the older brother he had needed.

In my imagination, I stood some distance away from him. Thoughts of what he might have been feeling at that age were coming to mind. He already believed he was stupid. He was angry with his dad, and he was learning that he couldn't trust all words spoken by adults.



AI Image by MidJourney

What follows is my journal entry from that day. I have left it mostly as I wrote it because it captures what the experience felt like in the moment.

I walked up to him while he was playing in the garden dirt, making ponds and streams. While he enjoyed his play, the verbal wound he had experienced by age 5 was still at work doing its damage.

He noticed me, but I imagined that he was wary of adults and their motives. I let him know I was present to be with him. He seemed to remain distant, and yet, I knew he wanted friends to play

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with him. Those conflicting desires were hard for him.

He's going to need time to feel safe. I'll be patient with him.

This experience of meeting him was disheartening, and yet I understood that his distrust of adults included me.

After several chapters discovering our reasons for our addictive behaviors, we landed back in a few assignments where we interacted with our younger selves. One assignment was to write a letter blessing my younger self for all the qualities in him that others had not necessarily noticed or spoken into.

Reflecting on this *Blessing the Boy* assignment, I realized how long I had despised who I had been—and I wouldn't be surprised if fragments of that disgust remain. There are many reasons why someone's healing journey may stall out—I wonder if this was one of mine. The following phrase used in HMA has been helpful: You can't lead the boy if you don't love the boy. He won't let you.

I thought that because I had already done work in this area, I was good. Although blessing who I was came easily, the exercise did something I hadn't expected: it connected me to old emotions, old pain, and old desires that were dormant but good.

In the next session, *Older Brother Coaching*, I was asked to notice where my younger self was, what he was doing, how he responded to me, and whether Jesus seemed near.

I was to approach him gently and simply be with him to see what happened.

In my case, I observed that he wanted to go to the creek and play. He welcomed me on this journey. I let my mind remember what it could about why I loved going to the creek to play. The fun was mixed with sadness from the memories of disconnection and pain he had experienced. The pain of all this was too much for him to think about, so we moved on to easier topics. Eventually, it was time for him to go home. We enjoyed our time in one of his favorite places.

The final assignment in this unit was *Quality Bro Time*—doing something that my younger self would have loved. I chose to go camping in my hometown park. For those who may not know, my given name was Cory, and because I did not change my name until my early thirties, it felt natural for me to address my younger self by that name.

Here is my journal entry from that day:

I am spending time with Cory. He's with me now. We just spent some time reminiscing about lots of things. I asked him questions. He asked me questions. I wasn't prepared for that.

He asked if I still worship Jesus, which made me sob for a while. I told him that I did. Worship does not feel as connected as it once did, but my relationship with Jesus has deepened since then. I told him that I often feel that religious experiences are mysterious and unclear, and that I need and want more understanding. I think that's why worshipping has gotten less connected. I reassured him that I still find moments in worship just as tender as the ones he experiences regularly.

I brought up a painful memory, which he remembered, but he didn't want to talk about it today. He wanted to talk about his passions. We talked about his love for exploration and how he loves to find obscure things. He loves streams and watching how water moves around rocks. He likes lichen, mosses, and ferns. He has a mind for creating things out of nearly anything. He dreams of small houses like I do. Just wait until he discovers tiny house shows on YouTube!

He never understood why his youth group friends didn't have the same desire to talk on the way home from summer camp but instead wanted to sleep. He couldn't imagine the thought of sleeping when conversation could be had.



AI Image by MidJourney

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stop and ask, "What am I worshiping? What idols have I allowed into my life?"

Whenever our hope, identity, or sense of worth is entrusted to anything or anyone other than God, idolatry takes hold.

We turn to idols when we seek control, comfort, approval, or other things apart from God. We choose to rely on ourselves instead of God the Father. As we see in Psalm 135, idols cannot provide what we are striving for. We may think control, comfort, or approval will give us peace, but really, we were made to trust Him. Only God the Father can provide the peace our hearts truly need. Isaiah 26:3 gives us this powerful promise: "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, all whose thoughts are fixed on You!" (NLT).

This is why Jesus warns us about divided allegiance. "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other" (Luke 16:13, NLT).

Removing Idols and Returning to God

Scripture shows us the contrast between the enemy's destructive work and the abundant life Jesus gives: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10, NLT). Idols cannot give us that life. Instead, they compete for our trust, distort our desires, and keep us from walking freely with God.

When Israel entered Canaan, God warned that what they failed to remove would become "splinters in your eyes and thorns in your sides" (Numbers 33:55, NLT). In a similar way, idols that remain unaddressed in our lives continue to trouble and entangle us. That is not the abundant life Jesus wants to give us. That is the problem with idols.

God says, "And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God... Therefore come out from among unbelievers and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:16-



AI Image by MidJourney

17). This passage calls God's people to separate themselves from idolatrous compromise. Because we belong to the living God, we must not allow idols to share the place that belongs to Him alone.

Separation from idols is only part of the response. Scripture also calls us to return our hearts to God. First Samuel 7:3 gives us a clear picture of repentance: "Then Samuel said to all the people of Israel, 'If you want to return to the Lord with all your hearts, get rid of your foreign gods and your images of Ashtoreth. Turn your hearts to the Lord and

obey Him alone'" (NLT). Repentance is not only turning away from idols. It is turning our hearts back to God.

In Psalm 139:23-24, David prays: "Search me, O God, and know my heart...Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life" (NLT). We must pay attention to what we love and to anything that draws our hearts away from God toward self, approval, comfort, control, or anything else that begins to take His place.

Notice God's compassion in Isaiah 30:19-22: "He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sound of your cries. Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, He will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go,' whether to the right or to the left. Then you will destroy all your silver idols and your precious gold images. You will throw them out like filthy rags, saying to them, 'Good riddance!'" (NLT). We see God's tenderness

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queered out.

Newly released!

Queered out is an eight-video series built around testimonies of men and women speaking about sexuality, identity, surrender, healing, and their experience of following Christ.

queeredout.com



as He responds to our cries, teaches us, and helps our eyes and ears to see and hear the way He wants us to go.

Ultimately, removing idols is part of what it means to follow Jesus. In Luke 9:23-25, He says, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world, but you are lost and destroyed?" (NLT).

The answer to idolatry is not simply removing something from our lives, but returning our hearts fully to God. Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, NLT). Isaiah 31:6-7 also calls God's people to return to Him and throw away their idols: "Though you are such wicked rebels, my people, come and return to the Lord. I know the glorious day will come when each of you will throw away the gold idols and silver images..." (NLT). That is the heart of being a God-follower and removing idols from our lives with God's help. Return to the Lord, or continue following Him.

How Do We Respond?

Begin by turning your attention toward the Father. Ask Him to help you remember who He is and to show you the way He wants you to go.

What are you looking to for comfort, approval, control, or security apart from Him?

What might He be asking you to confess, surrender, or trust Him with today?

Ask the Father to search your heart, expose what you cannot see on your own, and help you recognize the schemes of the evil one.

Then choose to follow Him. Ask Him to shape you into the person He has called you to be and to help you glorify His name in the choices you make today.

May the Lord help you recognize what competes for your heart, surrender it to Him, and follow Him with wholehearted devotion.

FSM

I put my hand on his neck and his head, letting him know I cared about him through touch. I offered more if he wanted it. When he noticed me experiencing painful memories, he leaned over and gave me big hugs. He didn't have words for me, just love. That's often how I am as an adult, and it sometimes leaves me feeling awkward. I was able to receive his hug for what it meant to him, and to me.

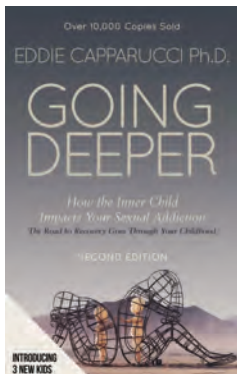
This has been a good day with my little brother.

When I began HMA, I had forgotten that this would be a program that could help me connect with my younger self. I've only begun giving my childhood self his voice back. The pain that he's aware of, but not yet ready to talk about, may eventually come to the surface. I won't force it. Forcing topics has never worked with me, so I know it

won't work with him either. I can honestly say that I've never encountered anything so healing in such an intentional way as this. I will go through the coursework again, using it as the structure I need to continue giving my childhood voice room to speak.

Even for me, this has been an odd thing to be asked by God to do. I thought that since I could remember and talk about my points of wounding, this was enough. But I have learned that talking about a wound from across the room is not the same as walking down to the creek with the boy who carries it. He is saying things he never knew he was allowed to say. He has an older brother now, and that brother is walking him toward Jesus—patiently, at the pace of a boy who is still deciding whether adults can be trusted.

FSM



Going Deeper: How the Inner Child Impacts Your Sexual Addiction

Does your Inner Child have an impact on your sex and porn addiction? Absolutely. The road to recovery from sex and porn addictions goes through your childhood. Why? Because your addiction is rooted in unresolved childhood pain and an inability to deal with and process emotional discomfort. Therefore, you learned at a young age to escape your pain points by distracting yourself - too much TV, food, sugar, video games, fantasy, etc. As we get older, we exchange our behaviors for more potent ones, including porn and sex. Over time, these behaviors can lead to addictions. The main problem is we are unaware this is what is occurring in our lives.

The Inner Child Model is a trauma-based approach that has been proven successful with many men globally. This unique treatment has changed the lives of many individuals who felt helpless and hopeless due to their addiction.

50 YEARS OF Faithfulness



From the Desk of the Ministry Director



Laura Leigh Stanlake,
Ministry Director

When I think about my 33 years with First Stone, I can only think of the people I've encountered. Our appearance is different and programs have changed, but the truth we have held to has endured, and God has continued to work among us.

I met Jeff Janes at a wedding. He struck up a conversation, saying, "I heard you have a great testimony. I'd like to talk with you about it." Soon, I began volunteering with First Stone during a season of new development and change under the Janes' leadership. I trusted them for their warmth and determination to serve.

As a new volunteer, I was startled by the raw honesty in the support groups. I quickly saw how that honesty could become a path God used to bring repentance and healing.

This became the essence of ministry at First Stone. Through biblical counseling, prayer, groups, and gatherings, I have watched the Holy Spirit use community to bring people along in their journey with Him. It was both safe and personal. In September 1997, I joined the staff full-time.

Over the years, I have witnessed many expressions of God's heart toward hurting people. Lewis and Carol, along with Jo and Warren, ministered from their homes with tenderness and generous hospitality. Sheila served women, Louise the staff, Angie parents, and Kim H. wives. Keith proclaimed

truth and wanted people to understand how to walk with God. Steve H. brought earnestness and creativity to men's ministry. Andrew cared deeply about spiritual formation. Stephen brought years of leadership, a powerful teaching voice, and language for difficult discipleship practices.

No single ministry leader carried the heart of the mission. First Stone would have been much less without the many faces of staff and volunteers. Each person brought beautiful gifts, and through them I have seen truth and tenderness, proclamation and hospitality, creativity and patience, spiritual depth and practical care.

I see the same thing in our staff and volunteers. We each bring our own gifts and ways of serving, and I am grateful for what each one brings into the room.

In many ways, the work still looks the same: people gathered one-on-one or in groups, experiencing the love of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the care of His people.

I am grateful that God gave me a place among these people. I have known their faithfulness, laughed with them, struggled alongside them, learned from them, and watched God use them in the lives of hurting people. I am grateful for those who came before us, for those who have walked beside me, and for those who are still making room for hurting people today.

Meetings



Next
Prayer & Worship Meeting
Friday, October 9th, 2026
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A safe, scripture-centered group for adults (18+) pursuing emotional and spiritual wholeness—especially around identity, sexuality, and relational wounds. The cross of Christ is central to our teaching and ministry, visibly represented in our gatherings as a place of surrender, healing, and hope.



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This Issue: Idolatry & Inner Child Work

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"Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. Mark 10:14-16 NLT

