

## Episode 033

# The Leader's Gods

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## Introduction

I wonder if a question was posed to our hearts, “Will your real god please stand up?”, how will our hearts respond? Will it be Christ or something else? These gods, of course, are that which we worship. Gods are what or whom we give great heart alliance or alignment to. Comparable to or even above Christ. It is what is our master. Exerting a dominance over our lives that we cannot shake off. Jesus astutely brought this observation in Matthew 6:24 (NIV) “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” In His specific statement, money has become a god in our hearts.

We may assume that leaders, being more committed and devoted to Christ and His cause, would have much less problems in this area. Unfortunately, Christian leaders are no more exempt from idolatry in our hearts than any other believers. In recent years, we have seen well-known Christian leaders fall from grace due to significant deplorable personal failings. Shockingly, some even leaving the faith.

As spiritual leaders, our connection and commitment to God is essential, fundamental to our effectiveness in spiritual leadership. Our availability and obedience to God is linchpin. Yet the presence of other gods corrupts, weakens and may eventually destroy our leadership and even self. Let me elaborate further on several ways this occurs.



## MASTER OR MASTERED?

The Devil works overtime to disguise these gods in their covert operations in undermining our hearts and ministries. We may think we are in charge or in control of these urges when the reality is the opposite. These urges may be in more control than we acknowledge. Have you considered those coffee morning pickups that we cannot do without or those sugar boosts that we crave? Those may seem like trivial examples. What about the gaming adrenaline rush or even ministry-adrenaline pump? Are we beginning to live for such boosts? Whether it be coffee, alcohol, food, gaming, social media or even ministry – if we cannot function without it then it is likely an addiction. If we cannot switch it off without experiencing withdrawal symptoms, then it is in control of us. If we are not its master, it is likely master over us. Any addiction is evidence of a god in our hearts. It competes for our devotion to Christ.

## FROM GOOD TO GOD

Sometimes we may be deceived into thinking that what we are involved in is good when, in reality, it has started to rot. My wife and I started gardening and have enjoyed growing vegetables, fruit trees and flowers. We soon learnt that some plants may look good for a season but due to a variety of reasons, have been attacked by disease in its roots. It then starts to rot from inside out. This can happen in any aspect of our life or ministry. What may have started out good, noble, praiseworthy and admirable may take a more sinister hue.

Loren Cunningham, founder of YWAM, shared a story of such a journey in his book “Is That Really You, God?” In 1973 Loren and a team of YWAMers felt led by God to begin a ship medical ministry to reach the island nations. With much faith and courage, they found an old ship and begin to raise funds to purchase and restore it. Having raised the initial deposit, the ship was released for them to begin work on it. With great excitement they began to restore the old ship. A huge amount of focus was placed upon it. Then one night, Loren had a strange dream. In the dream they had managed to fully restore the old ship. At the dock they sent it off with great fanfare. As the ship slowly moved from the dock, Loren noticed a man standing all alone on the dock. Suddenly it dawned upon him that it was Jesus, forgotten because all the attention was upon the ship.



Loren woke up with the realisation that YWAM had become so enamoured with the ship they have shifted focus to the ship instead of Jesus. They had subtly turned from Giver to gift. And God was not pleased. But it was too late. The project started to unravel. They were unable to raise sufficient funds to finalise the purchase of the ship. Finally, they lost the ship. It was a big spiritual lesson for Loren and YWAM.

### **DREAD TO DENIAL**

Sometimes we may continue to be in denial of the reality of the problem in our hearts. We may refuse to acknowledge the issue because of a secret fear of what it potentially signifies. We may push it from our minds because it is too complicated to contemplate. Even though we may have detected some warning signs, yet we push forward in hope that it will fade away miraculously or that it would not in any way jeopardize our ministry. Our dread of the potential implications can motivate our denial. What is not seen, is not felt. Until it explodes in front of us. We ignore the little god until it gets too big.

### **SELF OVER CHRIST**

The biggest struggle is usually between self and Christ. Our personal desires, longings, needs, ambitions, and self-preservation can often be the biggest stumbling block towards Christ being Lord in our lives.

Self-preservation can cause us to take steps to protect self above obeying God's commands. Gideon could have refused to rise up to lead the Israelites against the Midianites because it places him in harm's way. We back off from any activities that may be risky to self despite God's instructions to us.

Self-gratification occurs when we become more concerned about our personal happiness or comfort than God's agenda. Our over-riding concern is what do we get out of it, rather than what God's Kingdom gets out of it. Like Judas, we may end up betraying God.

Self-promotion can motivate us to gain more glory through what we do for God. We become more interested in making sure people know what we accomplished than making sure God receives the glory. When we insist to get top billing in a conference.



When we insist on getting the best seat, the best treatment, etc. Beware of stealing the glory that should be God's alone. Consider the case of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, when God judged him for his pride.

Self can be elevated to sit on the throne of our lives, dethroning Christ the rightful King. We become our own god.

### **KEEPING GOD ON THE THRONE**

How then should we deal with such gods in our hearts? How do we avoid such gods from developing in the first place? How do we keep God on the throne of our lives and ministries? Let me recommend a few keys.

### **PROXIMITY PROMOTES PURITY**

How can we keep our hearts pure? In the right place before God? The closer we keep to God, the more aware we become of any impurity in our hearts. The more intimate our connection with God, the more His holiness would reveal sin in our hearts. Just as the prophet Isaiah had a vision of the thrice-holy God and was immediately painfully aware of his own sinfulness in Isaiah 6:5 (NIV) "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

I can affirm this from my own experience relating with God. For the clearer we hear from the Holy Spirit, the greater the holy convictions placed upon our hearts. The process can be painful but also liberating. The little gods will be exposed in such a deepening relationship.

An intimate relationship with God will also keep us centred on what is holy, godly, gracious, compassionate. For we tend to become more like whom we admire and worship. When our relationship with God is skewed off-centre, we lose the north star and veer off track. Instead of being moulded by God towards His ideal, we stir ourselves or allow the Devil to veer us further and further off track. The further off track we go, the easier it is for these little gods to take root and gain dominance.



## HEALTHY FEAR FOR HEALTHY SOUL

A popular way to view our relationship with God is to have Jesus as our buddy and God as our dear father. While such perspectives are correct and should be encouraged, yet it should never be forgotten that God is still King and Judge. Those different aspect of our relationship with God needs to be held in proper tension. We should therefore maintain a reverent fear of God who will hold us to account for our thoughts and actions.

Having a healthy fear before God, will keep us more alert towards compromises with sin in our own hearts. We would far less inclined to excuse our weaknesses and sins. We will be more ruthless to weed out the little gods. Our souls will be far healthier.

## HUMILITY IS THE BEST POLICY

Pride is the insidious disease of our hearts. Probably the greatest killer of a leader's life and ministry. Pride blinds us to the little gods creeping into our lives. Pride blocks out concerned voices seeking to warn us. Pride leads to over-confidence that we can overcome any little gods that seek to creep into our hearts.

I will not delve any deeper on this aspect but refer you to my previous podcast "Why We Need Deep Humility". There I lay out in greater detail the reasons why we need deep humility and some key steps on how we develop it.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Lastly, we need accountability as it is those around us that are able to observe and note when little gods pop up in our lives. They can warn us about signs we are going on the wrong track. We may not notice these or we may be in denial. Giving others to right to speak openly into our lives will make a significant difference.

## CONCLUSION

Do we have little gods in our hearts? Let's rid ourselves of all those so that God may be fully on the throne of our lives and ministry.



## Discussion Questions

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These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. We defined gods as what or whom we give great heart alliance or alignment to. It is what is our master. Exerting a dominance over our lives that we cannot shake off. How would you respond to the question, “Will your real god please stand up?”. Have we been mastered by anything?
2. We made the statement, “When we begin to take our primary focus off the Giver unto the gift itself, what was good may become a god in our hearts.” Do we have an issue in that area? Discuss.
3. We shared some practical tips to help keep God on the throne of our life. Consider if you are weak in any specific area.

## Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. We suggested some key areas to help us avoid allowing other gods to grip our hearts. Focus on 1 or 2 of these and make some simple plans to grow in it. Make sure to have a timeline.
2. Are we accountable to another leader? Consider who you might be comfortable to be accountable to. Consider in what ways you can be accountable and discuss with that leader.







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