

SE033008
AMERICAN IDOL

1. Breaking Free From the Tyranny of Self Promotion

With TV SHOWS like *Big Brother and Survivor* and live television dating and of course, American Idol, it seems more than ever that Andy Warhol was a prophet. Because he was the one who said before he died in 1987:

“in the future everybody will be famous for 15 minutes”

As you can tell from our AC3 Idol competition, some people’s time in the time of fame may last shorter than the 15 minutes! But it is fun to think about being in the spotlight, isn’t it? Of being famous, of having everyone know your name, and everyone think you’re great.

But is there a dark side to this phenomena? This desire for self promotion?

In a message Dan Hazen gave a while back, he found some quotes from actual American Idol applicants.

Question: Why do you want to be an AMERICAN IDOL?

Answer: I have a gift that touches every individual and a personality that everyone loves.

Question: What advice do you have for other AMERICAN IDOL hopefuls?

Answer: Believe in yourself and know that you are a star.

Question: What is your definition of an AMERICAN IDOL?

Answer: An extremely talented, well-grounded individual with a clean record that possesses every bit of star quality...sounds like me...

Now, how many of you have watched the audition rounds of the show? If you have then you know that as much as they may believe in themselves...many of them CAN’T SING! Their self esteem seems to be intact – which shows all our self esteem programs at school seem to be working – but something is missing isn’t it? Besides musical ability. Something seems amiss in all this self promotion.

NOW, don’t get me wrong: I’m not ragging on our AC3 Idols. For 3 weeks were going to have some fun with a cultural fad. This was a fun thing for years before American Idol, because you know big a deal Karaoke has been. Why is that? Maybe partly because for 15 minutes, in front of a small crowd, in a small bar, in small town we can pretend to be famous.

AND just in case you jocks think this need for self promotion is a special problem for the artsy fartsy crowd – you do this too, in gyms and playfields all the time. Like, maybe you had visions of athletic grandeur in another life. But now you’re 15 lbs overweight,

45 years old and playing beer league softball someplace... but when you hit that homerun or make that play, for 15 minutes, you're famous, you're a star!

In fact others might get that same feeling from our careers. We have a moment standing in front of a class, or a staff we built, or even our kids, or at a prom, or maybe standing behind a pulpit at a church, and we're in that spotlight that we always coveted.

We've got our 15 minutes of fame. Of Glory.

And some of that is actually healthy. The Bible teaches that when it's about

- finding our niche,
- finding our special gift from God,
- finding what we were MADE to do,
- finding how we can serve others the way God made us to,
 - o that's a good thing.

But when the hundreds of contestants come through the auditions on American Idol, and someone squawks out ANOTHER tone deaf rendition of "The Greatest Love of All" what do **we** all think?:

- this is NOT their gift. God love 'em, they HAVE a gift, singing just isn't it!
- And when the moment of truth comes down and Paula says something critical (albeit passively), and Randy says something truthful* (yo dog, check it out, that wasn't good for me), and Simon says something cruel... what do many contestants do?

They say:

- "who are you to judge me, you guys don't know anything!"
- "I don't care what you guys say, I'm the next American Idol!"
- And out they storm from their audition with some choice words deleted by the editors – but we can read lips...

It's at that point that sometimes something ugly comes out. What is it? It's a defensiveness, a pride, sometimes a flat out arrogance, and a horrible lack of self awareness!

As a society we seem to have bought into the idea that everything begins and ends within **ourselves**. That we, as individuals, as persons are "it". We are the bomb, the terminus of the universe. In fact, it appears that we want to go back to a Ptolemaic universe.

You remember what Ptolemy told us don't you? Let me use him as a metaphor today do a danger we're all susceptible to. The Catholic church accepted his ideas as pure dogma for the better part of a 1000 years. What Ptolemy told us was that we were the center of the universe. That's right, we earthlings were center stage.

- We were the hub of the planetary wheel,
- the navel of the heavenly body,

We are dead center! And dead still! It's the OTHER planets that plod around the skies, but not us! No sir, we stay put. As predicable as the weather in Washington State. As predicable as a husband's need to control the 6 remotes – and his ignorance in how to use a single one of them! Some fickle planets and stars revolve around **us** every day, but the earth is solid, the Rock of Gibraltar of the Universe.

Ah, but then came Copernicus. Blasted, Nicolas Copernicus, with his maps and telescopes and his boney nose and Polish accent and his pestering questions:

- excuse me, can anyone tell me what causes the seasons to change?
- Does anyone know exactly how far before ships fall off the face of the earth?

And then he said it. Heresy. He pointed at the sun and said,
There my friends, THAT is the center of the solar system.

People denied the facts for over 50 years, until Galileo came along and said the exact same thing! They tossed him in the slammer and booted him out of the church. You'd think he called the Pope a Baptist or something. Apparently they didn't take well to demotions.

And friends, neither do we. Max Lucado writes:

What Copernicus did for the earth, God does for our souls, he bumps us off, self-center.

What we're going to find in the next three weeks is that this demotion, this bumping of our lives off "self-center" is actually very, GOOD NEWS! There's something humbling AND liberating in the Copernican SHIFT of the soul.

You see, the Bible says that when God looks at the center of the universe, he doesn't look at you. When heaven's stagehands direct the spotlight, like our production guys just did, when the angels crowd to see the star of the show, guess what? I'm not going to need any sunglasses, because the light's not going to be falling on me.

It's going to be falling on and coming from the Son. The Son of God, that is. Jesus Christ. That's how central is Jesus Christ, not just to human history, but really to the destiny of the entire universe. The Bible says:

Going through a long line of prophets, God has been addressing our ancestors in different ways for centuries. Recently, he spoke to us directly through his Son. By his Son, God created the world in the beginning, and it will all belong to the Son at the end. This Son perfectly mirrors God, and is stamped with God's name. He holds everything together by what he says... (Heb 1:1-4)

Now that is some major, cosmic stuff right there – to say about a human being! Of course we can't know that's true about Jesus without faith. But we do have the consensus that Jesus Christ was the single greatest man that ever lived, and we have this amazingly well preserved account of his life, and compelling proofs they give for his bodily resurrection – we have that evidence. (Case for Christ)

And if while investigating Jesus Christ, you find this evidence compelling, you may experience his Sonship... and when you do, the idea that he is the center of it all, will not longer seem like a stretch after all. You'll KNOW it. AND, here's one more thing, you may find that HE being at the center of it all, lifts an terrible burden off your shoulders.

See friend, you were not meant to promote yourself to the universe. You were meant to promote **God**... Maybe, if you're honest about things today, you'd say, that most of your life you've been obsessed with promoting yourself.

I know I can say I have been.

I love applause. I'm an applause-aholic. I love to be in the spotlight. I've wrestled through many restless moments of prayer wondering if I should keep doing the job I do, because my motives can get so polluted at times. Because you see, the stage is not the best place for an applause-aholic. It's kind of like the liquor store for an alcoholic.

I engage in some disciplines specifically to keep this in check

- By not standing at the door when you leave to solicit strokes...
- By relentless and ruthless honesty in open community that checks for a sense of when I'm in it for me, when I'm in it for self promotion, not God promotion...
- I've given people that permission.

And then with God's help, and the help of my community, I slide again into this role that I fight so hard against, so often, yet a role that is a so much more natural fit for me, a role that feels comfortable like a old pair of jeans. A role that is easy, a burden that's light. You know what that is?

It's me, not as the sun, but as the **moon**. I'm like the moon... that's more in keeping with the truth about me. I'm the lesser orb – not at the center. Contrary to the little Ptolemy inside of me, I'm not at the center of the universe. The world does NOT revolve around me.

I mean, the moon is important, the moon is appreciated. The moon is loved dearly, there's great poetry written about the moon. And surely God thinks of us as precious. Listen to these words of God's about his precious human creations:

Zeph 3:17 "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

So I'm precious, I know that. But there's something that gets sick inside me

- that turns my sense of spiritual value into a lie.
- that turns my legitimate love for self, into a selfishness,
- that turns my inner sense of self appreciation into a feeling of entitlement and – there's no other word for it:

- self worship.

And then I realize that I'm back in the garden of Eden, and I'm hearing the oldest of lies whispered in my ear. We get this Eden story all wrong if we focus on Medieval art with cartoonish naked Adam and Eve behind leaves, apples and snakes. We miss the meaning. Original sin was not to the desire for a piece of fruit. *Come on.* The garden was full of good food.

No, the temptation was this:

Gen 3:5 – God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil – YOU WILL BE LIKE God!

The human could be wise without God, could be powerful without God, could be good without God, could be beautiful without God. In short, the human could BE God, could take over the center, could be totally autonomous,

- no more silly dependence on another,
- no more submission or obedience, only rulership,
- no more worship, rather self worship.

It's as old as the hills friends... are we surprised that people still look up into the midnight sky and say, it's looks like the whole universe is turning right around ME at the center. The problem is – it looks exactly the same way to 6 billion other people. If everybody buys in to the lie that it's "all about me" – is it any wonder the center gets too crowded?

And what happens when the center gets too crowded? A spontaneous game of king of the castle breaks out. You played that game with your spouse this week didn't you? I did. A game of king of the castle breaks out when you and your spouse realize you both want to occupy the space at the center of the universe.

The other person should meet all of your needs, right? I mean, you do this and you do that, and that makes you a very important person. So it's only right that your needs should take priority. Why aren't they meeting my needs?! I was thinking about my role in that little game of king of the castle, and how it just seemed so natural to me that I should be the king.

And oh, I had burned so many calories resenting every way in which I felt I wasn't the center. We get into a sparring match recounting all the reasons why WE should be at the center. Why we deserve it, why we have earned that spot, because of the dues we've paid.

I realized after our latest marriage spat what a wearying load it is to try and stay at the center. To focus on MY needs, and then to nurse my resentments for not being at the center. And I realized that the greatest sins I commit against the people I love the most, are committed when I worship myself.

It was the first and still the greatest sin. Can you relate?

The Assyrians were the Nazi's of the 8th century BC. And we have a speech recorded by one of their rulers, Assur-Nasir-Pal. Listen to the explanation he gives for his exploits:

Now at the command of the great gods, my sovereignty, my dominion, and my power are manifesting themselves; I am regal, I am lordly, I am exalted, I am mighty, I am honored, I am glorified, I am lion-brave, and I am heroic.

[This guy doesn't seem to have a self esteem problem! Yet he then goes on to detail his conquests, his execution of captives with fire, the enemies he skinned alive and the general devastation he wrought.]

You see the connection? One thing flows from the other... you get at the center of the universe, and you start to make up the rules, start to justify why you can break the rules. Nassir Paul can be cruel, because he is the center of all things.

A while back I was stopped for speeding on the way to a spiritual retreat. It didn't exactly put me in a spiritual frame of mind. The cop got me going 40 in a 25. As he's taking my license and information I'm resisting the urge to tell him that he's delaying a man of God from his rendezvous with the Maker of the Universe – "you don't want to do that man!"

I didn't say that, instead I got angry. And I was justifying in my mind.

- The sign was poorly marked...
- the street was a main thoroughfare...
- the cop was in a bad mood...
- I didn't MEAN to speed, I just didn't check my speedometer.

And on and on I went. Until I got so worked up about it... until I knew this was going to not be a retreat (but rather full blown offensive) if didn't deal with my anger. So I prayed about it, and I felt God bringing me to this place we're talking about today...

Let go of the center of the universe Rick, you don't make up the rules, the rules don't bend at your command, you are just a very small man, at the mercy of so many things... let it go.

And there was God working a Copernican shift in me. Is he working one in you? God doesn't exist to make a big deal out of you... friend, you exist to make a big deal out of God. Whoa! That might be life changing for some of us, weaned on this idea that "it's all about me..." even when we hear the message of Christianity, the message of God's love... some think, even God is all about me!

We hear the gospel and we're like cats instead of dogs.

- Our dog looks at us and sees that we love it and feed it and care for it and it thinks, "You must be God!"

- Our cat looks at us and sees that we love it and feed it and care for it and it thinks, "I must be God!"

We're more like cats than dogs aren't we? We think even God's love for us means we must be pretty dang great. Instead of humbly saying,
wow, isn't God great!

Here's the truth about me. I was made to be the moon not the sun. What does the moon do? It reflects the sun's glory. Apart from the sun, the moon is a pitch black, cratered ball of space dust. But properly positioned, the moon BEAMS. In our proper role, doing what we were made to do, a clod of dirt, shines!

It becomes a source of inspiration!

What if we were at peace with our place away from the center, like the moon? It's a change that won't come easy. We've been trying to be idols all our lives:

- I want a spouse that makes me happy, that doesn't hold me back
- I want coworkers that always share my opinion
- I want weather that suits me
- I want a government that serves me
- I'm entitled.

And what inner chaos this brings to our little lives. We keep chasing the booby prize and we miss out of the lottery: the God centered life. I'm finding more and more, it works. And it rescues us from a life that doesn't.