

A DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON

★iDOL GiRLS★

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INTRODUCTION

From beauty and boys to designer jeans or drugs—there’s an endless supply of idols for today’s teenager to choose from. With their shiny promises of popularity and happiness, these things can easily invade a girl’s heart, becoming a god in her life. *Idol Girls* tackles the issue of teen idols head-on—with plenty of soul-searching ideas and practical advice for teens who want to move beyond the false hope and obsession that idols have created in their lives.

The *Idol Girls* discussion guide brings girls together in a team effort to root out the idols in their lives. It will give teens the opportunity to identify their idols, strategize ways to get rid of their idols, and encourage each other along the way.

Please note: *Idol Girls* was written by a girl, for the girls, about girl issues. As such, I highly recommend that this study be led by a girl instead of a guy. If you are a male youth director/pastor who thinks this study would benefit your group, we suggest that you ask a trusted adult woman to lead the group instead of yourself. I also recommend that you use this guide over a four-week period, tackling one session each week. This gives you plenty of time to prepare and gives your students plenty of time to read.

In each activity, you will find activity suggestions, follow-up questions, and discussion questions. These activities are designed to be interactive and easy-going, so let your students have fun with them. The follow-up questions after each activity will help you transition into a discussion of *Idol Girls*. And the discussion questions are provided to get that discussion started. As you progress into that part of the session, start with an open-ended question such as “Did you learn anything new from this week’s reading?” or “Was there anything you found especially convicting in these chapters?” Give students the freedom to bring up the issues they found most interesting. As their initial responses dwindle, you can move on to the more specific questions provided in this guide. These questions are not meant to be a rigid guidepost. You may find that students come with enough questions of their own to fuel an hour’s worth of conversation. Remember, the goal is to generate a healthy discussion—not to simply “get through” the list of questions provided.

BEFORE YOU START

Hand out *Idol Girl* books to your students at least two weeks before your first session and encourage them to read the introduction and Chapter 1 before your first session.

Also, familiarize yourself with this discussion guide and read through each session’s material checklists carefully so you can gather the necessary items beforehand. Pay special attention to the discussion questions and consider any personal anecdotes or insights you might want to

share. You don't want to do all the talking—but it's helpful to have some ideas in mind in case the conversation needs a jump start.

It's almost time to get started. But first, here are some helpful hints about using this guide in a group setting.

GROUP RULES

Remind your girls that this study group is a place where people are to be valued and respected. We suggest that you share these simple group rules with everyone before you start:

- » **Practice confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
- » **Respect other people's views,** even when they are different than your own.
- » **Listen. Listen. Listen.** Don't be the one who does all the talking, but let others have a chance to share their views as well.
- » **Don't interrupt.** Wait your turn to talk.

TIPS FOR LEADING A DISCUSSION

Here's a few ideas to keep your discussions rolling in a meaningful way:

- » **Prepare.** Make sure you've read through the book chapters for each session. As you prepare for the sessions, consider one or two personal anecdotes you may be able to share during the group's discussion.
- » **Be yourself.** Thank students for sharing their thoughts and opinions, but don't feel that you need to agree with every one. Be honest with your students about the lessons you've learned in your own experiences—even if they may not be what your students want to hear!
- » **Encourage students to go deeper.** When someone gives a simple response, ask them follow-up questions such as "Why do you feel that way?" "What do you mean by that?" "Tell us more."
- » **Allow for silence.** Remember: Your students haven't read the questions ahead of time and they may need some time to process a response. Allow for about 7-10 seconds of silence before saying anything further, even when it makes you feel uncomfortable. If necessary, you can reword the question or move on to another topic.
- » **Include everyone in the discussion.** If it seems like the same two or three students are responding to all your questions, look for ways to bring others into the conversation. Some students may need a little encouragement to share their thoughts and opinions. So invite them to talk by saying something like "Lisa, I'm curious what you think about this too" or "Sara, I'd love to hear what you have to say about that." Be sensitive to their feelings, though: If the student has nothing to say or looks extremely uncomfortable, give them an "out" by moving on to someone else.

- » **Be a good listener.** The goal is to have a true discussion, not just a “talk” from the group leader. Avoid putting words in the students’ mouths or overreacting to comments that you may not agree with. Try asking “mirror” questions that challenge students to clarify or affirm what you’ve heard. For example, say “What I hear you saying is this. Is that what you mean?” or “So what you seem to be saying is this. Would you agree?”
- » **Bring God into it.** Pray for the students before and after each session. Ask God to direct your discussion and be open to the Spirit’s leading: It may be that He takes you in an unexpected direction, so don’t get too hung up on “the plan.” If students are genuinely interested and engaged in a healthy side topic, let the conversation go, saying a silent prayer for God’s to be working on their hearts as you go.



SESSION ONE —IDOL INTRO

OPENING ACTIVITY: OBSESSIONS

Supplies Needed: blank paper, pens, index cards (save for use after the discussion)

Divide students into groups of two or three for this activity. Give each group several sheets of paper, along with a few pens.

Tell the groups to imagine that they are TV executives, planning a show to add to the fall season line-up. The show they are developing is called “Obsessions”. It’s a drama about teenagers targeted at a youth audience. Each group will spend brainstorm ideas for this new program. Encourage them to come up with a few ideas for each category:

- » **Characters:** Describe a few characters you’d put in this program. How old are they? What are they like? What do they love/hate? How do they act and what fuels their actions?
- » **Sets:** What kind of setting will your TV drama take place in? What will be the primary locations you need sets for?
- » **Plot:** What are some potential plot lines you’d like to develop? (Romantic developments, family relationships, school issues, major crises, etc.)

Let the groups work for about ten minutes. Then take a few minutes to have them share their ideas with each other.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- » Was it easy or difficult to imagine a program about obsessed teens? Why?
- » Did any of your groups end up describing similar character types or plot lines? If so, what were they? And why do you think those particular issues came up in multiple groups?
- » Do the program descriptions you developed sound like any real-life TV shows you watch or have heard of? In general, what obsessions do teenage television characters tend to have?
- » Do you think TV programs ever fuel any real-life obsessions among teens? If so, give some examples.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had on the introduction or first chapter of *Idol Girls*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SESSION ONE

1. Before you started reading this book, had you given much thought to idols or idolatry? If so, what did you think of when you heard those terms?
 - » Do you think teens have a problem with idolatry? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree that an obsession is an idol? Why or why not?
 - » What reasons does Hayley offer to support the idea that obsessions aren't good for you?
 - » Isn't it a good thing to be passionate about certain things in life? Where is the line between having a healthy interest in something and having an unhealthy obsession with it?
3. Look at the list of obsessions on page 19. Are there any items listed that you were surprised to think of as obsessions? Are there any items you would add to the list?
 - » What leads teens to be obsessed with the things on this list?
4. Based on your reading so far, how would you define the term "idol" and "idolatry"?
 - » Why are obsessions and idols so attractive to us?
 - » In what ways do we try to use idols as a substitute for God in our lives?
5. Consider this quote about idols from page 33: "... they usually come with promises of happiness, relief, or escape, but what they actually do is suck the happy right out of you and leave you feeling empty."
 - » Have you ever had an experience where something seemed like it would be great for you, but turned out to be a disappointment? How did that make you feel?
 - » Can idols ever give real happiness? Why or why not?
6. What do you think Hayley means when she talks about the idol of happiness?
 - » What's the difference between seeking your own happiness versus seeking happiness with God?
 - » If you're tight with God, will you always be happy? Why or why not?
7. In what ways do idols get in the way of loving God? Can you think of some specific examples using some of the obsessions/idols we've mentioned so far?
 - » How can even good things—like family, activities, work—become idols?
8. How hard do you think it will be for you to recognize and get rid of idols in your life?
 - » Is it worth making the effort to give up idols if it means you can have a closer relationship to God? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Close this session with a time of written prayers. Hand each student an index card and a pen. Ask them to write a brief prayer telling God how they feel about idols, as well as their desire to have a better relationship to him. Encourage them to take their card home and read it at least once a day during the next week.



SESSION TWO —IDOL AWARE

OPENING ACTIVITY: AMERICAN IDOLS

Supplies Needed: several entertainment/teen magazines (People, Seventeen, etc.), scissors, glue, posterboard, markers, plate of cookies (save for use after the discussion)

Divide students into groups of two or three for this activity. Give each group a magazine, a piece of posterboard, scissors, glue, and markers.

Remind your students of last week’s definition of an idol: An idol is anything that becomes a rival to God. Then ask students to create an idol collage using the magazines and other materials you’ve given them. Encourage them to cut out advertisements, articles, pictures, and headlines that represent some of the idols in American culture. Groups should paste their cut-outs on the posterboard and write the idols’ various names around the pictures using their markers.

Allow the groups to work for 5 or 10 minutes. When they’re finished, gather back together as a large group and tackle these follow-up questions:

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- » How many idols did you find? Do you think there were even more idols in your magazine?
- » Based on this activity, would you say that Americans might be especially tempted to idolatry? Why or why not?
- » When you look at the items you put on your poster, how many of those things are “wants”? How many are basic human “needs”?
- » How do ads in magazines and other places affect your sense of “wants” versus “needs”? Do you think advertising encourages idolatry?
- » Do you think that Americans are any happier today than they were before they could buy/achieve all the things you have on your posters? Why or why not?

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had on chapter two of *Idol Girls*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SESSION TWO

1. “Lots of people who worship God inadvertently, accidentally, or purposefully turn to other things and people to save them *in addition* to God” (page 55). Why do you think Christians turn to idols for extra help?
 - » What’s the relationship between idolatry and doubt in God?
 - » What do you think God’s thinking when he sees us trying to get help from other stuff besides him?
2. Have you ever felt really depressed or stressed about wanting something that you didn’t have? Can you share a bit about that experience?
 - » Hayley says, “I think you will find that most of your emotional misery comes from wanting something you don’t have” (page 64). Do you agree?
 - » How do our obsessions/idols get in the way of being thankful?
3. What does it mean to “deny yourself”? What does that look like in real life?
 - » How does “denying yourself” fit into the issue of idolatry?
 - » Why would a loving God ask us to deny ourselves? Isn’t that kind of mean?
 - » Why do you think it’s so hard for us to “deny ourselves”?
4. Can you think of a personal story (from you or someone you know) when God had a better plan in mind than anything you were trying to cook up on your own? What happened?
 - » What would have happened if you’d just gotten your own way?
 - » What can you learn about “denying yourself” from that experience?
5. In what ways do we become slaves to our idols? Can you think of a specific example?
 - » Why do you think people sometimes hang on to their idols tightly—even when the idol isn’t making them happy?
 - » How does giving up an idol give you freedom? What does it set you free from?
6. What’s the difference between light idols and dark idols?
 - » How do you need to handle these idols differently?
 - » Do you think there are any “light” idols that are generally accepted by our culture, even though they aren’t really acceptable to God?
 - » How about idols that are accepted by fellow Christians?
7. Why is it difficult for Christians to admit they have idols?
 - » How do we justify certain idols?

8. How successful do you think you'll be at fighting idols if you do it on your own?
Why?
- » Why are other people important when it comes to fighting idols?
 - » In general, do you think Christians do more to help each other fight idols, or do we sometimes just help each other justify those idols?
 - » What are some practical things we could do to help each other fight our idols?

PRAYER

Wrap up your session by having the girls circle up and hold hands for a **closing prayer**. Place a plate of cookies in the center of your circle and tell the girls to try and grab one without letting go of each other's hands. After they struggle for a minute, remind them that it's harder to give into temptation when they're fighting it together—hand-in-hand—than when they're trying to do it on their own. Say a short prayer asking God to give your girls wisdom and honesty as they try to identify specific idols in their lives during the week ahead. After your prayer, invite them to **drop hands** and grab a cookie!



SESSION THREE —IDOLS IN-DEPTH

OPENING ACTIVITY: IDOLS.COM

Supplies Needed: posterboard, markers, index cards with the following titles written on them:

- » www.idols.com/romance
- » www.idols.com/beauty
- » www.idols.com/worry
- » www.idols.com/entertainment
- » www.idols.com/guys
- » www.idols.com/food
- » www.idols.com/peoplepleasing

Divide students into groups of two for this activity. Ask each group to choose one of the index cards. Then give them a piece of posterboard and some markers.

Tell students to imagine that they're a web team developing the website for Idols.com—a site devoted to promoting teen idols. Each group will be designing a web page for their particular area of the site. They should use their posterboard and markers to draw out their main page, including any graphics, pictures, text, or links that they would want to put on that page. Encourage groups to have fun and be creative with this project, designing pages that would really entice teens to check out their particular idol.

After the groups have worked for 5-10 minutes, gather them together to take turns sharing their web page designs. Then ask the following questions:

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- » What strategies did you use to make your idol look good?
- » In general, do you think the Internet encourages any forms of idolatry? Why or why not?

- » What makes popular idols so popular? Why, for example, do more teen girls idolize beauty instead of idolizing the ability to cook or babysit?
- » To what degree are a teens' desires controlled by retail companies, the entertainment business, media companies, etc.?
- » What makes more sense: Letting your desires be fueled by the people who want to make money off of you? Or letting your desires be fueled by a God who gave everything for you? Why do we so often pick the former instead of the latter?

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had on chapter three of *Idol Girls*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SESSION THREE

1. Of the idols mentioned in this chapter, which ones would you say girls at your school struggle with the most? Why?
2. Why do you think girls sometimes make idols out of romance and guys?
 - » What feeds this kind of idolatry?
 - » How can you tell if your interest in guys/dating/romance has crossed over the line into idolatry?
 - » What other kinds of relationships might become idols in a girls' life? How?
3. What might be some symptoms of a girl who's made beauty an idol?
 - » How much pressure do you feel to be thin and beautiful? Where does that pressure come from?
 - » How can you fight all that pressure when you're constantly surrounded by it?
4. Before you read this chapter, did you ever think about worry or fear as idols?
 - » Do you agree that these things can become a rival to God? Why or why not?
 - » What kinds of things do you tend to worry about? What would be a healthier response to these stresses?
 - » In what areas do you think God might want you to grow—even though it may be a little fearful?
5. Why do you think some people fall into a lifestyle of self-hatred?
 - » Cutting, self-mutilation, and drug abuse may be the more obvious signs of self-hatred, but what are some more subtle forms this idol takes?
 - » In what ways is self-hatred really just another form of self-worship?
 - » Is it fair to beat yourself up because you make mistakes?
6. How could a supposedly good thing—like trying to protect yourself from pain or looking for a sign of God's will—become an idol?
 - » How does true trust in God help you handle these issues in a healthy way?

7. Do you think our culture takes addictions to food or technology (TV, video games, cell phones, etc.) seriously? Why or why not?
 - » Do *you* see any real danger in these addictions? If so, what's the harm? Who gets hurt?
 - » How would you define gluttony? In what areas do you think teens have a real problem with gluttony?
8. When you consider all the various idols mentioned in this chapter—romance, beauty, worry, self-hatred, addictions, etc.—do they have anything in common?
 - » In what way does every form of idolatry really become a way of idolizing yourself?
 - » After reading this chapter, have you identified any specific idols in your life? Would you be willing to share about one of them?
 - » How have these idols affected your view on life? How have they affected your relationship with God?

PRAYER

If time allows, close this session with a special prayer. Ask each girl to mention one idol she's struggling with. Then take turns praying for each other, having each person pray for the person on their right. Ask God to give all the girls in your group the courage and strength to start tearing down these idols.





SESSION FOUR

—IDOL FREE

OPENING ACTIVITY: MY PET IDOL

Supplies Needed: paper, pens/markers, index cards labeled with various idol titles (beauty, guys, worry, sports/activities, grades, technology, etc.), blank index cards (save for use after discussion)

Divide the group into teams of two or three for this activity. Give each group several sheets of paper as well as a few pens or markers. Hand each group an index card with an idol name.

Ask each group to write and illustrate a children's story called "My Pet Idol." Their story should use simple language about the idol named on their index card. The groups should weave the following elements into their story:

- » Pick an animal to represent their idol.
- » Pick a name for their pet idol.
- » Explain how they "feed" their pet idol and keep him alive.
- » Explain what makes their pet idol happy.

Encourage creativity and give the groups 10 minutes to work before gathering back in the big group for story time. After the groups have shared their stories, ask the following questions:

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- » What made you choose the animals you did for your pet idol? Was there any symbolism to the animal or name you chose?
- » Were there any types of "food" that were common in more than one story?
- » In general, what kinds of "idol food" are especially popular among teens? What common activities/things contribute to idol-worship among your peers?
- » What would it look like if you decided to feed your soul instead of feeding the idols?

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had on chapter four of *Idol Girls*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SESSION FOUR

1. Is it possible to be completely “idol free”? Why or why not?
 - » In what ways is idolatry really a control issue?
2. In what ways can the Holy Spirit help you get rid of idols?
 - » How does the Holy Spirit speak to people today? What does the Spirit use to help show you the way?
 - » What distractions might prevent you from hearing the Holy Spirit’s voice?
 - » What is one way you could try to make yourself more open to hearing the Spirit’s voice?
3. Why is confession so important when it comes to going idol free?
 - » Does confessing to something mean that you’re a bad person? Why or why not?
4. What are some practical ways that you can spend more time with God, even if your schedule is super busy?
 - » In general, do you think teens are too busy for God?
 - » How can you make your time with God meaningful instead of routine?
5. What does it mean to “stop feeding the idols”?
 - » What are some general forms of “idol food” for teens? Are there any activities that should be off-limits for everyone because they serve no other purpose than “idol food”?
 - » What is one of your weak areas where you’re trying to get rid of an idol? What can you do to stop feeding that idol?
6. What should you do if your friends are feeding your idols?
 - » How important is it to have friends who share your values and beliefs?
 - » Is it ok to hang out with someone who’s involved in wrong behaviors as long as you don’t join them in those things? Why or why not?
7. How can you encourage your friends to join you in going idol free without sounding preachy or judgmental?
 - » How could a group of girlfriends work together to fight idols?
 - » How do you think your friendships would be affected if you worked together at being idol free?
8. Do you think most teens are thankful these days? Why or why not?
 - » What makes it difficult to be thankful as a teenager?
 - » What do you have to be thankful for?
 - » What are some practical ways to live a thankful life?

9. Hayley says that “Becoming idol free is going to be hard work” (page 163). Why do you think it’s hard to give up idols?
- » How will fighting idolatry improve your life? Is it worth the hard work to achieve that goal?
 - » How might fighting today’s idols prepare you for the idol-temptations of the future?
 - » How will you keep yourself motivated to live idol free?

PRAYER

As you close your *Idol Girls* study, ask your students to look at the verses in the “God’s Word, Your Power” section of the book (page 175–184). Encourage them to pick one verse that will help them stay motivated in their effort to live idol-free. Then hand each girl an index card and a pen so that she can write out her verse.

End the session by praying through God’s Word. Have each girl read her verse as a prayer, asking God to help her make that verse real in her life. If time is short, encourage the girls to spend a few moments in silent prayer about their verses instead. Encourage everyone to bring their index card home and post it somewhere they will see every day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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