



household --- gods

FREED FROM THE WORSHIP OF FAMILY
TO DELIGHT IN THE GLORY OF GOD

TED *and* KRISTIN KLUCK

“Ouch! That hurts. Truth does that, you know? *Household Gods* is a book of hard truth. But it’s easier to take when the writers are funny and authentic, write really well, and don’t do the self-righteousness thing. Truth also sets you free. This book will set you free. Maybe. Give it to everyone you know. They will either stone you or bless you. I rise up and call Ted and Kristin Kluck blessed!”

STEVE BROWN

Professor emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary,
and author and broadcaster with Key Life Network, Inc.

“This is Ted Kluck’s best work to date. It is simultaneously personal, poignant, and brutally honest. But above all else it is undeniably challenging, both to the individual reader and—possibly even more important—to the institution of the church itself. Ted may not make many friends with this book, but I have no doubt that this book glorifies God.”

REV. BENJAMIN J. ROBY

Senior pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Ashland, OH, and Bible
instructor at Veritas Classical Christian Academy, Ashland, OH

“Employing tales and terms that are both humorous as well as humbling, Kristin and Ted Kluck unmask the domestic gods of our age. Rather than simply marveling at how easily we bend the knee before idols such as sports and cynicism, the Klucks offer clear and compelling correctives that are seated in Scripture. Gen Xers and Millennials will especially resonate with the Klucks’ style, but this is a transgenerational primer addressing the challenges of our age in the light of God’s Word.”

RANDALL J. GRUENDYKE, DMin

Campus pastor at Taylor University and contributor to *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes*

“The ancient Israelites persecuted God’s prophets because the Israelites loved their idols so much and because their idols were so ingrained in their culture. We read these texts and feel self-righteous because we don’t bow down to little statues; meanwhile our lives are chock-full of things we put above Jesus. Thank God for the honesty of His prophets, and thank God for the honesty of the Klucks’ voice, helping us all keep Jesus as the center of our lives!”

NOAH FILIPIAK

Founding pastor of Crossroads Church, Lansing, MI,
and author of www.AtACrossRoads.net

“Imagine a reality entertainer who shows off what embarrasses him, not what titillates you. Imagine a searing critique of evangelical culture by a prophet who indicts himself. Imagine an inspirational story where a loser doesn’t make a comeback, but he does meet Jesus Christ. Actually, don’t imagine it; read this book.”

CORY HARTMAN

Pastor, First Baptist Church of Hollidaysburg, PA

“In *Household Gods*, Ted and Kristin Kluck speak openly and honestly about the idols Christians encounter within their own homes. With humility and humor, they point the reader to sins of the heart and to the Savior who is greater than those sins.”

STEPHEN ALTROGGE

Author of *The Greener Grass Conspiracy and Untamable God*

“*Household Gods* might best be described as a comedic devotional. Anyway, that’s the best I can do at categorizing a book that is at once so funny and spiritually enriching. Ted Kluck—with help from his wife, Kristin—lays bare not only his own heart but the reader’s as well, for we all nurture our own family idols. And along the way we are treated to vintage Kluckian cultural commentary, regarding everything from youth sports leagues to the Christian publishing industry. You will laugh with conviction.”

JAMES S. SPIEGEL

Taylor University

“As an author, when I read Ted Kluck I feel a bit like a garage-band guitar hero who gets a front-row ticket to see Clapton. He starts the concert, hunkered in his seat, eyes locked on the fingerings, intent on stealing his riffs . . . until he gets caught up in the music and rises to his feet. Ted’s unique voice—modern, postmodern, edgy, and efficient—draws me in every time. This has never been truer than in this book about love and legalism, values and expectations, parenting and pedestals. Ted and Kristin have written a book that takes biblical concepts from the lips of the prophets and the pens of the apostles and translates them into our world of little league, Wes Anderson movies, alumni magazines, and grinding concrete. The result is challenging, uplifting, and freeing.”

ZACHARY BARTELS

Author of *Playing Saint*

“Ted and Kristin’s collaboratively written book, *Household Gods*, gives the reader a candid look at the various idols that distract families from focusing on the truly important things in life. Their narrative is relatable and provides helpful lessons to learn. Instead of living vicariously through their sons or with a self-absorbed focus on family success, the Klucks describe a family relationship that better reflects a communion with our Lord. I look forward to learning the valuable lessons shared by Ted and Kristin and incorporating them into my family.”

NATHAN LEAMER



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Foreword

The household is becoming a dangerous place.

Or maybe it's always been that way.

For all the outrage from both the church and conservative media that the family is being attacked, hijacked, undervalued, and redefined, it seems that little weight is ever given to the thought that one of the biggest threats to families may actually come from the inside.

It's a subtle thing. In our desire to bring family values back to the forefront of our culture, could it be possible that we've over-corrected and created an impenetrable idol out of them instead? Did God really intend for our families to be the one thing we can never spend too much time, energy, love, and money on? Or have we proudly turned our households into golden calves that we dutifully serve as they subtly enslave our hearts?

Although the evangelical church has much to say about a society that makes gods out of careers, sports, hobbies, and cash money, the home will rarely if ever get added to the list of things for us to be on guard against. In fact, just the opposite seems to be true.

We applaud the dad who obsessively devotes all of his time, energy, and attention to his spouse, kids, and house. We admire the mom who tirelessly commits her life to soccer games, dance recitals, playdates, and school activities. It's admirable. Selfless. Sacrificial. It's what *good* parents do. It's what *other* parents who aren't doing them aspire to do.

The reality is that few people are ever going to call out anyone for finding their identity in hearth and home because we don't believe it's actually possible to do that, do we? After all, our first ministry is to our family, isn't it? The problem couldn't possibly be that we're giving *too much* attention to domesticity, could it? Unfortunately, in a world that appears to be at war trying to redefine what marriage and the traditional family are supposed to look like, evangelicals and conservatives alike may be creating an equally damaging alternative: the deification of it.

So how do we guard our hearts from worshipping at the altar of family and finding our identity from the household gods of this age? What did God actually intend for our families to be for both us and Him?

Ted and Kristin take us on an honest and courageous journey chronicling how the life of their household became the god of their lives. You'll read stories of how good gifts from God cease to be blessings when they draw our hearts away from our good God. And like all great stories, you'll shed some tears over the loss they suffered and share the joy they experienced as God led them down the road to restoration and relationship.

*Ronnie Martin, church planter and coauthor of
Finding God in the Dark*

A Note from Ted

I always do this. I always end up writing two introductions. I write the first one right at the beginning—usually at the book proposal stage, before the whole thing has even been *consummated* by a contract—and then the second one, this one, at the end.

What I've always wanted from people in my family, maybe more than anything, are collections of stories. I wish my dead grandparents had written down all their stories. Same with great-uncles and great-aunts. Same with my parents. I think more than anything I just want to know about their lives. I want to know everything—from the mundane to the heroic to the grotesque and shameful. Of course, nobody does this; nobody writes everything down. However, it's what I've tried to do with all my books—even the teachy ones (like this one)—so that when I'm dead and gone, my kids and grandkids will at least know what I was up to all these years. Maybe they'll have a shot at not making the same mistakes I've made. Maybe they'll have a better shot at loving the Lord and loving their neighbor.

I teach a university class called Mass Media Literacy. Nobody really knows what the class is supposed to accomplish, and as such, we often end up talking about movies we like (such is the beauty of the communications major). One morning, after delving deeply into the work of filmmaker Wes Anderson, it occurred to me that all of his films are about family.

And what's more, all of Anderson's films are about the sins that "present" in family contexts: greed¹, pride², arrogance³, selfishness⁴, sibling rivalry⁵, sports⁶, celebrity⁷, lust⁸, adultery⁹, and so on. One of my students made the incredibly insightful comment that "In Wes Anderson movies, adults act like children and children act like adults." I'm always jealous of the Bill Murray character, who gets to sulk and be disenfranchised for the duration of each of these films; however, when I try to sulk and be disenfranchised in my own family, it doesn't come off nearly as charming.

The fact that I like these movies so much is probably part of the reason I'm often so bad at living in a family and loving them as I should. That, and my sin nature.

Like a Wes movie, this book is part didactic and part storytelling. Though the book is "about" family idolatry in a broad sense, many of the chapters are about specific idolatries that present, or show themselves, in a family context. You may be tempted to wonder, *What does this chapter have to do with family idolatry?* Think, rather, *How might this idolatry manifest itself in a family context?*

Not that I'm telling you what to think.

Because we live in a time and place where Christians sometimes seem to love fighting about issues almost as much as they love the Lord, here's a short list of issues that we *won't* be fighting about in this book, partly because the Bible isn't explicit (or really even implicit) about them, and also because we don't feel called to write about them. Search your own heart as to whether you're making idols of these family-related concerns:

- how many children to have
- whether you should homeschool your children
or send them to public school

The things you'll read in this book are all things we've struggled with, or are currently struggling with. Kristin and I bring them to you humbly, in hopes that they will challenge and encourage you, and bring glory to our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Family Idolatry and Other Household Gods

You shall have no other gods before me.

— EXODUS 20:3

If you lined up, side by side, every printed, photographic evangelical Christmas card, they would wrap around the globe three times. You know the cards I'm referring to. In the South, the Beautiful Family is all adorned in the same khaki pants, blue dress shirts, and yellow ties. Dresses for the ladies. Up north, it's a bit more casual, and by casual I mean everyone is wearing matching jeans and fashionable white T-shirts or matching North Face jackets if the photo was taken in the cold. Sometimes the family dog is included.¹

If you lined up all these cards side by side, it would be mile after glorious mile of nice-looking, affluent, well-groomed, perfect-seeming families. Miles and miles of mountain scenes in the background (from our ski trip!) or ocean vistas in the background (we live in North Carolina!) or poor people in the background (we're missionaries and we have big hearts

if not a lot of money!). Miles and miles of less-than-engaging copy about how hubby's job is awesome, the kids are all getting straight As, Mom is *so busy* (but handling it well), and about the new bambino on the way (What a surprise! How will we deal with it?). The khaki pants alone would cover most of Europe and Asia. The accompanying letters would cover South America. The family dogs would cover Central America.

There's seemingly no end to how impressed we are with our own families, and how badly we want you to know about it.

As a group we book-purchasing evangelicals are, for the most part, a well-educated, affluent, and decent-looking lot. We clean up and photograph well. Our kids do well in school. And if we don't have all the money in the world then, hey, at least we have our Great Families, right? Well, not exactly.

The two of us grew up believing, albeit subconsciously, that being a good, successful Christian involves having a good, successful family. (Sound familiar, anyone?) Here are some of the lies we told ourselves:

- If I'm single, having a husband or wife will fulfill me and make life great.
- If I'm childless, having a child will fulfill me and make life great.
- If God loves me, He'll bless me with a family whose job it is to provide me with a nonstop cavalcade of Kodak moments and splendid memories.

In our experience many churches continue, year after year, to subconsciously sell these lies to their congregations. The stuff of our family fantasies includes an adoring, faithful spouse; attractive, obedient kids; people who depend on us, love us, give us a reason to get out of bed, and regularly stand up and sing our praises.

Many of us worship at the altar of The Perfect Family. It's worship at the altar of family that causes the mom in your women's Bible study to post the sixty-seventh photo of her daughter's birthday party on Facebook. It causes Dad to spend an additional thirty hours a week playing football with his son so his kid can get a college football scholarship. It's the reason for the magazine-quality family photos all over the house. Family is a prominent household god.

IDOLATRY DEFINED

All this talk of household gods can be confusing. How can something good (family, professional success, comfort) be something bad (an idol)?

In his great book *Counterfeit Gods*, author Timothy Keller defines an idol as “anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and your imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”² Our wise friend and counselor, Pat, has explained it to me this way: Anything we feel like we have a “right” to have is an idol (a loving spouse, healthy kids, sufficient income, a nice house, a good-paying job). Anything we feel we can't be happy without is an idol (more of the

same). Anything that, if lost, would cause utter despair (not sorrow, not pain, but despair—a sense that all is lost, God is cruel, you want to die).

Keller writes that “the human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, and even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them.”³

We look to our household gods to give us “significance and security, safety and fulfillment.” We elevate and worship them when they succeed at making us feel this way. When they don’t, we feel devastated and personally affronted or shafted by God, as though *The Perfect Family*, *The Perfect Job*, *The Perfect House*, and so on were our birthright as Christians. And when I say “we” I mean “I.”

Of all the household gods, family idolatry is the most tricky to identify because of the value the Bible places on family. The family is the building block of a moral society. It is a hedge of protection for the vulnerable children and women of that society. The Bible talks a lot about what a blessing a godly spouse⁴ and a house full of children⁵ are, and it has a lot of directives on how to keep those relationships healthy and godly.⁶ Parents are charged with the precious task of directing and guiding our children’s hearts toward God, so it is easy to think of family as an unqualified good. “Family values” is practically synonymous with “Orthodox Christian.”

Family is a good gift from God, and we are right to love, cherish, and protect it from harm. We are right to grieve when we lose a family member, when we see a disabled child who cannot fully experience life, or when we experience a broken relationship. These tragedies are all evidence of sin in our world, and it is right to grieve them and to rage against the sin that has marred God's beautiful creation. But at some point, even without realizing it, we can cross a line with our love and cherishing and protecting. We cross the line into idolatry when we begin to love the gifts God has given us more than we love Him. When we rage at Him and question Him if things go wrong in our families. Idolatry is a matter of the heart.

WHY THIS BOOK?

Writing a book about household gods is tough, because in order to be good, it *has* to be honest. In order to have a shot at being interesting, it has to be honest. I think, personally, in order to be a Christian book about idolatry and family, it has to be honest. There are droves of family books, some of them even good, that say all the right things and make the author look like a big sweetie. I could write a book about "dating my wife" or raising a little Christian knight that would make me look like a real swell husband or a real amazing dad. Probably all of my male readers would roll their eyes and secretly hate me. I wouldn't blame them. I've secretly hated Christian authors like that for years.

If this introduction introduces nothing else, let it introduce this: I'm not that author (nor is Kristin). I'm a sinner

in specific and hurtful ways, and I'm sometimes a jerk to my family. On these pages I've written about the different household gods we've worshipped—not as a means of glorifying our sinfulness, but as a means of exposing it and thanking God for His grace and sanctifying work. Before nearly every book I tell Kristin, “This is probably going to be my last book,” because I'm convinced that people will hate it and I'll never get another opportunity to write. I'm sure some people will hate this one because it exposes and challenges some idols that many of us hold dear.

Still, the idea of discovering, naming, and outing new sins seems to be a particular passion in the particular sub-subculture (Young Reformeddom) that I'm in. We like the idea of being tough on sin and, as such, have made it our goal to discover and name new sins in the same way that astronomers used to discover and name new stars.⁷ I hope and pray that this won't be “that” kind of book. I hope that we can teach through our stories, come alongside you in your struggles, and reach for the Cross together.

In the midst of a Christian subculture that idolizes the family, an evangelical history that overcelebrated it, and a secular culture that overprograms it, it is easy for well-meaning Christians to cross over the line into family idolatry. Kristin and I know, because that has certainly been the case for us. This book isn't meant to judge. It isn't written to crack wise about the latest evangelical trends. We want to share with you the idols that have been exposed in our lives with the hope of helping you identify some of your own.

We will examine the culture that spawned family idolatry and also share with you the steps we have taken to adjust our perspective, flee this and other household gods, and escape to the Cross. The first few chapters will focus specifically on family idolatry, and then we will move on to talk about household gods that arise within the context of family.

A word about how this book is structured: I write the majority of the material, and Kristin chimes in whenever she has something to say. Her stuff is in a different font and preceded by her name. We didn't feel the need or compulsion to shoehorn her into every chapter because that (formulaity, shoehorning, and so on) is part of what's wrong with this industry, in our humble (or, more accurately, not-so-humble) opinions.

This book is for friends, for family, and for us. For people who search for their identities on Little League fields, or who feel like they're failing, silently, in church pews. This is a book for anyone who's ever looked at the day-to-day life of their family, felt it's out of control—felt that priorities and focuses weren't quite right—and wanted to change, but didn't know how. It's for people who love their family, but perhaps have elevated that love higher than it should be. It's for anyone who feels like all they do is compete—at sports, at academics, and at the arts. And it's a book for those who are interested in reclaiming the humble joy of and proper perspective on life, particularly when it comes to family.

Matthew 5:4 reads, "Blessed are those who mourn." Kristin and I mourn and grieve our sins. We have struggled—and

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still struggle—with many of these household gods. We write this book from a fundamental position of poverty of spirit (Matthew 5:3). We invite you to be impoverished with us, and then invite you to gaze at our Redeemer by repenting and feeling God's mercy.

CHAPTER 1

Spawning Family Idolatry

It is difficult to question anyone who explains that he wants a certain position of authority because God plans to use him in it (which is why this problem is so difficult to deal with).

— CHERYL FORBES, *THE RELIGION OF POWER*

“Everybody in our church growing up had a big family . . . usually seven to ten kids . . . always homeschooled . . . and there was the pressure that all of those kids would be perfect and that, as a family, we’d all have some skill like singing together or drama,” explains my friend about growing up in what sounds like a strange, burlap-jumpsuited, evangelical re-creation of *The Brady Bunch*, *The Partridge Family*, and *The Sound of Music*.

My friend is in his early thirties. Married. A father of two. An avid pickup basketball player. An excellent public school

English teacher. A lover of books, Scripture, and the gospel. All of that to say he's remarkably, or perhaps unremarkably, normal. We invited his wife and him over because they are, to our knowledge, the only other couple in our church who aren't homeschooling. That makes them, potentially, prime friend material, being that homeschooling is the tie that binds people socially in our church.

"We didn't watch television, didn't watch movies, and couldn't listen to music with drums. We didn't date, we courted, which of course makes it more spiritual and of course makes it better," he says with a chuckle. It's the kind of chuckle that acknowledges the weirdness, but in a nonbitter way. "In our cult¹ it was normal to be disdainful and wary of things like the government, college, and especially women who had jobs outside the home. It was normal to want to grow your own food, make your own clothes, and be 'self-sustaining.'"

What he's describing is a version of Christian life in which the Christian family is, ideally, sequestered or cut off from the culture at large and is a self-sustaining, apprenticeship-generating, college-disdaining, government-distrusting unit. It's a version of family that takes seriously the verse that says "be fruitful, and multiply"² but often seems to disregard Scriptures on being salt and light in the world and not hiding your light under a bushel.³

At some point over pizza it occurs to us that what my friend has been describing sounds eerily familiar to the de facto dominant subculture in conservative evangelicalism, at least in the Midwest, where we are. The disdain for

government, the emphasis on family, and the “circling the wagons” mentality are all points of overlap.

“That sounds like what’s popular now,” I say, to no one in particular.

In *The Pursuit of God* A.W. Tozer wrote, “We imitate each other with slavish devotion. Our most strenuous efforts are put forth to try to say the same thing that everyone around us is saying—and yet to find an excuse for saying it, some little variation on the approved theme or, if no more, at least a new illustration.”⁴ Tozer could have been writing in direct, critical response to today’s evangelical blogosphere or church culture, except that he penned that particular sentence around 1948, proving at some level that there is nothing new under the sun.

Wrote Janet Fishburn in 1991’s *Confronting the Idolatry of Family*:

*A mother knew she was a success if her children followed the prescribed pattern. Her crowning achievement was visible whenever the family was together again—at worship in the “family pew.” Though parents might have been unhappy knowing that some of the younger generation were there under duress, it did not matter a great deal. The important thing was that they were there.*⁵

This definitely squares with Kristin’s description of her upbringing, which was in many ways easy and idyllic, as her parents were on staff with one of the 1980s prominent family ministries in evangelicalism. Being, though, that their family

was essentially her parents' "product," Kristin felt a great deal of pressure when she was trotted out in front of supporting churches on the family's annual summer support-gathering tours.⁶ In her teenage years, grappling with questions of the faith seemed to take a distant backseat to looking right and saying the right things in front of people who mattered (read: supporters). This bothered her, and still does.

LEGALISM'S APPEAL

Why is slipping into law-based Christianity, fakery, and group-think appealing to so many? Especially in a family context?

It's appealing because legalism makes following Christ easy, because it takes critical thinking and discernment out of the equation. Instead of studying Scripture, seeking God for comfort and counsel, and listening to the Holy Spirit in the midst of life's struggles, we can look to religious leaders for the answers. For example, Bill Gothard sold the dream of having an "ATI" family, which is about as eighties and corporate as it sounds. ATI stands for "Advanced Training Institute"—it provides training seminars for doctors, lawyers, teens, and families and includes life training on everything from what kind of a girl to marry to how to buy makeup to how to stand around as a guy when you're, well, standing around (seriously).⁷ No area of life has gone uncommented upon by Gothard's company.

It's this—the commenting upon of certain areas of life that fall outside of biblical directives (example: Paul didn't write another letter to the Ephesians telling them how to

tuck in their shirts or how to stand around⁸)—that resulted in the rampant legalism that ruined lots of kids’ Christian school experiences in the eighties and homeschool experiences in the nineties, after God’s explicit plan for education became homeschooling and not Christian schooling.

My friend, by the grace of God, has ended up remarkably normal and cool.

THE PROBLEM OF SIN

It’s worth noting that we can’t blame our family of origin, or Bill Gothard, or even trendiness for family idolatry. While Kristin and I somehow latched on to the 1990s ethic of “if something is really popular it must be bad,”⁹ we recognize that family idolatry didn’t start in the 1980s and certainly not with Gothard. And it’s not finding its apex in today’s large-family-homeschool-dominant culture. So the problem isn’t cultural trends. The problem is sin, and the problem is me.

Paul wrote in Romans 3 that “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin,”¹⁰ and that “there is no one righteous, not even one,”¹¹ and later “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹² The problem is that, although I mean well, my motives are inherently flawed. I want my kids to make me look great. I want all of my decisions about family size and schooling to turn out great so that I look good.

I need God’s help to recognize these idolatries, confess them, and fight them. Paul captured this with brutal clarity

in Romans 7:24-25, when he wrote, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

EVERYWHERE PRESENT

To be fair, family idolatry is not solely an evangelical problem. We see it in our own fairly average suburb. We see it every time we go to a ball game or performing arts event that our kids are involved in. We see it every time we spot a fifth grader’s name and number emblazoned on the back of his mother’s sweatshirt¹³ in the stands of a peewee football game. We see it in every harried family taking different cars in different directions to different sports practices only to reconnect at the end of the night to collapse into bed. We see it in our own hearts when we’re disappointed that *our* child may not be the star.

We see it in the financial product advertisements that suggest that if we aren’t building a financial fortress for our children and grandchildren, we’re not doing right by them. We see it in the ads that suggest that if I don’t buy my wife the hearts-on-fire pendant or tennis bracelet, I may not get the warm, suggestive television embrace that must mean that she really does love me.

We see it in the commercials that suggest that if we *really* love our children we’d buy the car with the extra air bags, or we’d start saving for college, or we’d take them to Disneyland

where we could engineer a childhood's worth of family memories for the cost of airfare and a hotel suite.

I'm saying that—Christian and secular—we're all in danger of getting the value of family horribly wrong. So how do we stem the tide? How do we protect our hearts from something that, on the surface, seems so good, and is even celebrated and subtly encouraged?

It starts with searching our own hearts and our own motives, and with a healthy recognition of who we are without Christ, which is to say that we are “dead in [our] transgressions and sins.”¹⁴ Even if we look good and have reasonably well-behaved kids, we're still dead in our sins apart from Christ. It starts with a call to think more deeply about the things we want and why we want them. It starts with a willingness to indict ourselves, which can be one of the hardest things in the world to do.

≡ *From Kristin* ≡

Imagine the kind of women's Bible study/gab session/hen party that happens all across the country. Imagine a little urn of coffee in the corner. Imagine danishes. Imagine name tags. Imagine a full-to-bursting lactation room around the corner. Imagine that the leader of said study asks, as she always does, “Tell us a little about yourselves!”

Gag. Cue family idolatry. As the dreaded Infertile Woman, I hate this part of these studies the most. The part where the woman in the fashionable jeans and faux-hippie dress exclaims, “I have five beautiful, healthy kids

and I'm so blessed!" The part where the woman in the college hoodie says, "I've been married to my husband for ten years, and he's my knight in shining armor." The part where the overly enthusiastic leader then claps, middle-school-cheerleader-style (fingertips up and together), and says, "Yay!"

This is the part where I deflate and wonder how I'm going to deal with my own family-idolatry issues. This is where I wonder if I'm the problem, or if our culture is the problem. This is the part where I want to run away.