

THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR?

The People-Pleaser Trap

"It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you, but if you trust the Lord, you are safe." **PROVERBS 29:25 (TEV)**

"I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant."
GALATIANS 1:10 (NLT)

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WHOSE APPROVAL ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

Because God wired us for relationships, each of us carries a desire to be loved, to be valued, and to be appreciated. We long to feel accepted and approved by others. This *longing for belonging, the desire to “fit in”* and feel connected to others, is the driving force behind many of the choices we make. In both small choices, like the clothes we wear or the style of our hair, and in major decisions such as where we live and work, what other people think has a greater influence on us than we are aware of.

There is nothing wrong with our desire to be accepted, appreciated, and approved by other people. In fact, without the affirmation of others we never fully blossom into our full potential. Our growth is stunted. We can only become what God created us to be *with the help of others*.

Encouragement is absolutely essential to your spiritual health and development.

But as with all of the healthy and good desires God puts in our hearts, the desire for approval can be misused, abused, and confused. It can become an obsession that dominates our life and a fear that destroys our soul. Like a flesh-eating bacteria, *the disease to please* can consume all our time, energy, and happiness. The American actor Bill Cosby once said, “I do not know the key to success, but I do know that the way to fail is to try to please everyone.”

People-pleasing is the flip side of envy. Envy says, “I must be *like you* to be happy!” People-pleasing says, “I must be *liked BY you* to be happy.” Both traps will prevent us from living a purpose driven life for God’s glory.

The dark side of the desire for approval is the fear of disapproval. After talking with people living in over a hundred different countries, I have come to believe that fear of being criticized or rejected by others is the most common reason people get detoured from the path God planned for them. “But what will other people think?”

What if – dislike the changes you make?

What if – criticize what you say or do?

What if – make fun of what you believe?

This fear of rejection is often such an overwhelming force that we back away from what we know is the right thing to do. It is why peer-pressure is so effective in controlling what we do and say.

Of course, the Bible repeatedly commands us to be considerate of other's feelings. In matters of behavior where God allows great freedom, *"We may know that these things make no difference, but we cannot just go ahead and do them to please ourselves. We must be considerate of the doubts and fears of those who think these things are wrong."* It is unloving to ignore how our choices affect others. Paul reminds us, *"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone."*

But the Bible also warns us not to let the fear of disapproval keep us from doing what we know God wants us to do. **Proverbs 29:25** says, *"It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you."* Another translation of this verse says, *"Fearing people is a dangerous trap."*

The people-pleaser trap is baited with a lie. The lie is this: "If I can just get everyone to like me, then I'll be happy!" But that lie will only make us miserable. We cannot live under the constant stress of worrying about what others think of us. the Bible says, *"Too much honey is bad for you, and so is trying to win too much praise."*

The Dangers of People-Pleasing

Let me share **five** harmful effects of letting other people's approval or disapproval determine what you do with your life.

***People-pleasing will cause me to miss God's will for my life.** Remember, God didn't create you to fulfill the expectations of others! God's Word is unmistakably clear: *"Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts."* Note that God inspects and tests "the motives of our hearts." God is always more interested in *why* you do what you do rather than where or how you do it. You can do all kinds of good work, but if your motive is just to impress others, gain recognition, or avoid their disapproval, you miss the point of doing good. The expectations of others will box you in, limit your potential, and keep you from fulfilling the dream God placed in your heart to fulfill.

***People-pleasing prevents my faith from growing.** The fear of disapproval keeps me from taking risks in faith. The Bible says, *"You try to get praise from each other, but you do not try to get the praise that comes from the only God. So how can you believe?"* **Never allow anyone else to stand in the way of your relationship to Christ.**

People-pleasing is an emotional handicap. It immobilizes your potential. The Message paraphrase of **Proverbs 29:25** says, *"The fear of human opinion disables."*

Whose opinion matters *most* to you? Whoever that person is, is your god. When you value anyone's opinions more than God's, you give that person power and authority that belongs only to God. That creates all kinds of insecurity within you.

***People-pleasing leads me to other sins.** Scripture is filled with examples of people who did wrong because they gave in to peer pressure: 1. Reuben agreed to sell Joseph, his younger brother, into slavery because the other brothers pressured him. 2.

Aaron built a golden idol to worship when the people pressured him. 3. Samson broke his vow to God when his girlfriend pressured him. 4. Peter denied knowing Jesus when he feared what others might say. 5. And Pilate even though he knew Jesus had done nothing worthy of punishment, allowed Jesus to be crucified because he feared the disapproval of the crowd.

If you're honest, you can recall times when you have caved in to peer pressure the way these people did. Right now would be a great time to pause and confess your cowardice to God. Pray the words of King Saul, who said, *"I've sinned! I've trampled roughshod over God's Word and your instructions. I cared more about pleasing the people. I let them tell me what to do."*

Friends who discourage your walk with God are not true friends. *"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning."*

***People-pleasing causes hypocrisy.** The English word *hypocrite* comes from an ancient Greek word used to describe stage actors who played multiple roles in the same play by wearing different masks for different scenes. People-pleasers wear masks, and they switch roles, depending on the audience. They wear one mask at home, another mask at church, and an entirely different mask at work. They are hypocrites.

Jesus was referring to this kind of hypocrisy when he told the Pharisees, *"You are always making yourselves look good, but God sees what is in your heart. The things that most people think are important are worthless as far as God is concerned."*

***People-pleasing silences my life-message. Until you break free from the fear of disapproval, God can't use you the way he wants to.**

"No one had the courage to speak favorably about him [Jesus] in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the Jewish leaders." Later John wrote, "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities did believe in him. But they would not admit it for fear of the Pharisees, in case they should be excommunicated. They were more concerned to have the approval of men than to have the approval of God." If you are always reluctant to share your faith with others, you have a problem with people-pleasing. For the sake of others and their eternal destinies, you need to ask God to help you break free from the trap.

How to Break Free from the People-Pleaser Trap

What is the cure for approval addiction? How do we break out of the people-pleaser prison? Well, since this prison is mental, not physical, the solution is to change the way we think. **The Bible word for this mental shift is *repentance*.** We break free from the pressure to conform by having our thoughts transformed by God: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* So what does God use to transform our minds? The answer is *truth!* Cultural lies conform us, but eternal truths transform us.

***Remember that even God can't please everyone!** At every sporting event, fans on each side pray for their team to win. In every election, voters in each party pray that their candidates will win. Someone is always disappointed! Some days farmers are praying for rain while children are praying for sunshine. Other days, some people pray for snow while others pray for no snow. The list could go on and on. Even God can't please everybody. Only a fool would try to do what even God can't do. It is impossible to make everyone happy at the same time.

Jesus said, *"Woe to you when all men speak well of you!"*

***Remember that I don't need anyone's approval to be happy.** Happiness is a choice. You are as happy as you choose to be. What other people think of you cannot rob your happiness unless you allow them to rob it.

It is a fact of life that on our broken planet filled with broken people, there will always be those who will demean how you look, dislike what you do, disapprove of what you believe, dispute what you say, and disrespect who you are. But they cannot control your emotions unless you let them. Disapproval doesn't have to devastate you.

“If you haven't gotten their approval by now, you're not going to get it.

Instead of focusing on that unappeasable person, refocus on Jesus, who accepts you unconditionally.

Getting to know Jesus personally and intimately can free you from many things: the burden of guilt, the poison of resentment, the stress of overwork, the pressure of materialism, the habits of addiction, and the fear of death. But one of the greatest freedoms Jesus offers is being liberated from the fear of disapproval. That is a key to peace of mind.

If you are looking to *any* human being to either make you happy or keep you happy, you are going to be disappointed eventually. No human being has the capacity to meet all your needs and keep you constantly happy. Only God can meet all your needs.

The Bible says, *“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.”* This is a truth you can count on, a solid rock on which you can build your identity, your security, and your happiness.

***Remember that what seems so important now is only temporary.** In the light of eternity, what other people think of you right now isn't going to matter at all. In fact, it probably won't even matter in just a few years.

Everything around us today tells us that wealth, success, and fame will earn us the approval of others, but the truth is, none of these values will last. They are all temporary. God says, *"The world and everything in it that people desire is passing away; but those who do the will of God live forever."*

***Remember that I only have to please one person!**

The first two of the Ten Commandments are (1) "You must not have any other god but me," and (2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol of any kind." An idol is anything I put first in my life before God. If someone's approval matters more to me than God's, then that person has become an idol in my life. Jesus pointed out that it is impossible to have two gods in your life: *"No one can serve two masters."* You have to decide.

The reason Jesus was not swayed by criticism or the fear of rejection is that he lived for an audience of One. He said, *"I don't try to please myself, but I try to please the One who sent me."* To be like him, we must do the same.

***Remember that one day I will give an account of my life to God.** There will be a day of reckoning. The Bible says, *"Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God."* You're going to be asked for an explanation of everything you have said and everything you have done. That is a sobering thought!

But here's a question: Because of your fear of disapproval, have you been ashamed of Jesus? Remember, one day you will give an account to him, and Jesus has said, *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of*

him when he comes in his glory.” Will Jesus be ashamed of you one day because you were ashamed of him?

***Remember that God shaped me to be me, not somebody else.** This is the final truth to hold on to.

In these last two chapters I have explained the two biggest hindrances to living the life God designed you to live: Wanting to be like others (envy), and wanting to be like by others (people-pleasing.) **These traps are subtle, but they distract and detour millions of people from the purposes they were created to fulfill.**

My sincere prayer is that you will begin to experience all that God has in store for you. *“No mere man has ever seen, heard, or even imagined what wonderful things God has ready for those who love the Lord!”*

THINKING ABOUT MY PURPOSE

POINT TO PONDER: Happiness is my choice. I don't need anyone's approval to be happy.

VERSE TO REMEMBER: *“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.”* **Psalm 27:10 (NLT)**

QUESTION TO CONSIDER: Whose opinion matters most to me? Whose approval am I living for?

MESSAGE TO HEAR: www.purposedriven.com/day 42

