

Working Hard To Be Liked

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When I was in college, I spent my summers working for the local recreation department. The slogan of the recreation department at that time was “People Pleasing is Our Priority.” While this is a great slogan for marketing purposes, it is harmful to live our lives as people pleasers.

Many people consciously try to please loved ones or show others respect and honor through acts of service. Similarly some people are peacemakers and take a big picture view of life. These individuals usually do not become overly upset with disappointments and can tolerate criticism fairly well. This is different than being a people pleaser. People pleasers crave love and acceptance of others at the cost of their own personal identity. The real person becomes lost in the daze of *perceived* expectations.

People pleasers are overly sensitive to the opinion of others. They spend much time and energy trying to be the person they think others want them to be. In trying to achieve this, they often go to great lengths in order to gain the approval of others and to impress people. This often includes avoiding conflict at all costs. People pleasers frequently do not speak up for themselves but instead keep negative emotions inside. They often like to be in the background because they fear making a “wrong” decision and do not want to risk offending someone.

People pleasers often are perfectionists and hope that by being perfect or always being “good” and doing the “right” thing they will avoid disappointing others. Because none of us can be perfect and cannot “please all of the people all of the time” we all experience criticism and failure at times. For the people pleaser, criticism and failure are their worst fears. The negative comments are internalized to such a degree, people pleasers have a tendency to over generalize the comments and view themselves as being “bad.” They can become depressed or angry in reaction to the perceived rejection. Additionally, people pleasers spend much time comparing themselves to others. They feel emotionally “safe” when they perceive themselves to be better than others or “not as bad.” This desperation to please certainly gives way to pride.

Sadly, although much energy is expended in trying to please others and win their approval, people pleasers often feel alienated from others and ultimately from God. People pleasers idolize the praise of man. When they do not receive praise, they can become anxious and will attempt to change themselves in order to please and so the cycle continues.

The good news is that once this craving for acceptance and approval is recognized it can be changed! God is on our side. We can invite Jesus into our need for love and approval and ask Him to transform us and help us to have God

honoring and God pleasing priorities. When we prioritize pleasing God first, the depression, anxiety, and fear associated with trying to please people gives way to His grace and mercy. We then experience the freedom to be who God has called us to be.