

Are You A PEOPLE PLEASER?

by Joyce Meyer

Whatever may be your task, work at it heartily (from the soul), as [something done] for the Lord and not for men, knowing [with all certainty] that it is from the Lord [and not from men] that you will receive the inheritance which is your [real] reward. [The One Whom] you are actually serving [is] the Lord Christ (the Messiah).

—Colossians 3:23,24

One of the most freeing things that I have learned in my years of walking with the Lord is how to break free from being a people pleaser. Now, I am not talking about living a healthy, unselfish life where we make the needs of others a priority. I am talking about a pressure to perform—an unhealthy drive to be accepted and approved by others. It is a desire so strong that it influences and controls the majority of our decisions.

There are some individuals who have spent a good part of their lives trying to please other people, and as a result, they are unhappy, bitter, resentful and depressed. How other people think and feel about them has become so important that it is like an addiction affecting every part of who they are. The real tragedy is they don't know what is causing the problem.

How can you and I know if we are a people pleaser? There are some key signs that we want to take a look at. If you and I are not supposed to live to please people, who are we supposed to live to please?

ARE YOU HONEST WITH OTHERS?

One of the greatest signs of being a people pleaser is not being completely truthful with others about who we are. We say we like things we really don't like. We go places and say we are enjoying it, when in reality, it is the last place on earth we want to be. And we nod our heads in agreement to things we don't feel right about in our hearts. Instead of telling people the truth about our desires, feelings and thoughts, we develop a pattern of telling others what we think they want to hear in order to remain accepted. There are also times when people are dishonest about their true thoughts and feelings because they are trying to keep the other person "fixed" or happy. Whatever the reason, untruthfulness in relationships only leads to some kind of heartache.

Dave and I have four children and eight grandchildren, and in our family, we have an agreement to be open and honest with each other without getting angry. For instance, if my daughter Laura calls my daughter Sandra and asks, "Can you watch my kids tonight?" Sandra is free to be honest and say, "You know, Laura, I've had a really tiring day at home with the twins, and I'm just not up to watching them tonight." Although Laura may be disappointed, she is not going to get upset with Sandra or act aggravated or cold toward her. Instead, she would probably respond, "That's okay. I understand how you feel. With four kids, I have had my share of tiring days too." By not acting in anger, Laura lifts the pressure off Sandra, and the relationship between them remains peaceful.

Now, our family is not perfect, and we do have our trying moments. But for the most part we strive to follow what the Word says. Ephesians 4:15 says, *God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love...* (The Message). Verse 25 goes on to say we are to *...put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other* (NLT). And in Colossians 3:9, we are told, *Do not lie to one another, for you have stripped off the old (unregenerate) self with its evil practices*. I think it is pretty clear: God wants us to be truthful with each other at all times in a kind and considerate way.

DO YOU DO THINGS OUT OF DUTY OR DESIRE?

Another big indicator that we are people pleasers is that we do things out of a sense of *duty* instead of *desire*. In other words, we do something for someone because we feel obligated, or it is expected of us—we are afraid if we don't do it, others will get mad at us or think badly of us. But doing things because we feel forced to do them or are fearful of being rejected is doing things for the wrong reason.

Let me give you an example: During the holidays most of us spend time with our families. Years ago when our children were small, we had a tendency to run from house to house to house, trying to visit all of our family members on the same day. This was especially true on Christmas. To a great degree, we felt like it was a requirement we had to fulfill, and if we did not, somebody would get their feelings hurt. What happened as a result is that we really did not enjoy the holiday season.

Thankfully, Dave and I have made some adjustments over the years and changed our expectations. Our children are all grown and have families of their own, and to try and get everybody together in one place on the same day is difficult. It does happen sometimes, but if someone has other plans or is unable to make it, that is okay. I know some people who agree to alternate their holiday visits between their families. One year they choose to spend Thanksgiving with the wife's side of the family and Christmas with the husband's side. The next year, they do just the opposite. Other people visit one side of the family on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, and then a week later spend New Year's Day with the other side of the family. The point is, their visits are based out of desire instead of duty.

Now, please understand that we do not have to *want* to do everything we need to do. There are some things that we are required to do, and if we don't do them, problems develop. I may not want to or feel like cleaning my house, but if I never clean it, things will become disorganized, out of order, and very stressful. You and I may not want to do the laundry, but if we never do it, we will eventually run out of clothes to wear. So there is a balance in this area that God will help us find. We just need to remove the pressure and expectations from others so that they do not feel obligated to do something for us. In the same way, we need to get out from under the pressure and expectations of others to do something for them.

ARE YOU CONSTANTLY SACRIFICING YOUR OWN LEGITIMATE NEEDS?

The third major sign of being a people pleaser is always being quick to set aside our own genuine needs to meet the needs and wants of others. Each of us has legitimate needs to be loved, accepted and approved. We also have needs for things like attention, affection and rest. Constantly denying our genuine needs and doing things for everybody else will usually result in becoming bitter and resentful because we feel all used up.

I know a wonderful woman who loves the Lord and will do things for everybody else except herself. She takes care of the needs of her husband, her children and her church family, but she will not take care of her own. She maintains the attitude, "No, I don't need anything. I can do without." But she ends up with a bad attitude. This is not healthy and is often the reason why many Christians experience burnout.

Yes, the Bible does say we are to live a life of self-denial and even put the needs of others before our own. However, if we are *always* denying our own needs and *always* putting the needs of others before our own, we are out of balance. Being out of balance opens the door for the enemy to wreak havoc in our lives (see 1 Peter 5:8).

Before I began a serious relationship with God, my attitude and way of thinking was, *If I don't take care of myself, nobody else will*. Then when I became a committed Christian, my thinking changed to, *I will sacrifice everything—including my own legitimate needs for rest, fun and friends—all for the sake of the call*. But after I pushed myself beyond my personal limits and got physically sick on at least three occasions, I realized I could no longer neglect my legitimate needs. Since then, God has helped me find and maintain a balance between caring for the needs of others and not neglecting my own. And He will do the same for you.

HOW CAN YOU OVERCOME BEING A PEOPLE PLEASER?

There is only one remedy I know of to avoid being a people pleaser and that is learning to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in all we do. That is one of the most exciting things about being a Christian. As

believers, the Holy Spirit lives inside us. He desires to lead us in everything we do, from how we handle our finances, to the type of job we have, to the house we live in, to what we do or don't do for others. He does not want to just be involved with the spiritual side of our lives; He wants to be involved with the natural side of our lives too.

I love what Romans 7:6 says: *But now we are discharged from the Law and have terminated all intercourse with it, having died to what once restrained and held us captive. So **now we serve not under [obedience to] the old code of written regulations, but [under obedience to the promptings] of the Spirit in newness [of life].*** What Paul is saying is, when we follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we experience newness of life—peace, joy and contentment—that cannot be experienced when we live under the “shoulds,” the “oughts,” the obligations and the expectations of being a people pleaser.

What is the leading of the Holy Spirit? For the most part, it is having an inner peace about doing something. Colossians 3:15 says, *And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (**act as umpire continually**) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds...].* In other words, if we have peace in our spirits about doing something or not doing something, we can know the Lord is in the decision. If we do not have peace in our spirits about doing something or not doing something, then it is a good indicator that God is not leading that decision.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO ONE THING...

Motives... Why are we doing (or not doing) something? Are we being motivated by fear, personal gain or a sense of obligation? Are we being motivated by a desire to be in control, accepted or seen? These are all the wrong reasons for doing something. Our motive for doing anything should always be because God has prompted us and we want to please Him. Following the leading of the Holy Spirit means we are motivated by the fruit of the Holy Spirit, such as love, kindness and goodness. What the Spirit leads us to do or not do, He will give us a peace about.

Remember, whatever you and I do, if we will do it as unto the Lord, our lives and the lives of others will be blessed. If you help a family member, do it as unto the Lord. If you visit with relatives, do it as unto the Lord. If you work in the nursery at church, do it as unto the Lord. If you are getting dressed, washing the dishes, driving to work, cutting the grass, or going to the grocery store, do it as unto the Lord. In other words, with everything you do, do it with the motive of pleasing God. The result will be a new measure of joy and enthusiasm in your life—even in the everyday, ordinary things.

I encourage you to shake off the way people think or feel about you and just begin to do what you feel God wants you to do. If you need strength in this area, and I think we all do, pray and ask the Lord for His grace to follow after His voice instead of the pressures and demands of others. *That you may walk (live and conduct yourselves) in a manner worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing to Him and desiring to please Him in all things**...*(Colossians 1:10).