

The Approval Trap: Living to Keep People Happy

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1. The problem of people pleasing

2. The sponge and the fig

3. People pleasing through the story of scripture

4. Moving from people focussed pleasing to God dependent love

	Situation
	Response
	The Heart
	The Lord

Portraits of people pleasing

1. Alexandra has always been responsible. She is the oldest sister and has gone through life collecting responsibilities because she always rises to the challenge. She is now a mum of four teenagers and every day after school she is busy driving them around to their sports clubs and cooking huge meals for them all. Life is busy and she works in her local GP surgery as a nurse while the kids are in school. She is an established member of the pastoral team at church and takes these duties very seriously. When the children were smaller, she would often have people from church or school back for a meal or to hang out for the day. As the kids got older, she carried on with this and still has people over every weekend and for lunch on her day off from work. Sunday is an intense day while people queue up to talk to her after the service. She sometimes wishes she had a bit more space, time or energy left for the people who live in her own home. Often by Sunday evening she is feeling fragile, exhausted and tearful. Last Sunday she couldn't stop crying when she thought of the week ahead.
2. Ben grew up in an unhappy home; his mother experienced seasons of depression and for months at a time the whole family had to tread on eggshells to keep the equilibrium. Ben knew his job was to keep the peace and to hold things together. He stayed at home through most of his 20s and 30s because he could see that his Dad couldn't manage things when he was away. Despite this tension, he got a good job and was promoted several times in quick succession. His colleagues like him and think of him as easy going and generous. Ben is usually first in and last out of the office, and he picks up the slack when others don't meet deadlines. Everyone defers to him, and although he likes his colleagues, he feels increasingly frustrated that everything is falling on his shoulders. Outside of work, Ben doesn't seem to have time for his hobbies anymore. His church attendance has become mechanical rather than joyful. Ben hasn't taken a holiday in months and now he worries that if he stops, he will be so exhausted he won't be able to enjoy it.

	Goal	Looks like	Flows from	Leads to
People focussed pleasing: Like a sponge	<p>Making everyone happy</p> <p>Keeping conflict at bay</p> <p>An easy life</p> <p>Personal glory</p>	<p>Making decisions based on the loudest demands</p> <p>Busy service/ministry</p> <p>Anger when others don't meet your expectations</p> <p>Frustration with others for not pulling their weight</p> <p>Not "rocking the boat"</p> <p>Appeasing and pleasing people</p> <p>Stepping in to rescue/ saying yes without prayer</p>	<p>Pragmatism- this is the easiest way to get things done</p> <p>Heroism- I can help and I will save them</p> <p>Shame -hidden beliefs that I matter less than others</p> <p>Independence- I have had to rely on myself, so I will carry on doing that</p> <p>A need for approval- that is ultimately self-serving</p> <p>A concern for myself- wanting praise, adulation, leverage, opportunities, love</p>	<p>Exhaustion</p> <p>Anxiety</p> <p>Frustration</p> <p>Burnout</p> <p>Strained relationships</p> <p>Superficial relationships</p> <p>Spiritual stagnation</p> <p>Anger</p>
God dependent love: Like a fig	<p>Goals are aligned with Christ's</p> <p>God getting the glory</p> <p>Helping others to find joy in Christ not in people</p> <p>Transformation for me and for them</p>	<p>Messier relationships with conflict and time taken to resolve things</p> <p>Willingness to disappoint people when needed</p> <p>Not doing everything that other people want</p> <p>Not making other people immediately feel happy.</p>	<p>Union with Christ- Christ abides in me and I in him so my agenda is his. (<i>John 15:4</i>)</p> <p>Prayer and humility- I am not self-contained, I need God and I need others. (<i>Proverbs 3:5</i>)</p> <p>Dependence- on the body of Christ. (<i>Ephesians 4:15</i>)</p> <p>Love- Jesus has loved me so much that my identity is secure in him. (<i>John 13:34-35</i>)</p> <p>Patience- God's way in this relationship might be messy and time consuming. (<i>Colossians 3:12</i>)</p>	<p>Peace with God and with others. (<i>John 14:27</i>)</p> <p>Openness with God and with others. (<i>James 5:16a</i>)</p> <p>Intimacy with God and with others. (<i>Psalms 73:28</i>)</p> <p>Joy in the Lord and with others. <i>The joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10b)</i></p> <p>Freedom from preoccupation with myself. (<i>Psalms 63:3</i>)</p> <p>Prayerful dependence on God. (<i>Isaiah 26:4</i>)</p>