

Seminar

The Approval Trap



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Today

1. The problem of people pleasing
2. The sponge and the fig
3. People pleasing through the story of scripture
4. Moving from people focused pleasing to God dependent love

Matthew 22:34-40

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

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1. The problem of people pleasing

Discuss

1. What jumps out to you from these portraits?
2. Where do you see yourself?
3. Where do you see people focused pleasing instead of God dependent love?

2. The sponge and the fig



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Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

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People focussed pleasing: Like a sponge

| Goal | Looks like | Flows from | Leads to |
|-------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| Making everyone happy | Making decisions based on the loudest demands | Pragmatism- this is the easiest way to get things done | Exhaustion |
| Keeping conflict at bay | Busy service/ministry | Heroism- I can help and I will save them | Anxiety |
| An easy life | Anger when others don't meet your expectations | Shame -hidden beliefs that I matter less than others | Frustration |
| Personal glory | Frustration with others for not pulling their weight | Independence- I have had to rely on myself, so I will carry on doing that | Burnout |
| | Not "rocking the boat" | A need for approval- that is ultimately self-serving | Strained relationships |
| | Appeasing and pleasing people | A concern for myself-wanting praise, adulation, leverage, opportunities, love | Superficial relationships |
| | Stepping in to rescue/ saying yes without prayer | | Spiritual stagnation |
| | | | Anger |

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| | Goal | Looks like | Flows from | Leads to |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| God dependent love : Like a fig | Goals are aligned with Christ's | Messier relationships with conflict and time taken to resolve things | Union with Christ- Christ abides in me and I in him so my agenda is his. <i>(John 15:4)</i> . | Peace with God and with others. <i>(John 14:27)</i> . |
| | God getting the glory | Willingness to disappoint people when needed | Prayer and humility- I am not self-contained, I need God and I need others. <i>(Proverbs 3:5)</i> . | Openness with God and with others. <i>(James 5:16a)</i> . |
| | Helping others to find joy in Christ not in people | Not doing everything that other people want | Dependence- on the body of Christ. <i>(Ephesians 4:15)</i> . | Intimacy with God and with others. <i>(Psalm 73:28)</i> . |
| | Transformation for me and for them | Not making other people immediately feel happy | Love- Jesus has loved me so much that my identity is secure in him. <i>(John 13:34-35)</i> . | Joy in the Lord and with others. <i>(Nehemiah 8:10b)</i> . |
| | | | Patience- God's way in this relationship might be messy and time consuming. <i>(Colossians 3:12)</i> . | Freedom from preoccupation with myself. <i>(Psalm 63:3)</i> . |
| | | | | Prayerful dependence on God. <i>(Isaiah 26:4)</i> . |

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3. People pleasing through the story of scripture

Creation

Fall

Redemption

Consummation

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Creation: we were made to please the Lord

Fall: people focussed pleasing flows from Adam and infects us all

Redemption: Christ is the only human who displays God dependent love. His words and work lead to our salvation from people focussed pleasing and connect us to him in God dependent love.

Consummation: Our union with Christ leads to our growth in God dependent love.

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Our union with Christ leads to.....

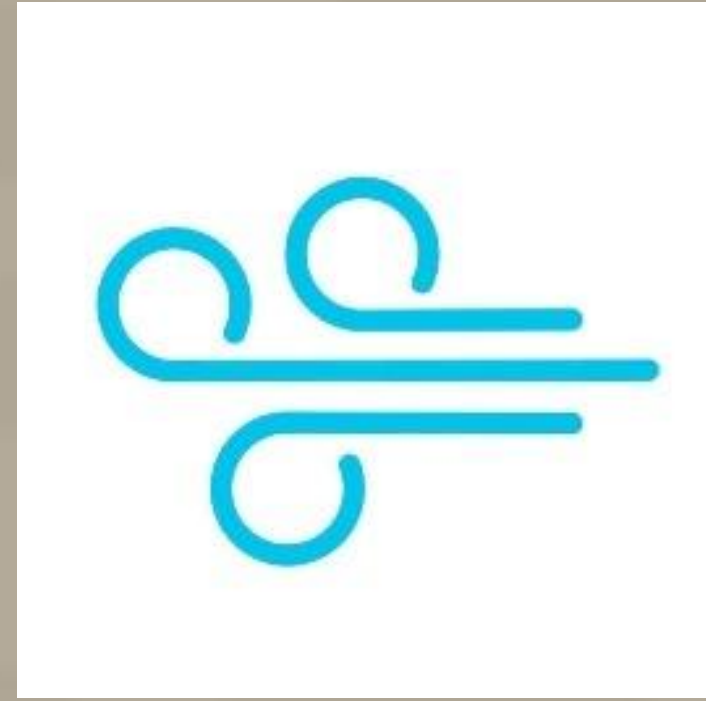
Love

Growth- in need

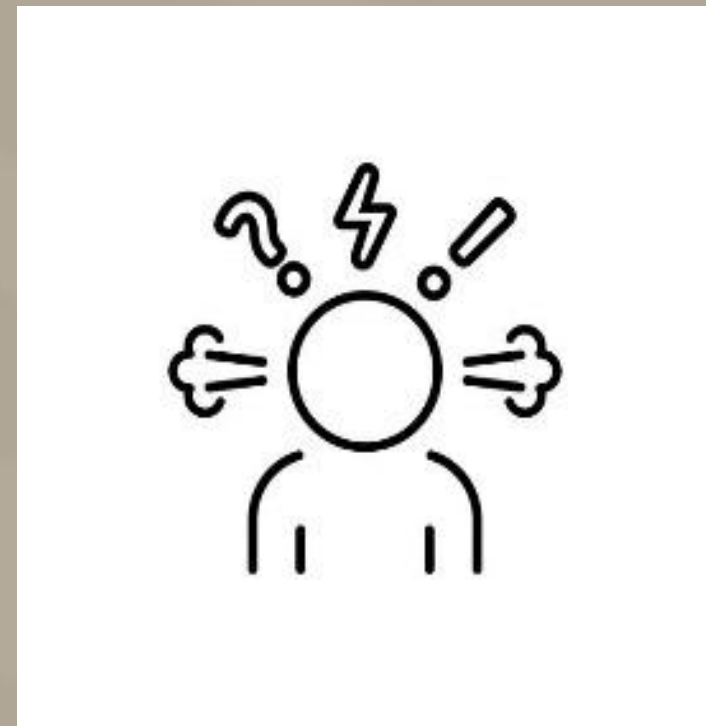
- in grace

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4. Moving from people focused pleasing to God dependent love



Situation



Response



Heart



The Lord

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Remember what a life of unquietness and continual vexation you choose, if you place your peace or happiness in the good will or word of man. For having showed you how impossible a task you undertake, it must needs follow that the pursuit of it must be a life of torment.

Baxter from "Directions Against Inordinate Man-pleasing"

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**Be still my soul, the Lord is on your side
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain
Leave to your God to order and provide
In every change he faithful will remain
Be still my soul, your saviour and your friend
Will lead you safe, until a joyful end.**

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**Be still my soul, your God will undertake
to guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still my soul, the wind and waves will know
His voice who ruled while he was here below.**

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**Be still my soul, the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored
Be still my soul, when change and tears are past
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.**

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