

## Letting Go To Be Set Free!! Letting Go of People Pleasing February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Christian author, **Sharon Miller**, writes: *“For all my life, as long as I can remember, I have been a nice Christian girl. Whether a tadpole of a first grader, a teeth-and-elbows middle schooler, or a success-driven high schooler, I was always a rule-follower, a church-goer, an academic achiever, and of course, a consummate people-pleaser.*

*I ran my life on the straight and narrow, and I was delighted to do it. My teachers praised me, my parents trusted me, my pastors affirmed me, and I loved every bit of it. The world was a friendly place to a kid like me.*

*But here is the thing about “nice Christian girls” – there is a special temptation that faces us. Being a nice Christian girl earned me acceptance and praise, but somewhere along the way that praise got tangled up with my identity.*

*It wasn’t very long before I needed the praise, and the line between doing good for goodness’ sake, and doing good for appearance’s sake, became increasingly blurry. I wasn’t sure if I was nice because of Jesus’ call, or because I so desperately needed the approval.*

*Over time, my self-image had soured and decayed into a shallow habit of pleasing, but this story is not actually about that.*

*This is not a story about needing to be praised, and this is not a story about my fragile self-esteem.*

*This is the story of what I discovered underneath my need to be liked, how people pleasing is a symptom of deeper sickness. The thing about people pleasing is that it seems so “others focused,” but really, it’s just about you. You want people to think well of you. You want people to say nice things about you. You help and you do favors and you struggle to say no, because you don’t want people to be mad at you.*

*Yes, your self-confidence hinges on the well being of others, but at the end of the day, people-pleasing is in service to yourself. People-pleasing – even the Christian kind – is ultimately about you. And soon “you” becomes your focus. Your reason. Your motivation.*

*That is my story. The seemingly benign desire to be a nice Christian girl had planted seeds, and put down roots, which grew into a pernicious self-focus. What appeared to be Christ-centered was, at its core self-centered. My problem wasn’t people pleasing. My problem was self-focus.*

*What I needed more than high self-esteem, or the freedom from what people thought of me, was to focus on myself less and to focus on Christ more. Your life is not about you. Your family, your calling, your appearance, your faith, is not, at bottom, about you. It’s about Him!”*

It’s a tough life living as a people-pleaser. And it’s quite prevalent in many people – especially Christians, because we often develop this perception that it would be mean and unChrist-like to ever say no to someone. So, we often live life saying “Yes” to people and regretting it later, but we keep on doing it because it’s what good Christians should do.

**Lysa TerKeurst** in her popular book, **UnGlued**, talks about this very personal struggle in her own life. She says: *“Hello, my name is Lysa and I want people to like me. So, I will sometimes say yes when I really want to say no. And when I do say no, I sometimes worry about how much I’m disappointing that person. Part of my DNA is to love others. But I worry about disappointing them. Real love pursues authenticity rather than chasing acceptance.”*

In her attempt to break free from this unhealthy approach to others she’s learned and implemented the following guidelines.

1. **I am going to disappoint someone.** Every no carries with it the potential for disappointing someone.
2. **I’ve learned to say thank you for asking me.** *My heart says yes, yes, yes – but the reality of my time says no.*

3. **I take peace with the fact that some people won't like me.** In an effort to keep my life balanced, I will have to say no to many things. If someone stops liking me for saying no they'll eventually stop liking me even if I say yes right now.

This morning I'm beginning a new preaching series entitled, "**Letting Go To Be Set Free**". This series will take us all the way up to Easter. While during the observance of Lent, many Christians observe the discipline of fasting (giving up various things – like caffeine, or certain types of food or pop or TV or social media etc.), I'd like to offer you up 6 things that are worthwhile giving up, not just for the next 6 weeks but for the rest of your life. These are things that as Christians we so easily allow to become part of our lives, but in reality should not be.

These topics will include giving up

- Giving up the mentality of **Entitlement**,
- Giving up the Spirit of **Poverty**,
- Giving up a life of **Mediocrity**,
- Giving up a **small view of God** and
- Giving up a life of **self-sufficiency**.

This morning, I want to begin this series by focusing on the topic of **people pleasing**. A trap that most of us at one point or another have been sucked in to. And like I said earlier, I think Christians are particularly vulnerable to this because we struggle with doing the unloving thing by ever saying "No". And yet by continually saying YES to someone else's needs you are at the same time saying NO to your own needs or to your families needs or even to God.

### **Problems with People-pleasing:**

#### **1. It can actually be a form of idolatry.**

Because rather than seeking God's will and wisdom on how you should respond – you immediately say YES, and after awhile, you can become burned out with all of the YES's you've agreed to. And you can become so busy helping everyone else out that you don't have time to rest in the Lord.

#### **2. Your goal can become keeping everyone happy.**

You might think – what's wrong with that? But what if God, wants to grow someone through the struggles in their life? Then you're eliminating God's means to grow them. You're taking over for God and declaring you know what's best for them and it's a life free from problems.

#### **3. You are afraid of what others will think if you say "No".**

Often part of the motivation in helping others is that they don't want anyone to think poorly of us. And yet, is God's calling on your life to make everyone like you?

Often people pleasers were taught at an early age that people will love you if you help them but won't love you if you don't. It's an entirely works based acceptance and love. The result is that you live your life craving the love of others and will practically burn yourself out trying to earn their love. This is an extremely dangerous slope to try to live on, because then you feel let down and disillusioned if you help someone and they don't heap an inordinate amount of praise on you afterwards.

#### **4. It will keep you from sharing your faith**

You don't share your faith because you're concerned about someone not liking you.

**John 12:42-43 (NIV)** *Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in Jesus. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.*

If you're more in love with getting people to praise you than God then Satan can have a hey day with you. He'll bring more needy people into your life and keep you busy meeting their needs and you'll end up feeling emotionally and spiritually drained and you'll slowly drift away from God.

## Key Truths to Ponder:

### 1. Neither you nor God can please everyone

Constantly in the world people are praying for opposite things. Some people want snow and others want clear streets and sidewalks. Some people want cold and others want warmth. Some people want one team to win and others want the opposite team to win. Even God can't please everyone – neither can you.

And you may have to even admit that some people are committed to being unhappy and whiny.

**Luke 6:26 (NIV)** *Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.*

If everyone likes you all the time, it's unlikely that you stand for anything. You may be very wishy washy who goes along with everyone in order to get them to like them.

If you stand solidly with Christ there will be plenty of people who don't like you.

### 2. You're responsible for pleasing God above everyone else.

**Galatians 1:10 (NIV)** *Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Paul is saying that his ministry would have looked quite different if he was merely trying to be a people pleaser. He certainly wouldn't have preached quite as harsh as he did, his letters would have been much more kind and watered down. He wouldn't have addressed any of the problems that had developed within many of the churches. But he was on a mission from God and that calling dictated what he preached and wrote.

There are plenty of preachers who simply preach messages that people will like to hear. And many of those preachers pack large stadiums and auditoriums with people wanting to feel good about themselves. But the truth of the gospel is that we're all sinners in desperate need of God's grace. Even the gospel message isn't as much about you as it is about God displaying His power and saving grace.

### Integrity is far more important than popularity.

### 3. Who's opinion matters more to you – God's or man's?

Your answer to that question will largely determine how you live your life.

**John 5:30b (NIV)** *I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

**John 5:41-42 (NIV)** *"I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.*

Jesus had his priorities right. If he wanted to be popular he would have done his ministry differently. He likely wouldn't have healed on the Sabbath, he would have spent more time hanging out with the Pharisees and Saducees and he certainly would have taught a much softer gospel message. But Jesus didn't really care what others thought about Him – he was living for the audience of One – His Father. And yet, Jesus demonstrated love and compassion in healing many.

What he says in John 5:42 is key. If we really have the love of God reigning supreme in our hearts then we will live lives of compassion and helping others. But we'll be doing that out of the overflow of our hearts and not in an attempt to gain other people's favor or love.

**Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)** *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.*

Make sure you trust in the Lord before being engaged trying to please and help others.

#### **4. Discern God's will before saying "Yes".**

**Caution:** what I'm not saying this morning is that we can ignore the needs of others. That's clearly not Scriptural on lots of levels. But our help for others has got to flow out of our love for God. And our helping others needs to be a response to what God is calling us to do.

Through the years, I've often been pretty quick to jump and try to meet every need that everyone has. Early on, it may have been because I was insecure in myself and this ministry but it changed as I gained confidence in who I am in Christ and in this ministry. But I'd still say that there have been many times that I jumped in with pure motives to help. It really was an overflow of my love for God and I think one of my spiritual gifts is the gift of helping. However, what's become more clear to me over the years is that my strong desire to help may have at times not been God's desire. Because sometimes my jumping in to help may have been robbing someone else the opportunity to serve and God wanting to use that to grow their faith and expand their vision of how God plans on using them.

Also, sometimes I've jumped in to help when I've later realized that my helping was allowing an individual to continue in an unhealthy lifestyle pattern that God wants to free them from. And so, in essence what seemed like an act of love to me was really further delaying God setting them free from unhealthy life choices. I wasn't letting God be God in their life.

#### **Key Questions to Consider when helping others:**

1. Are you doing this out of duty or desire?
2. Are you motivated to help out of your own insecurity or by a desire to show God's love?
3. Are you afraid of being rejected if you say no?
4. Are you expecting something in return if you help?
5. Do you determine your course of action based on what's popular or on what's right?

Pleasing those we love is rewarding, and this may not be wrong in and of itself. But pleasing God is a higher calling and much more fulfilling. We are headed for trouble when our desire to please people and gain their approval becomes as important as pleasing God and sensing His approval.

**Letting Go To Be Set Free!!**  
***Letting Go of People Pleasing***

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2. Your goal can become keeping everyone \_\_\_\_\_
3. You are afraid of what others will think if you say \_\_\_\_\_
4. It will keep you from sharing your \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Truths to Ponder:**

1. Neither you nor God can please \_\_\_\_\_
2. You're responsible for pleasing \_\_\_\_\_ above everyone else.  
\_\_\_\_\_ is far more important than \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who's opinion matters more to you: \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?
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