

John 12:42-43; 5:44 Sermon-Based Discussion Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To help us see the ways we are addicted to approval and see how God's approval brings freedom.

Sermon Refresher:

Jesus exposed how the religious leaders' love for people's approval kept them from following Jesus; it was a sort of spiritual slavery in their lives. If we examine our own lives, we too will see signs of that approval addiction. Learning to value the approval of God more than the approval of people is the only thing that will set us free.

Icebreaker: Most of us have some little things that we obsess about. It could be having a clean car, a color-coded calendar, an organized cabinet, a certain way we mow the lawn, etc. What is a little thing you obsess about?

Transition: When we live for the approval of people, we are making a small thing big and a big thing small. When we are addicted to approval, people are big and God is small.

Discussion

- 1. How do you know if you struggle with approval addiction? Consider these questions from a very helpful book called *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch. Read the questions out loud as a group. Which ones resonate with you? How is this a symptom of approval addiction in your life?**
 - Are you over-committed? (because you can't seem to say no to people's requests?)**
 - Do you *need* certain people to respect and like you?**
 - Do you fear being exposed as an imposter?**
 - Are you always second-guessing your decisions because of what others might think?**

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- Is your dieting or exercise or clothing mainly about impressing others?
- Do you often feel empty or meaningless?
- Do you get easily embarrassed?
- Do you use little white lies to cover up?
- Do you avoid people? (when you're not at your best)
- Do you disobey God to keep the approval of people?
- Do other people often make you angry or depressed?
- Is your mood dependent on how others express approval or disapproval of you?

2. Read Galatians 1:10 out loud.

- Is it possible to seek the approval of both God and man simultaneously? Why or why not?
- If Paul equates seeking the approval of God with serving Christ, what does seeking the approval of man equate to?
- How does the realization that seeking approval of people makes you a slave to people rather than Christ help you?

3. Read this short article Keith Simon wrote about the apostle Peter's struggle with approval. Take turns reading paragraphs then answer the questions that follow.

Peter is perhaps the most well-known disciple. Without a doubt he was the boldest and is also well known for his courage – the kind of courage that led him to walk on water when everyone else stayed in the boat. He is the last person that you would think would struggle with what others think of him. But it turns out that he is just like the rest of us.

Peter had seen miracles. He had seen the transfiguration. He was even the first to profess that Jesus was the Messiah – the Son of God. He is the last person that you would think would deny Jesus. And yet he is a sinner like us capable of exalting people so that they seemed more important, more valuable, more significant than Jesus himself.

On the night that Jesus was taken into custody, Peter was in the crowd standing outside the high priest's office while inside Jesus was being questioned. When a person in the crowd said that they had seen Peter with Jesus, he replied, "I don't know what you are talking about." You

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would think that in order for Peter to deny being seen with Jesus, he must have been being questioned by a person of great authority – maybe a Roman soldier or someone who could have arrested him or even executed him on the spot. But no, the person Peter was afraid of was a servant girl. It's tempting to think that Peter's life was in danger but that's just not the case. It didn't take much for him to deny Christ. And he didn't stop there. Before the night was over, Peter had denied Jesus three times.

Did Peter ever learn to want God's approval more than human approval? I think so. Look at what he wrote in a letter: Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. (1 Peter 3:13-15)

Don't be afraid of other's rejection or disapproval or criticism. Make Christ the Lord of your life. Don't let other people take God's place.

- **What surprises you about Peter's struggle?**
- **How is Peter's struggle a comfort to you?**
- **What do you think Peter learned that helped him care less about people's approval?**

Digging deeper (optional): Read Proverbs 29:25. Fear of man is when we allow fear of what people will do to us, say about us, think about us to control us. In what ways is the fear of man a snare in our lives?

4. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:3-8 out loud. In this passage, Paul wants the church in Thessalonica to know that his motives for sharing the gospel with them were good. He tells them that he was not speaking to please men, but to please God. Paul mentions a few things that helped him to do this. What are they?

- **How does knowing that God tests our hearts/witnesses our actions help us not live for approval?**
- **How does knowing that he has already been approved by God (so approved as to be entrusted with the gospel!) help Paul please God instead of men?**

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- **V. 8 shows us that Paul's ministry to them wasn't about needing them; it was about loving them. What's the difference between needing people (their approval) and loving people?**
- 5. Because our hearts were made to need approval from someone, we can't stop approval addiction; we can only redirect it. Take a few moments and read these promises of the value of God's approval over people's approval. Which promise, if you meditated on it frequently this week, would give you stronger sense of God's approval (thus more freedom from people's approval)?**
- **Hebrews 13:5b-6 – He is with me. What can people do to me?**
 - **John 12:43; 5:44 – I will receive a glory that comes from God.**
 - **1 Peter 5:4 – A crown of glory.**
 - **Isaiah 66:2 – God notices and esteems me.**
 - **Matthew 25:21, 23 – The verdict of God's "well done" about my life.**

Sharing and Prayer Time ideas:

- **Share about the ways you saw God work through ForColumbia. Take time to thank God for that.**
- **Take time to thank God for his immeasurably valuable approval of us in Christ. Pray for more belief in the value of his approval.**
- **Ask your group: what's one area or situation where you need God's help to live for His approval? Pray for those together.**

Passage for next Sunday

John 13:1-17