



Wisdom Worksheet: Leading the People Pleaser through Listening (James 1:19)

The Problem: Desire for Significance apart from Christ

The Style: Leading with the Emotions

The third difficult person is the people pleaser who is noticeably people-oriented as opposed to the task-oriented aggressive and complainer. He agrees with everyone. Consequently, the people pleaser is indirect in his difficult behavior. He creates negative conflict when he promises everyone what they want to hear. The result is unmet expectations because the people pleaser is unable to do what he said when the interests of two parties collide. His desire to please flows from an underlying motive to bring significance to himself as he seeks attention, acceptance, affection, and approval. He utilizes at least four persuasive tools that stem from his gift to gab: (1) gossip, (2) exaggeration, (3) flattery, and (4) a chameleon complex that desires to say, “Yes.”

Gossip

The people pleaser gossips, although he never sees himself as doing so. In his non-stop conversational banter, the people pleaser shares unverified and even classified information about other people. His desire for significance creates a seemingly insatiable desire to be the bearer of news as he delights in airing his own opinions (Prov. 18:2). This idle conversation can be contagious (Prov. 26:22).

Exaggeration

The people pleaser is gifted in leveraging emotions for his persuasive pleas. In order to do so, he exaggerates facts with his words and his non-verbal cues. His loud



tone of voice, animated hand gestures, clever eye contact, excitable facial expressions, and warm body posture are convincing (Prov. 26:23).

Flattery

The people pleaser uses charming words to get what he wants, including praise from others. This is flattery. In essence, he tells others what they want to hear, not as much for their benefit as for his (Prov. 26:24-25, 28). This creates a net that can snag his audience (Prov. 29:5).

Chameleon Complex that Desires to Say, “Yes”

The people pleaser loves to please people. His low expectations of self and others combined with his love to have fun provide an agreeable atmosphere where he genuinely wants to say, “Yes” to everyone he encounters. In essence, he becomes difficult by default. When he says, “Yes,” to two different persons who have opposing interests, he creates negative conflict (Prov. 26:27).

The Solution: Leading through Listening

In order to lead the people pleaser, we must listen to his heart—his will, mind, emotions, and spirit. These four chambers of the heart can be discovered by learning his choices, thoughts, feelings, and even his prayers. *Connect with his heart like a Lego* (Prov. 20:5). *Deflect his difficult behavior like a shield* (Prov. 17:9). *Reflect his heart like a mirror* (Prov. 27:19). *Direct him toward wisdom like a highway sign* (Prov. 24:11-12).



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Wisdom works when we *connect, deflect, reflect, and direct* the people pleaser through four wise practices: (1) *don't gossip*, (2) *don't be gullible*, (3) *don't give in*, and (4) *graciously support him in the wisest direction*.

Connect with his heart like a Lego: *Don't Gossip* (Prov. 20:19; 26:20, 22)

The people pleaser often speaks and thinks later. We need to be careful not to do the same. Gossip is unnecessary talk about others. It often includes untrue statements (slander) as well as true statements that are confidential. Solomon said, "*A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much*" (Prov. 20:19). He likened gossip to throwing wood on a fire, "*Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down*" (Prov. 26:20). Gossip offers deceptive pleasure because it attempts to satisfy our desire for significance—apart from Christ. Solomon recorded, "*The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts*" (Prov. 26:22). We either lift ourselves up or bring others down through gossip. We must be careful not to do so when we engage with a people pleaser. Even if we nod in agreement, the people pleaser will quote us to his next audience as the perpetrator of the rumor at hand.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Next time you encounter a people pleaser connect with his heart by avoiding gossip. In his heart, the people pleaser desires significance apart from Christ and leads with his emotions. Do not assume that his gossip is true, and do not perpetuate a conversation that breaches confidence. Be careful not to nod your head in agreement to gossip nor utter, "Uh huh."



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Deflect his difficult behavior like a Shield: *Don't be Gullible* (Prov. 26:23; 14:15)

Exaggeration is a powerful tool leveraged by the people pleaser. Distorted facts, recollections that stretch the imagination, and embellished stories all cleverly mishandle the truth. Solomon said, *“Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart”* (Prov. 26:23). Just like that coating of glaze over earthenware makes the outside look better than it truly is on the inside, so exaggerated words allow the people pleaser to appear more significant on the surface than he feels in his heart. The Bible warns us not to be gullible to exaggeration. *“A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps”* (Prov. 14:15). *Simple*, or *gullible*, is the first of five progressive words for *fool* in the Hebrew language. We must deflect the difficult behavior of the people pleaser and remain connected with his heart by not becoming gullible to exaggeration.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

After connecting with the heart of the people pleaser by not gossiping, next deflect his difficult behavior by not becoming gullible to exaggeration. In unthreatening fashion, ask for verification of facts or other eye witnesses when wisdom tells you that the people pleaser is exaggerating. *“Were you really there?” “Who else saw that?” “What would they say?” “Where could I download a list of those facts?”* These are all examples of wise questions that deflect exaggeration.

Reflect his heart like a Mirror: *Don't Give In* (Prov. 26:24-25, 28)



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The people pleaser uses flattery to gain an advantage. When he does, we are often tempted to give in because we like what we hear. *Flattery* comes from the Hebrew word for *smooth*. Flattery is a smooth way to capture the heart and life of another person. As previously referenced, it is designed to snag its target (Prov. 29:5). Flattery is differentiated from a compliment not merely by whether it is true, but by whose interest is at heart. Paul said, “*For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naïve people*” (Rom. 16:18). The people pleaser uses flattery for his advantage (Jude 1:16). We give in to flattery by believing what we hear, foolishly surrendering our heart to the people pleaser, and acting on the deceitful compliment.

Solomon commanded, “Don’t give in to flattery.” This is a shrewd practice to reflect the heart of the people pleaser. “*A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart*” (Prov. 26:24-25). When we don’t give in to his net, we won’t be tripped up. The people pleaser will realize that we have not fallen prey to his deceptive tactics, and he will begin to wrestle with his own heart that desires significance apart from Christ. Solomon described the flatterer’s disingenuous intent and the painful result, “*A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin*” (Prov. 26:28).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work



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Connect with the heart of the people pleaser by recognizing his desire for significance apart from Christ, and don't gossip. Deflect his difficult behavior, and don't be gullible to his exaggerations. Reflect his heart, and don't give in to flattery. Simply smile and say, *"You sound really convincing, but I need some time to pray about that."*

Direct him toward wisdom like a Highway Sign: *Graciously Support him in the Wisest Direction* (Proverbs 4:11; 24:11; 1 Thess. 5:14)

The people pleaser is weak in willpower. His desire for significance apart from Christ leads him to be a chameleon as he adjusts his values to accommodate whomever he is with at the moment. In his effort to be popular, he foolishly says, "Yes" to everyone he encounters. Only after two persons or groups with opposite interests experience each other's *carte blanche* from the people pleaser does negative conflict occur. The people pleaser says, "Yes" to the Sunday school budget increase and the new elder retreat committing the same finite dollars twice. The people pleaser says, "Yes," promising the same car on the same Friday night to two different teenage siblings. The people pleaser says, "Yes," to two appointments at two different locations at the same exact time. The people pleaser says, "Yes," to the differing values and opinions of two people with opposing views. The result is an over-commitment of life's resources: time, talent, and treasures.

The people pleaser needs a new benchmark for success—wisdom. His desire to please will motivate him to try wisdom when it is *graciously* presented as an alternative, and he feels *supported* to get there. *Grace* means "undeserved love"—where one finds



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ultimate significance in Christ (2 Cor. 8:9). *Support* means that he will not go there alone. Solomon believed in graciously supporting one toward wisdom, “*I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths*” (Prov. 4:11). Solomon compelled young leaders to shrewdly save those who are directed toward foolishness, “*Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter*” (Prov. 24:11). The weak-in-willpower people pleaser will become warm toward a wise alternative when he is emotionally supported in that direction. Paul said that we should support the weak (1 Thess. 5:14).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Connect with the heart of the people pleaser by recognizing his desire for significance apart from Christ, and don't gossip. Deflect his difficult behavior, and don't be gullible to his exaggerations. Reflect his heart, and don't give in to flattery. Finally, direct him toward wisdom, and graciously support him in the wisest direction. After being prompted with wisdom from the Holy Spirit and the Bible, say, “*Based on my understanding of the Bible, this direction would be a wise solution for you. Your gifts would greatly honor God. I would love to help you get there.*” He will want to please you with his wise behavior. If he is an unbeliever, use discretion in your use of the Bible and God in your conversation.

Summary

Remember that wisdom allows us to move through conflict toward community. When we connect with the heart of the people pleaser, deflect his seemingly pleasant



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difficult behavior, reflect his heart in an unthreatening manner, and direct him toward wisdom, we navigate through conflict to community. When encountering a people pleaser: (1) *don't gossip*, (2) *don't be gullible to his exaggerations*, (3) *don't give in to his flattery*, and (4) *graciously support him in the wisest direction*.