



APPROVAL ADDICTION

OVERCOMING YOUR NEED
TO PLEASE EVERYONE

JOYCE MEYER

AUTHOR OF THE ONE-MILLION-COPY BESTSELLER
BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND

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CHAPTER

1

Facing Fear and Finding Freedom

The first step in understanding an out-of-balance need for approval is to understand fear. The variety of fears people deal with is endless, but an important one I discovered in my own life—and one you may be dealing with yourself—is the fear of not being pleasing to God. If you have been hurt and wounded by people who were difficult or even impossible to please, you may think God is the same way. He isn't! It is not as difficult to please God as we may think it is. Simple, childlike faith pleases Him. He already knows we will not behave perfectly all the time. That is why He sent Jesus to pay for our failures and mistakes.

As I said in the Introduction, I struggled and suffered in frustration many years trying to please God with good, or even perfect, behavior. At the same time I was always fearful I was failing. It seemed no matter what I did right, I always saw something I was doing wrong. I never felt good enough; no matter what I did, I always felt as if I needed to do more. I felt God was displeased with

me, and even though that was not accurate, it was true for me because I believed it. I was deceived!

There is a possibility you, too, have been deceived. To be deceived means to believe a lie. Many people are trapped in bondage that makes them miserable simply because they have wrong belief systems. It is very possible you believe some things with all your heart, yet those things are not true at all. I once believed my future would always be affected by my past, but then I learned through God's Word that what I believed was not true at all.

We can let go of what lies behind, be totally forgiven for all our wrongdoing, and enjoy the awesome future God had planned for us since before the beginning of time.

“WHAT MUST I DO TO PLEASE GOD?”

There are two main things I believe we must do to please God. Number one is to have faith in Jesus, and number two is to desire to please Him with all our hearts. It is important to understand that we cannot have one without the other. The Bible says without faith it is impossible to please God (See Hebrews 11:6).

In John 6:28–29 we read about some people who asked Jesus:

What are we to do, that we may [habitually] be working the works of God? [What are we to do to carry out what God requires?]

Jesus replied, This is the work (service) that God asks of you; that you believe in the One Whom He has sent.

So you see God is pleased when we believe in His Son Jesus, and He is not pleased when we don't. We might do numerous good and benevolent works, yet if we have no faith in Jesus, God is still not pleased with us. But if we believe and trust in God, we enter

His rest according to Hebrews 4; we feel at ease and comfortable rather than fearful and anxious about life.

We believe, and God works. Our work—the work of the believer—is simply to believe. Remember, we are accepted because of our *faith*, not our good works.

Christians are referred to as *believers*. If our job were to achieve, we would be called *achievers*, not *believers*. We often want to place an emphasis on what *we* do, but our focus should be on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

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*If our job were to achieve,
 we would be called
 achievers, not believers.*

We can concentrate on our sin and be miserable, or we can concentrate on God's forgiveness and mercy and be happy.

Once we see this truth, we can enjoy our relationship with God. We don't have to live under the pressure of acceptance by performance, followed by a fear of failure each time our performance is less than perfect. We do not have to be addicted to approval and ready to obtain it by any means. If we want to please God with all our hearts, all we need to do is believe in His Son Jesus Christ and believe what He says in His Word.

I lived in the performance-acceptance trap for many years. I was addicted to approval. I felt if I performed well, then I would be approved of and accepted by God and people. I did not feel good about nor accept myself unless I performed well. When I did not perform well, I automatically assumed God rejected me because that was what I was accustomed to with people. Once again truth was distorted for me through a wrong belief system.

God does not reject us when we make mistakes, but if we *think* He does, if we *fear* He does, the lie we have believed becomes truth to us. I once had an employee who had experienced a lot of rejection from her father when she did not do well in school or

perform perfectly in other areas. The rejection she experienced early in her life caused her to develop some behavior patterns that were difficult to understand. When her job performance was anything less than perfect, I sensed her withdrawing from me and felt rejected by her. Not only did she withdraw, she also went into a work frenzy trying to get more done.

This behavior really bothered me and made it difficult for me to have a comfortable relationship with her. As her employer I dreaded giving her direction or correction about anything because I knew from experience how she would behave. As a matter of fact, I dreaded even asking her how various projects were coming along because if she could not give me a perfect report she became upset even if I remained calm. If I asked the status of her work, the only time she seemed settled and happy was if she could tell me everything was done, and done perfectly right.

I did not understand her actions at the time, but through prayer and sharing openly we finally discovered she was extremely afraid of being rejected if she did not perform perfectly. Even though I was not rejecting her, her fear of being rejected caused her to withdraw from me. To make matters worse, her withdrawal and silence made me feel *she* was rejecting *me*, or that I had done something wrong. Her belief system was wrong, and it created an uncomfortable atmosphere in which Satan could easily work.

I did not expect her to be perfect, but she expected it of herself. I was not pressuring her; she was pressuring herself. Even though I was not upset with her progress, she assumed I was and reacted to me accordingly. Her behavior really confused me and made me not want to work with her. Thankfully, she eventually learned to believe I loved and accepted her even though her performance was not always perfect. This enabled us to work together in joy for many years.

Just as I had learned before in my own life, my employee had to learn to believe what I said rather than what she felt. We must choose to do the same thing in our relationship with God. We must learn to trust God's Word more than our own feelings. We often bow down to our feelings without realizing how fickle and changeable they are. Our feelings are not a reliable source of information. God loves us and accepts us unconditionally. His love is not based on our performance. The Bible says in Ephesians 1:6 KJV that we are made acceptable in the Beloved. As I said earlier, it is our *faith* in Jesus that makes us acceptable to God and pleases Him, not our performance.

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*We must learn to trust
 God's Word more than
 our own feelings.*
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We are not living by faith if we believe how we feel more than we believe what God's Word says. Do you believe the God of the Bible or the god of your feelings?

DESIRING TO PLEASE HIM IN ALL THINGS

Anyone who loves God wants to please Him. The fact that we have a desire to please Him pleases Him. To please someone means to be well thought of or approved by that person. We want God's approval, and there is nothing wrong with that. As a matter of fact, a desire to please God is necessary; it motivates us to seek His will in all things. People who have a deep desire to please God may not perform perfectly all the time, but they keep pressing forward and always have the attitude of wanting to improve.

In 2 Chronicles 16:9 we see God is searching to and fro for someone in whom He can show Himself strong, someone whose heart is

perfect toward Him. The Scripture does not say He is looking for someone with a perfect performance, but rather someone with a perfect heart—a heart that desires to please Him, a heart that is grieved over sin and evil, a heart that believes in Him and His willingness and ability to forgive and restore. God knows we cannot manifest perfection. If we could be perfect in our performance, we would not need a Savior, and Jesus would have come in vain. Jesus came for those who were sick in spirit, body, and soul, not those who had no need (See Luke 5:31–32). It is acceptable to be needy!

God is a God of hearts. He sees and cares about our attitude of heart even more than our performance. I have said many times that I believe God would rather have a believer who has a good heart and a less than perfect performance than one who has a perfect performance but an impure heart.

For example, Jesus had much to say to the Pharisees of His day. They had a polished performance, they kept the laws, they followed all the rules and regulations, and they were proud of it. They also had a judgmental attitude toward others, they did not walk in love, and they showed no mercy. Jesus called them whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, pretenders (hypocrites)! For you are like tombs that have been whitewashed, which look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and everything impure. (Matthew 23:27)

These Pharisees were very religious people—they kept all the rules—but their hearts were not right.

Truth pleases God. According to John 4:23–24 He is seeking worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (reality). He hates pretense! This is why I said earlier that two of the most

important things to God are faith in Jesus and a pure heart that desires to please Him in all things.

A man once said to me, "I'm not mean; I'm just stupid." His description of himself was correct. He is a person whom everyone likes, and he wants to do right, yet he seems to consistently make wrong decisions that get him into trouble. It is difficult to remain angry with him because he really does not intend to cause trouble even though he frequently does.

I am sure you have met people like the man I am describing—people who are very frustrating, yet you really like them. I think God must see us that way at times. We do things that cause trouble in our own lives and then run to God to help us. The good news is that He does help us again and again because He knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust (See Psalm 103:14). As human beings, we look at the performance of others, but God sees the heart:

But the Lord said to Samuel, Look not on his appearance or at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

"THE THING I FEAR COMES UPON ME"

For the thing which I greatly fear comes upon me, and that of which I am afraid befalls me. (Job 3:25)

As I said earlier, fear is a terrible emotion—a self-fulfilling one. Job had fears concerning his children and finally reached a place in his life where he saw his fears coming to pass. The Bible says it will be unto us as we believe (See Matthew 9:29). That principle

works in the negative as well as the positive. We can receive by fear as well as by faith.

My husband and I once hired a handyman to do some work for us. He kept saying he was *afraid* he would set off the security alarm.

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*Fear is simply faith in
 what Satan says.*
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We went over the instructions with him several times but could tell that he still lacked confidence. The first day he came to do some work, he set the alarm when he left and everything seemed to be fine. But that evening we

had some bad storms, and something set the alarm off at 3:00 A.M. The police called and said a door was ajar and they had secured it. We had to call the man we hired and ask him to go check. The news that the alarm went off really unsettled him. He said, "*I was afraid that would happen.*"

Fear is simply faith in what Satan says. We must remember that not only does God speak to us but Satan also speaks. He is a liar (See John 8:44), and when we believe his lies, we are deceived and the door is open for him to work in our lives. We open the door for God to work by placing faith in His Word, and we open the door for Satan to work by placing faith in his word. He places thoughts in our minds that are not true, but can become true for us if they are believed. If we are afraid we are not pleasing to God or people, we will manifest behavior that will actually make us displeasing. The same principle works with rejection. If we fear being rejected, we will often behave in a way that will cause people to reject us. We produce what we believe!

Because I am seen as a strong authority figure, I sometimes encounter people who are afraid of me or very nervous in my presence. I don't do anything to make them afraid; they have a problem from something in their past that has left them insecure and

fearful in the presence of authority. I don't like it when people are afraid of me. Just as in the case of my employee whose past issues strained our work relationship, it makes me uncomfortable and can actually cause me not to want to be around them. Their fear of me produces the very thing they are afraid of.

I know what I'm talking about, because I dealt with the same issue from the other side. I was raised in a very dysfunctional home—a home filled with violence, abuse, and fear. Because I was mistreated, I developed the feeling that I was flawed and unacceptable. I was ashamed of myself. I was afraid to meet new people because I felt they would not like me, and sure enough most of them did not. Even the ones I did become friends with often told me later they did not like me when they first met me. I got exactly what I believed!

GOD LOVES US!

As children of God we can renew our minds through studying God's Word and begin to think differently (See Romans 12:2). As we think differently, we will behave differently, because where the mind goes the man follows (See Proverbs 23:7). When I saw in the Word of God that He actually was pleased with me and accepted me even though I did not behave perfectly, it changed my thinking. I started *expecting* people to like me. And sure enough, they did. I even began to confess out loud that God gave me favor and that people liked me. I learned to say what God said about me instead of what the devil wanted me to believe.¹

Ask yourself what you have been expecting out of life, and you may discover the reason behind some of your disappointments. God wants us to aggressively expect good things, not bad ones. He wants us to expect acceptance as His gift to us. God will give us

favor and approval if we expect it. Satan will give us rejection and disapproval if we expect it. Living in God's supernatural favor is certainly better than attempting to earn acceptance through people-pleasing and a perfect performance.

In Matthew 3:13–17 we read an account of Jesus' baptism. When He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and landed on Him, and a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, My Beloved, in Whom I delight!" Then, in Matthew 17:5 on the Mount of Transfiguration, a shining cloud overshadowed Jesus and His disciples, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son, My Beloved, with Whom I am [and have always been] delighted." One day as I was studying, I realized that if Jesus needed to hear and receive this encouragement twice, how much more do we need to hear that we are pleasing to God? More important, what if Jesus had rejected His Father's words? How would it have affected His life and ministry?

God tries to tell us in His Word how much He loves us, that He accepts us, and that even though He already knew every mistake we would ever make, He actually chose us for Himself:

Even as [in His love] He chose us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (consecrated and set apart for Him) and blameless in His sight, even above reproach, before Him in love. (Ephesians 1:4)

We read it, but we have a difficult time receiving it. We let our feelings steal the blessing of God's acceptance and approval. We let people's opinions determine our worth and value rather than relying on God's Word.

I encourage you to say out loud several times a day, "God loves me unconditionally, and He is pleased with me." The mind rejects

such statements; after all, how could God, Who is perfect, be pleased with us in our imperfections? The point is that God separates who we are from what we do. My children are Meyers. They don't always act right, but they never stop being Meyers; they never stop being my children. Knowing they have a right heart goes a long way with me. They make mistakes, but as long as they admit it, and their heart is right, I am always willing to work with them.

*God loves me
unconditionally, and
He is pleased with me.*

God feels the same about us. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are God's children. We may not always act the way He wants us to, but we never stop being His children.

YOU ARE NO SURPRISE TO GOD

We act as if God is shocked to discover we make mistakes. He is not in heaven wringing His hands saying, "Oh no! I had no idea you would act like this when I chose you." God has a big eraser, and He uses it to keep our record clean and clear. He knows the end from the beginning of all things (See Isaiah 46:10). He already knows what our thoughts are and every word in our mouth we haven't uttered. He is acquainted with all of our ways (See Psalm 139:1-4). Even with all His foreknowledge of our weaknesses and the mistakes we would make, He still chose us on purpose and brought us into relationship with Himself through Christ.

If we never make mistakes, then we are probably not making any decisions either. F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "Never confuse a single mistake with a final mistake." Our mistakes have value; we

can learn from them. I like what author and speaker John C. Maxwell had to say about them. He said mistakes are:

- M essages that give us feedback about life.
- I nterruptions that should cause us to reflect and think.
- S ignposts that direct us to the right path.
- T ests that push us toward greater maturity.
- A wakenings that keep us in the game mentally.
- K eys that we can use to unlock the next door of opportunity.
- E xplorations that let us journey where we've never been before.
- S tatements about our development and progress.²

I'm reminded of an anecdote I've read and heard several times over the years. A well-known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a fifty-dollar bill. In the room of two hundred, he asked, "Who would like this fifty-dollar bill?" Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give it to one of you, but first let me do this."

He proceeded to crumple the bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?"

Still the hands were up in the air.

"Well," he replied, "what if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty.

"Now who still wants it?" Still the hands went into the air.

"My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth fifty dollars."

Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, we will never lose our

value in God's eyes. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, we are still priceless to Him.

Our desire for approval can truly be met only by receiving God's acceptance and approval of us. God told Jeremiah that before He formed him in the womb of his mother, He knew

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*We will never lose our
value in God's eyes.*

him and approved of him as His chosen instrument (See Jeremiah 1:5). When God says He knows us, He means He really *knows* us. This is a knowing that leaves nothing out.

It is amazing to me that God chose me. I don't think I would have chosen me. But God's tool chest has some interesting things in it. He works with what the world would reject as useless and would throw away as trash:

God selected (deliberately chose) what in the world is foolish to put the wise to shame, and what the world calls weak to put the strong to shame.

And God also selected (deliberately chose) what in the world is lowborn and insignificant and branded and treated with contempt, even the things that are nothing, that He might depose and bring to nothing the things that are. (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

Yes, God chooses and uses what the world would reject and throw away! Was Jeremiah perfect? Absolutely not! God had to correct him about fear, especially fear of people. Jeremiah was afraid of being rejected and meeting with disapproval. God corrected him about speaking negatively and encouraged him to go forward and not give up. God actually told Jeremiah not to look at people's faces. We pay too much attention to how people respond to us. We often watch their faces to see if they approve or disapprove of what we are wearing, our hair, our performance, et cetera.

Yes, Jeremiah had problems just like we do. When God saw Jeremiah, He did not see perfection, but He obviously did see someone with a right heart who believed in Him. He saw those two main ingredients in pleasing God: (1) faith in Jesus and (2) a deep desire to please Him. Although Jeremiah was not perfect, he did submit to the call of God on his life. Jeremiah, despite criticism, unpopularity, and attacks against him, faithfully delivered God's message to the nation of Judah.

Elijah was another great prophet. God used him mightily, and his fame was widespread, yet he also had imperfections. He experienced seasons of fear, depression, self-pity, and a desire to give up (See 1 Kings 19:3–4).

James wrote while encouraging the church to pray and believe their prayers would be answered:

Elijah was a human being with a nature such as we have [with feelings, affections, and a constitution like ours]; and he prayed earnestly for it not to rain, and no rain fell on the earth for three years and six months. And [then] he prayed again and the heavens supplied rain and the land produced its crops [as usual]. (James 5:17–18)

James wanted to make the point that even imperfect people can pray, and God will hear. Why does God do that? Because He is pleased with faith and a heart that is right.

God is not surprised by our human behavior; actually He tries to tell us what to expect of ourselves:

What is the nature of your life? You are [really] but a wisp of vapor (a puff of smoke, a mist) that is visible for a little while and then disappears [into thin air]. (James 4:14)

A voice says, Cry [prophesy]! And I said, What shall I cry? [The voice answered, Proclaim:] All flesh is as frail as grass, and all that makes it attractive [its kindness, its goodwill, . . . its glory and comeliness, however good] is transitory, like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely [all] the people are like grass. (Isaiah 40:6–7)

The flesh (man) is like a puff of smoke or a blade of grass—here for a very short period of time and not very stable. God knows it and has no problem with it, because He is willing to work through us and show Himself strong in our weakness. Actually the Bible states that God’s strength shows itself most effectively in our weaknesses (See 2 Corinthians 12:9). God has no problem with the knowledge of what we lack; we are the ones who have problems with it. We have a difficult time admitting to ourselves or anyone else that we are anything less than perfect. It is important for us to know what we can do, but even more important for us to know what we cannot do. We need to face our weaknesses, not feel bad about them.

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*Get up every day, love
God, and do your best.
He will do the rest!*

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Get up every day, love God, and do your best. He will do the rest! Remember, God is not surprised by your inabilities, your imperfections, or your faults. He has always known everything about you that you are just now finding out, and He chose you on purpose for Himself. Jesus will present you blameless and faultless to God, if you place your trust in Him (See 1 Corinthians 1:7–8).

When we face our fears, we can find our freedom. In John 8:32 Jesus said, “The truth will set you free.” The word *fear* means to run

away from. We don't have to run from anything; we can confront all things in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is time to stop running, to "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Exodus 14:13).

We've talked about fear in this chapter. Now let's take a further look at what it means to be truly sure of ourselves in God, and how that helps us overcome our need for approval.