

## What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?

1. Do you ever choose clothes because of what other people will think?
2. Are you afraid to ask questions in class because you might look stupid?
3. Do you wish you were thinner, stronger, taller, shorter, better looking, etc.?
4. Do you ever worry about being accepted by others in a group?
5. Do you notice that you act differently when someone is watching you versus when you are alone?
6. Are you ever ruled by the thought, “What will \_\_\_\_\_ think of me?”
7. Have you ever been embarrassed at the thought of other people knowing that you go to church?
8. Have you ever been embarrassed to say you believe in Jesus?

It’s likely that the answer to these questions is pretty much “yes” across the board for most of us. They all point to how we are controlled by the opinions of others. The potential for rejection is enormous and we feel it.

The questions “*What will they think of me? What might they think of me? How can I be accepted? How can I be loved?*” all point to how much weight we give to considering the opinions of others. They’re very important to us.

This problem goes by many names—desire for acceptance, the fear of rejection, painful self-consciousness or peer pressure. We believe that, “If I could just feel better *about myself*—the way I look, my abilities, my family—If I could just . . .”

Ultimately, these type of thoughts can cause grief—“*If I could just . . .*” but you must know that you wouldn’t feel better for long. You’d have a low-level, non-satisfying measure of contentment.

Some people are more self-confident or at least less self-conscious than others. How do they do that? Maybe they can manage this common experience by simply *ignoring* it. For most of us, that’s hard to do.

American culture is preoccupied with the goal of making you feel good about yourself—and to feel good about yourself you need to have some control over what others think: you need some **key people** to feel good about you.

Peer pressure, low self-esteem, shame—these are some of the terms used to identify how you are controlled by the perceived opinions of others.

You could use the phrase “fear of other people” to describe the experience. And do you know that when you fear something, you are controlled by it?

Unfortunately this problem doesn’t fade with time. In fact, if you don’t do anything about it now, it may even get worse.

Let’s look at what’s actually going on inside you. When you think about it, this stress or pressure actually comes from *within*, right? It’s produced in *your mind*. It’s the conversation or train of thought that’s going around in your head. You want to be accepted, praised, or loved. It’s more about what **you** want than about what **other people** *actually* say, do or think.

On a deeper level, this issue actually brings up three questions that every person must answer: **Who am I? Who is God? Who are those around you?**

You might easily answer these questions with something like . . . *Who am I?* “I’m a child of God, a believer, a Christian.” *Who is God?* “The Lord is my Savior.” *Who are others?* “Others around me are fellow believers, friends, and so forth.”

But to answer these questions in a way that reveals what really is going on inside, your real answers, you must look at how you live—in particular, tracking your emotions. Think about this issue and what makes you upset, depressed, angry, or anxious. Or, what makes you happy, calm, excited, and peaceful.

Take a moment and think of one of your less comfortable moods, how do you *really* answer these questions . . . maybe responses to those questions really go something like this:

### **Who am I?**

*I am important. I deserved something and I didn’t get it.*

*I am needy, and I haven’t got what I need.*

*I am lonely and alone.*

*I am unhappy and not sure how to get myself out of this funk.*

*I’m anxious and nervous about what others think.*

### **What about other people? Who are they?**

*Objects I manipulate to serve me*

*Threats*

*Jerks*

*Things that make me feel really good or really bad*

*Idols I worship*

## Who do you *really* say God is?

*Sometimes He seems far away and uncaring*

*Demanding*

*Unfair*

*Angry*

*Hard to please*

So, the key question that we must ask:

**How can you tell when people, others, have become too big in your life? When does a normal desire cross the line? When does this issue actually become *idolatry*?**

You usually can't see it happening. It is like when the day turns from dusk to night. Your eyes gradually adjust to the dark and you can't pinpoint the moment it happened. And often, we really don't *want* to see what's happening.

So is there any hope? Are you doomed to always slip across that line that separates normal desires from idolatrous ones? **There's hope. It's guaranteed, you can change. God gives you a map that leads away from what we might even call false worship, focusing on what others think of me, and on to true worship.**

This journey is going to be a lifelong journey. Probably no one can ever say they've completely erased the tendency to be influenced by other people's opinions. Remember that you are walking through this with a God who loves you with a constant love. His Spirit will show you where your desires have led you astray.

**Step 1:** The first thing you have to do is turn around. If you are living for the praise of other people, that path is a hopeless one with your emotions going off the charts—up and down—it all depends whether your idol is giving you what you want or not.

Where do you turn? Do a 180 and turn back to God. We call that confession and repentance. And the wonderful thing is that when you turn and repent, you don't have to walk for miles. The Lord is right in front of you.

**Step 2:** Once you are redirected toward God's kingdom, ask Him to help you know Him better. You have a relationship with Him. The Lord knows you and wants to share His inmost thoughts with you.

But what does all of this have to do with the opinions of others? This issue is about your heart loyalties and *who wins the battle for your worship*. If you are going to change your loyalties,

the only way you will do it is if you believe *God is more attractive or important than anything else in creation*. Up until now, the problem has been that you wanted something *from* other people more than you wanted something *for* other people. You loved yourself more than you loved them. This new path will enable you to *love* people more than *need love* from them.

Let's think again about the three questions that we asked earlier.

**Who is God?** He is better than you think.

**Who are other people?** They are people who you can enjoy, serve and love.

**Who are you?** You are someone who is intended to look like Jesus and live for Him rather than for yourself.

The answer is very simple: know God and love others. But, this answer is a journey—a journey that should be filled with hope and ends with joy.

So let's look at our first question again—*Who is God?*

**The most powerful treatment for the fear of other people's opinions is for you to learn the fear of the Lord: to be controlled by God rather than by people.** When you spend time in the throne room of the holy King, you aren't as easily dominated by mere humans who are just like you. If you want the fear of the Lord, you are going to have to learn to know that this God is holy. Your goal is to learn about the Lord Jesus—the fullest revelation of God to us—and be amazed, and want to worship Him. When you learn something about God that is great, tell Him. When you try to learn something about Him but have a hard time understanding, ask Him for more understanding of who He is.

**Gold Nugget: It is a basic principle: the more you are controlled by God, the less you are controlled by other people. The more you love God, the less you will love the acceptance or recognition of others.**

**And, the only way you can love Him more is to know Him.**

The natural place to start is the story that reveals God as Creator. The words, "In the beginning God created . . ." The problem here is that these words are a little *too* familiar. Let's take a bit of a different approach to Genesis 1—a fresh look at it, as if we were hearing it for the first time. Can you do that? Perhaps the first people to hear this story of creation were Hebrew slaves who were on their way out of Egypt. God gave this account to Moses and he, in turn, gave it to the people. In order to get in the right frame of mind, you have to think like a recently liberated slave.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*

Moses has just started to read this and already your mind is reeling. You know about lots of gods from your time in Egypt, but you aren't very familiar with the one God who created all things. He is the God. He is over everything and everyone.

*Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone . . ." (Isaiah 44:24)*

Genesis 1:16 says, *God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; **He made the stars also.*** Did you know that our universe contains perhaps 10<sup>22</sup> stars? And Psalm 147: 4 says: *He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them.*

Now the Egyptians don't look so big after all!

By the way, you are not just pretending to be a Hebrew slave. This really is *your* story. God created you. In other words, you belong to Him. You are God's possession. He doesn't want you to belong to anyone else. You live for His glory.

There are lots of implications to this truth. You belong to God and He gives you a mission: be like your Father and represent Him in His creation. **You are created to make your Father's name known on earth, which is another way to say that you live for His glory.**

Turn to Isaiah 40:25-31. (*Have someone read Isaiah 40:25-31.*)

**When you have been brought into the throne room to spend time with the King, and have become known to Him by name, the negative opinions of others don't carry as much weight. It's not that you are indifferent toward others and what they think. It is that their opinions can't emotionally derail you, turn you hopelessly inward, and keep you from *caring about other people.*** When you hear that someone you really love really cares for you, the nasty things that a few people think are not going to ruin your day.

Let's review. One important step in avoiding the worship of other people is to grow in knowing God's overwhelming power and love for you. When you really know this, you can no longer be

indifferent or distant from Him. He breaks into your everyday life, which is the only way you can be liberated from the craving to fit in or stand out.

Let's say that you just gave a speech to hundreds of your peers. No doubt you were nervous beforehand. Compare that with someone asking you to give a lesson for the three-year-old Sunday School class. I'm guessing that you would not be too rattled. You just spoke in a major venue, so a small group of kids is not very intimidating. That's how the knowledge of the Lord begins to cast out the fear of other people. **When you have been to the court of the King and lived to tell about it, the court of human opinion is less frightening.**

If there is one thing you can be sure about the Lord, it is that He makes Himself known to those who want to know Him.

**Remember the basic principle we looked at earlier—the more you are controlled by God, the less you are controlled by other people. The more you love God, the less you will love the acceptance or recognition of others.**

Who are we really? As it turns out, we are worse than we think. *Who are you?* An idolater. A lover of yourself and your own agenda. When I look at myself . . . what do I *really* think?

- I see resentment I have toward more people than I thought. *Who am I?* I am a god. *Who are other people?* They live to serve me. *Who is God?* Someone I hope will leave me alone so I can judge these people and feel good about it. When it comes to resentment I want to be God.
- I see that I like to be served much more than I like to serve.
- I see that I can speak against some people behind their backs. I wouldn't want some of my inner conversations to be made public. *Who am I?* Their judge.
- I see that I want to be loved more than I want to love.

Does any of this fit your experience? Don't forget, all these things can go on under the surface without you being aware, but make no mistake, we are doing these types of things. As it turns out, we are worse than we think.

\*You don't find the answer to paralyzing self-consciousness by giving yourself a pep talk about how great you are. You put your attention more on Jesus than on yourself—and things begin to happen. It's worth pausing a little longer in order to consider who you really are and who Jesus is and what He did.

Listen to Psalm 139:141. *“I give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.”* Hey! Maybe this is a verse that allows me to focus on my self. I don’t think the Lord put this verse in here to give us a little pep talk on ourselves about our appearance or self-worth. No, Psalm 139:14 is not written to help us feel significant. We have only to zoom out and consider the entire psalm to see this. Without question this chapter is not about us. Rather a reflection on me, fearfully and wonderfully made, it is an extended celebration of God, fearful and wonderful.

As long as we put the emphasis on ourselves instead of on a higher vision, we will take small comfort from discussions of identity—and we will see little lasting change. Our primary problem as Christian women is not that we lack self-worth, not that we lack a sense of significance or purpose. It’s that we lack *awe*.

Awe helps us worry less about what others think by turning our eyes first toward God, then toward others. It also helps to establish our worth in the best possible way—we understand our significance to our Creator.

\*Seeing all this accurately should move you toward amazement that God would love you and want you to love Him. No normal human being would tolerate such things and come back for more. If God were going to reject you after you rejected Him, there would be no reason to even think about these things. Why dwell on things that are miserable and hopeless? The reason you can look at yourself with such openness and honesty is because God does not reject you.

How does God do it? How does He keep from rejecting those who reject Him? He is love. But there is much more going on. God chose to bring a crushing blow to sin through one perfect person who would represent all those who trusted in Him. Jesus was the one who received that blow. He was the sacrificial lamb. The lamb in the Hebrew system was sacrificed so we didn’t have to be.

Are you changed by what Jesus did? Are you thankful—every day—and does His gift make you want to act like Him? Without the cross of Jesus Christ, justice would come screaming down on every one of us.

If you want to know more about yourself, turn to Jesus Christ. When you look at Him, you see the way you were intended to be. One of the first things you notice about Jesus is that His earthly life was one rejection and abandonment after another. If anyone should have felt empty and needy for acceptance, it was Jesus. Yet the insults and betrayals didn’t destroy Him.

How did He do it? His secret was simple: **He loved the praise of God more than the praise of people. His desire was to love the Father and do the Father's will more than it was to receive the affection of others. That was key for Him.**

Jesus loved people more than He wanted to be loved by people. For you, this type of relationship means true freedom—the scales are unbalanced—you want the weight to be more on the “*love*” side than the “*be loved*” side. You are no longer the center. You remember that you are created to live for God, not yourself. Christ has pursued you to the ends of the earth to make you His own. So you set your mission to love other people.

No more masks and painful insecurity. Instead, you are looking to bless, know, build up, ask forgiveness from, and reconcile with others. You have such a full job description that you have less time to dwell on what other people might be thinking.

This is a tall order, no question about it. You are going to have to go back to Jesus over and over. That's where you get the power to do the impossible. I John 4:19 says, “We love because He first loved us.”

There is only one way you could want to love others more than they love you: realizing that you have been loved more than you could ever love in return. Then everything makes sense. If you belong to Jesus, you learn that there is power and freedom in wanting to love more than to be loved.

Who am I? Beloved by God. He loved me more than I love Him, and now I get to love other people more than they love me. Being a Christian simply means trusting Jesus rather than yourself. You follow Him. You are always connected to Him. You are learning that there is power and freedom in wanting to love more than wanting to **be** loved.

Let's pray.