

Serving or People Pleasing—What's the difference?

Have you ever wondered why you serve the people in your life? Is it for people, please, or approval?

In this devotional, we explore the difference between healthy and unhealthy serving.

Yesterday, I attended an event and had an interesting conversation with a licensed therapist. We were talking about faith and marriage, and I shared this thought: “What would a marriage look like if the wife served the needs of her husband, and the husband served the needs of his wife? Wouldn't each person's needs be met through one another's care?”

Immediately, she responded with concern: “Well, we have to be careful, because people can become too dependent. If the other isn't there, then they can't do for themselves.”

And she's absolutely right—to a point. But here's the caveat: the kind of serving I'm describing is not rooted in codependency, approval-seeking, people-pleasing, or obligation. It is rooted in love.

This love doesn't come from weakness or insecurity, but from a confident identity anchored in Christ. It comes from knowing who we are as children of God—fully loved, fully accepted—and from that place of strength, choosing to love and serve others.

It's not serving out of fear or obligation, but out of love. Not because we have to, but because we want to.

And what does this look like?

A wife walks to the fridge for a drink and asks her husband if he'd like one too.

A wife comes home from work and hears, “Honey, are you hungry? Can I get you something?”

Scenario 3: A wife steps outside with an iced tea for her husband, who's mowing the lawn in the heat.

It's the little daily acts of love that flow from a heart secure in Christ. It's not about thinking less of ourselves, but about thinking of ourselves less.

Christ Himself modeled this. He served to the point of laying down His life—not from martyrdom, not from people-pleasing, but from His unshakable identity in the Father. He knew who He was. That confidence gave Him the strength to see His sacrifice through to the cross, trusting that His Father would raise Him to glory.

To serve like Christ is to love from a place of confidence, not fear; from identity, not insecurity; from strength, not weakness.

So yes—stop people-pleasing and start loving. Stop depending on approval and start walking confidently in your identity. Start serving not because you're weak and needy, but because you're strong, because you love. ❤️

“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” – Galatians 5:13

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