The Dangers of Being a People Pleaser by Dr. Henry Cloud

FEBRUARY 23, 2005

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Published by Life Way on Wednesday, February 23, 2005

Question

I’ve always been taught to serve other people. I’m naturally a people pleaser, so this has never been difficult for me. But I’m beginning to feel stepped on. How do I draw the line?
Answer

The Bible teaches the importance of serving and giving ourselves to others. John said, “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers.” (1 John 3:16, HCSB). We are to practice sacrificial love for each other, and that’s the highest value in life. (See Matt. 22:37-39.)

So, you have been taught well! However, like many other Christians, you’ve been taught correctly but incompletely. The Bible always gives us truth in balance. Freedom, for example, is balanced by God’s sovereignty. Justice is balanced by mercy. Grace is balanced by truth. If you practice any of these alone, you miss the ways that God structures that truth with other truth. I can think of at least three truths that you’re omitting if you’re getting “stepped on.”
Serve others

First, the Bible says to be mindful of the needs of others, but it assumes that you’re looking out for your needs as well. Listen to Paul: “Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). Paul doesn’t say to forget that you have interests. He just says to not allow that to be the only thing you think about. The good Samaritan (Luke 10:33-35) gave to the injured man, then took care of his own business.

You may be omitting taking care of what you need to do for yourself. It’s healthy to say no to requests sometimes so you can take care of your own needs.
Protect yourself

Second, if you allow someone to take advantage of you, you’re enabling this behavior and are part of the problem. God says that if we don’t confront someone in sin, we share in the liability of the issue. (See Lev. 19:17.) You are to confront sin in others by calling attention to it and taking a stand against it. (See Matt. 18:15-18.)

To allow others to continually mistreat you isn’t healthy. We should overlook some things to win people over or to solve problems (Prov. 19:11). We practice patience through forgiveness and turning the other cheek, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t confront mistreatment.
Give with purpose

Don’t give out of compulsion or begrudgingly, but as you have “decided in your heart” (see 2 Cor. 9:7.). Give as you have freely chosen to give and not because someone manipulates or forces you into it. Decide what you’re going to give. You’re not the answer for everything, just for some things. Say no to that which isn’t yours, and say yes to what God has chosen for you (see Eph. 2:10.)

What’s the bottom line? Love with all your might. But in your love don’t allow evil to reign. Remember your own needs and responsibilities, and let God, not others, choose your path. These truths balance the truth of sacrificial love.