



## HOW PLEASING OTHERS HURTS YOU

The desire to please our partner isn't always wrong. It brings us joy and delight when we do things to make others happy. When we're intentional about showing love to our partner in ways that he likes to receive love, our relationship often thrives. If you're familiar with the Five Love Languages, you probably know there are various ways others like to receive love. Through:

- Acts of service
- Words of affirmation
- Gifts
- Quality time
- Physical touch

Maybe your husband feels most loved when you run an errand for him or compliment his haircut or work ethic. Maybe he'd rather that you show your appreciation by picking out a new shirt or that new gadget he's been wanting. If his love language is quality time, maybe he'd rather that you take that walk with him. And physical touch is not always about sex. Lingering hugs or snuggling on the couch can go a long way to fill his love tank.

But when our attempts to please our partner is motivated by fear or to fuel a selfish ambition we jeopardize the health of our relationship and end up hurting ourselves.

## WHEN SILENT COMPLIANCE IS DESTRUCTIVE



Mark and Jennifer recently updated their kitchen. They did most of the work themselves. Mark painted the cabinets but when it was time for the doors to go back on, he didn't want to use the old hinges. He promised that he'd hang the cabinet doors as soon as he found suitable replacements. When a month passed with no new hinges in sight, Jennifer told Mark she was going to hang the cabinet doors, but his obvious displeasure intimidated her into waiting for him to finish the job.

A year and a half later, however, the doors were still not on the cabinets. Open shelving may be popular today but not to display canned goods, pasta and cleaning products. Jennifer seethed about her unfinished kitchen for well over a year.



Whether she played the martyr or victim or because she was afraid of his reaction Jennifer suffered in silence. Instead of confronting him and discussing the matter calmly, she complained and hurled out frequent sarcastic remarks about the unfinished job.

She also self-soothed her building resentment with a glass of wine every night. Nothing wrong with having a glass of wine but when it's to squash anger it becomes a dangerous habit.

Jennifer was so resentful that she spent most weekends away from the house, making excuses about why she didn't want to be home. Eventually her anger exploded, and she moved in with her mother.

Yes, her husband was inconsiderate. Absolutely! Maybe Mark's actions were intentional to showcase his control. I don't know. But I do know that Jennifer played a part in this destructive dance. She was afraid of conflict and hated the idea of setting a boundary. Instead, she thought the best way to handle the situation was to tolerate it. But did she really tolerate it?

I was curious about what word tolerate means so I looked up the definition. Yes, even looking up definitions of words we already know can provide new insight.

#### Here's how Webster's defines tolerance:

- to allow the existence, presence, practice, or act of without prohibition or hindrance; permit.
- to endure without repugnance; put up with

The second part of this definition is interesting.  
**Underline the two words in this part of the definition that describe endurance.**



**In our attempts to keep the peace, we often destroy our own.**

Jennifer allowed and permitted her husband's failure to finish the kitchen update, but did she endure it without repugnance? No! In her attempt to keep the peace, she destroyed her own. **When we strive to make others happy at our own expense, we invite the disease of resentment into our relationship.**



A better option would've been for her to kindly tell him how upsetting it was that her kitchen wasn't finished. Maybe she could've told him if the hinges weren't installed within a month that she would do it herself or hire it done. She'd have to face the consequences. Maybe he'd get angry. That's okay. We can't always control how our partners react. We have to allow them to own their own feelings.

We aren't responsible for our partner's reactions if we behave with reasonable intentions. But when we bow to their intimidation and stuff the anger and resentment, we are not doing either of us any good. We may be able to keep the peace for a moment, but eventually our actions backfire and cause more damage in the end.

**When you make attempts to please your partner at your own expense, how do you typically feel? Check all that apply.**

- Taken advantage of
- Angry at him for not being appreciated
- Angry at myself
- Hurt or resentful because my "consideration" was not reciprocated
- Ashamed
- Inferior, regretful or foolish
- Hopeful that my unselfish nature will change him
- Other
- All of the above

Selfish ambition can be aggressive or passive. It's easy to identify the forms of aggressive selfish ambition. Manipulation, control, indifference, stonewalling and narcissistic abuse are obviously aggressive. But in order for controlling forms of selfish ambition to operate, they have to have the cooperation of a passive partner. That's why every manipulator chooses an enabler as their dance partner and then uses guilt, shame, anger or even tears to maneuver her around his dance floor.

**Look over the bullet points you checked above.** In the space below write out a challenge to yourself to change. For example, "I will no longer be angry at myself or feel hurt or resentful when I'm not appreciated." This may seem simplistic, but every change begins with a thought!





## PASSIVE SELFISH AMBITION

The passive forms of selfish ambition listed below are subtle and may appear to be Christ like, but because the motivation is to safeguard your own comfort, they are destructive behaviors.

**Look over the list and consider if any of these behaviors apply to you. Highlight the portions you struggle with.**



### AVOID CONFRONTATION

If you tend to avoid confrontation, is your motivation to preserve the peace? Being a peacekeeper to avoid conflict only creates synthetic temporary peace and it's a selfish ambition because in the end, you are the one who benefits most, albeit temporarily, from a lack of confrontation.



### KEEP QUIET



Do you fear rejection? If so, your silence can be deceptive since it's often interpreted as a form of agreement. Of course, there are times when wisdom tells you to keep your opinion to yourself, but if your failure to speak up and share your thoughts is to avoid rejection your ambition is selfish. In fact, Leviticus 5:1 says not speaking up is sin.



### SEEKING APPROVAL



Are you afraid of criticism? Do you often agree because you want your partner or others to like you? Do you give compliments or gifts to win applause? Do you go out of your way to do favors for him in order to gain his affection? Do you always agree with him even when you don't? When your need for affirmation or admiration causes you to bow for approval, your ambition is a selfish one.



When we value our own comfort more than authenticity, our motive to please others becomes a self-centered agenda. It's because ultimately, we value ourselves and our own needs as more important. Our own well-being is our primal focus.

Confrontation is our Godly responsibility and it's often the provocation that compels our partner to change.

We all know it's acceptable to confront our children when they misbehave. Proverbs 29:17 gives us this promise. "Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire." It's our responsibility to correct our children. Similarly a teacher instruct students when they fail so they can prosper in knowledge and a boss must reprimand employees when their behavior warrants it. So where did we get the idea that we have no authority to confront our husband or partner when his behavior is harmful?

Paul gave Titus instruction on how to handle those that are disruptive and how to confront leaders who failed to do good. "Rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith (Titus 1:13)." A rebuke is a good thing. We reprove someone in hopes that they correct their behavior and don't continue to sin.

What if Jennifer confronted Mark about her frustration with the unfinished cabinets? Perhaps it would have motivated him to finish but even if he stubbornly refused, she could have communicated a reasonable consequence. Either she could put them up or hire someone to finish it.

These actions would have helped her guard her heart from the mounting anger and avoid the sin of sarcasm, which by the way means to tear flesh in Latin. Her boundary would have also prevented her need to drink and possibly avoided her frustrated move to her mother's home. By the way, she didn't really want to leave. Her motive was a vindictive ploy to punish Mark.

Keeping quiet and allowing your partner to continue to mistreat you is not good for them. It may seem easier for you to accept the burden of discomfort. But if you truly consider your husband or partner more important than you and your feelings and your discomfort, you would address the situation. Either with a verbal confrontation or by a change in your behavior if a verbal exchange is not safe.



**When our motive is to preserve our own comfort, avoiding confrontation, keeping quiet and seeking approval are passive forms of selfish ambition.**



## GUT WRENCHING HONESTY

Take a moment to think about what controlling or abusive behaviors you continue to tolerate because you're afraid of confrontation. Then take a moment to consider how your passivity affects your witness and influence.

For example, if you have children, consider how your behavior is influencing them. They learn by your example. If you have a daughter, are you training her by example that a woman's role is to tolerate abuse?

If you have sons, what message are you sending them? That he has the right to demand his own way? That abuse is acceptable? That he is superior?

**Consider who is being led astray by your passive selfish ambition. Write out a prayer of repentance confessing any areas of passivity that you've indulged in. Then ask the Lord to give you strength and courage to confront your partner with confidence when it's appropriate.**



**What is best  
for others isn't  
always  
pleasant.**

tell your truth

***To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech (Proverbs 8:13).***

