

Transform Practices: Secrecy (Living in the Father's approval)

This week we're looking at how we grow in the living from the approval of God rather than for the approval of other people. The spiritual practice that can help us put to death our desire for recognition, approval or acceptance from others is the practice of secrecy.

PRACTICE 1 - DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM

	Before we look at how to grow in living from the Father's approval, we need to spend some time looking at our hearts to see the ways in which approval of man has a hold / influence on us. Read the statements below and tick those that are true of you.
1	There is a place (E.g. Facebook, Instagram) or a person I regularly go to for affirmation or recognition
2	When I think about doing something that I know others will see, I always wonder what they will think about it or me.
3	I compare myself to others all the time
4	The successes or recognition of others makes me feel inadequate or envious.
5	I am reluctant to try things outside my comfort zone for fear I will be seen to fail
6	I feel a strong urge to share my successes with others
7	I seek to love others in order to win their approval
8	I am crushed by criticism or the perception of criticism
9	I keep my opinions to myself for fear others will disagree with me or reject me
10	I agree with things I don't agree with to avoid awkward conversations or confrontation
11	I put on a front of holiness when with the church but my day to day reality looks very different
12	I say things that I think others want to hear in order to please them
13	If I think someone is upset with me, I carry the feeling around like a heavy burden
14	It is really important to me that I am seen to be right and I hate the idea of being shown to be wrong
15	I'm constantly apologising to people for fear I have offended them or let them down

PRACTICE 2 - UNDERSTANDING AND RECEIVING THE LOVE OF GOD

	<p>Jesus lived free from the seeking or needing the approval of people because he was completely secure in His identity as God's beloved Son. He lived from a full confidence in the Father's affirmation, acceptance and delight in Him. We will only ever be able to live freely from the approval of people, when we fully understand and receive God's love for us.</p> <p>Take some time to read and reflect upon the scriptures below and ask the Holy Spirit to bring you in a deeper revelation and experience of the love of God.</p> <p>(To explore this foundational theme further we recommend reading the book Gentle and Lowly: The heart of Christ for sinners and sufferers).</p>
	<p>Psalm 36:7 'How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.'</p> <p>Psalm 86:15 'But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.'</p> <p>John 10:9 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.'</p> <p>Romans 5:8 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'</p> <p>Romans 8:37-39 'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'</p>

<p>Ephesians 1:5-6 'In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.'</p> <p>Ephesians 5:1-2 'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.'</p> <p>1 John 3:1 'See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!'</p> <p>1 John 4:9-10 'This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'</p>
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PRACTICE 3 – THE PRACTICE OF SECRECY

There are a number of practical things we can do to help put to death our desire to be seen or praised by others. Look at the list of suggested activities below. Think about which practice might be most helpful with the area of approval you struggle with and adopt it for a couple of weeks, asking God to work through it to change you. Share your experience within your discipleship group or with a trusted friend.

1	<p>Pray for people. In Matthew 6 Jesus warns the disciples about praying like the Pharisees in order to be seen by others. Whilst it can certainly be encouraging to tell people we are praying for them, sometimes it can be a subtle way of 'practicing our righteousness before others' (Matt.6:1). Praying for people regularly, without them knowing, not only blesses them, but helps us to grow in humility and love, opening our hearts to see people as God sees them.</p>
2	<p>Actively seek to praise other people. If you struggle when others are recognised and you are not, put to death envy and competition by being quick to praise and honour others. Commit to only speaking well of people.</p>
3	<p>Seek to bless or serve without people knowing. Seeking to bless people without them knowing can actually be really fun and it helps put to death our clamour for recognition or esteem. Think about what you could do to bless or serve someone secretly. Here are a few examples but get creative! (This is a great thing to do as a family too!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Put a neighbour's bin out. - Pay for someone to cut someone's lawn or wash someone's windows. - Send someone a takeaway or a voucher for a meal out. - Post an anonymous card through someone's door, encouraging them. - Show up early at church on Sunday to help setup or help pack away without being asked or being on the rota
4	<p>Limit your use of, or come off, social media. At the very least stop posting things that seek to draw attention to yourself or seek a response of affirmation from others. Take more time to ask yourself the question: 'Why am I posting this?' And 'Is there a felt need I'm seeking to be met by others' response to me that I should be seeking to have met in God?'</p>
5	<p>Boast in your weakness and failures rather than your strengths and successes In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul writes: 'But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me'.</p> <p>If Christ is to increase and we are to decrease (John 3:30), we must learn to practice boasting in our weaknesses in order to boast in God's grace and power.</p>