

4 Health Dangers of People-Pleasing

The Bible makes it clear that when we give our word, our yes should mean yes and our no, no. This sounds easy enough, but if you're anything like me, meaning what you say isn't exactly your forte.

There are often times when I know good and well that my yes would be better defined as a maybe, and then days, perhaps minutes later, I'm wondering if it's too late to change my this-feels-like-an-optimistic-maybe yes into an absolutely-not-but-I'm flattered-you-asked no. (Have I lost you yet?)

Even when we're less than enthused about scheduling one more activity into our weeks, volunteering on another committee, joining an early a.m. gym class with a friend or hosting our 18th baby shower this year, we give our yeses readily for this simple reason: We're people pleasers.

I think it's fair to presume that most of the time, we all say yes with the best of intentions. We want to bless people with our talents, honor them with our time, relieve them with our strength and energy, and encourage them with our kindness. We know how much more "blessed it is to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) because we have felt the ineffable waves of well-being that rush into our hearts and flood our souls after we do unto others with love and grace, joy and selflessness. But sometimes pleasing people becomes an all-consuming compulsion, one that replaces the sweet delight of do-gooding with an ironic dose of bitter displeasure.

If you're a chronic people pleaser, you could be on a dangerous path that could potentially harm your health and damage your relationships. Here are four warning signs to watch out for:

1. You're neglecting your health. If you're constantly saying yes, you're very well saying no to yourself too often. Wanting to care for others, of course, is not a bad thing, but when your own health is neglected, you won't be able to be your best for those you love most. If you don't set aside time throughout the day to eat healthy meals, exercise, pray and rest, you will quickly burn out and find yourself too tired, weak and weary to give your all to the tasks you're currently committed to, much less agree to take on more!

2. You're growing resentful. If, while doing for others, you find yourself making sharp, acerbic comments or cracking subtle, sarcastic jokes, chances are good that your people-pleasing heart isn't in the right place. Maybe you said yes when you should have politely said no, and now you're resenting the person you originally set out to help.

Passive bitterness can grow into relationship-destroying hostility, so when you feel resentment rearing its ugly head, take a few breaths and gently communicate your feelings before they come out in an unsavory manner.

3. You're becoming stressed and depressed. Constantly trying to please others can lead you to become chronically stressed and feel emotionally drained. Rather than looking to medication to help you cope, try looking to your calendar. When you feel overwhelmed, make a list of all of your obligations and identify which of those are musts and which are options. Then identify one or two of the options that could be eliminated to make room for more "you time." Write down why you're making this cut so if you feel guilty about saying no, you will have a note to remind you of the importance of your decision. Ask a friend or family member to help hold you accountable to your commitment to unwind and refresh for the sake of your health and relationships.

4. You no longer enjoy other people or God's presence. For this sign, I wish to share the biblical story of sisters Mary

and Martha and their very special dinner guest, Jesus. Martha is a perfect example of someone whose passion for pleasing others and showing hospitality completely stole her ability to enjoy the company of others:

“But the Lord said to her, ‘My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:41-42, NLT).

If you’ve ever thrown a party or hosted a special dinner in your own home, then you can probably relate to Martha’s worries. As soon as the invitations go out, the pressure is on to create for our guests a warm, inviting atmosphere, pleasant conversation, and, of course, a delicious meal that they’ll be raving about for days. However, I would venture to guess that none of us has experienced the stress levels that must have overwhelmed Martha as she swept, scrubbed, mopped and chopped for the King of kings!

It’s understandable that she was “upset over all these details”: she was serving Jesus, after all. So why did the Lord rebuke Martha just for trying to be like Martha Stewart? (Sorry, I couldn’t help myself.)

Martha shows what can easily happen to us if we focus more on doing than loving. You see, her desire to please had become so overpowering that it soon overshadowed her ability to enjoy her guests and embrace the blessing of their company. Her drive to be hospitable had, ironically, driven her to be quite the opposite as she accused Jesus of not caring about her while simultaneously tattling on her sister Mary:

“Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me” (Luke 10:40, NASB).

Martha probably had no intention of letting this get-together become a fretful, stress-inducing situation. It’s doubtful

she'd formulated a premeditated plan to embarrass or shame her sister in Jesus' presence. And I can imagine she wanted to kick herself with the foot she'd stuck in her mouth when she asked Jesus, healer of leprosy and opener of blind eyes, if He cared that she was serving Him solo. But what started out as a good-hearted act of kindness ended as a valuable lesson about priorities.

Notice that Jesus admonished Martha not for serving but for being worried and upset about serving. The Greek word used for Martha's "worry" and "upset" can be translated as "be anxious about" and "troubled in mind," respectively. Martha's preoccupation with being a perfect hostess had stolen the joy of simply being in Jesus' presence.

What insight this story holds for us today! In addition to the jobs, chores and distractions of daily life, we also have myriad commitments that require our attention. These commitments are good, in and of themselves; indeed, many people have responsibilities to organize, serve, manage and volunteer within the body of Christ. But even in godly pursuits we can find ourselves anxious and "troubled in mind."

In all of our doing and helping, all of our planning and preparing, there is always just one thing we should be most concerned about. Mary, Jesus said, knew what it was: His presence!

As you go about your day today, be careful not to let the doing for others supersede the loving of others. Don't let time spent on noble tasks replace time spent with Jesus. And if you feel yourself becoming anxious, return to His feet and discover, as Mary did, the pricelessness of His presence.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of *Creation House's Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman's Guide to Total Fitness* and her latest book, *Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness*. Her popular website can be found

at , and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.
