



## **When People Are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man**

*Edward T. Welch*

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However you put it, the fear of man can be summarized this way: We replace God with people. Instead of a biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others.

Of course, the “fear of man” goes by other names. When we are in our teens, it is called “peer pressure.”

When we are older, it is called “people-pleasing.” Recently, it has been called “codependency.” With these labels in mind, we can spot the fear of man everywhere. Diagnosis is fairly straightforward.

- Have you ever struggled with peer pressure? “Peer pressure” is simply a euphemism for the fear of man.
- Are you over-committed? Do you find that it is hard to say no even when wisdom indicates that you should? Are you a “people-pleaser,” another euphemism for the fear of man ?
- Do you “need” something from your spouse? Do you “need” your spouse to listen to you? Respect you? Think carefully here. Certainly God is pleased when there is good communication and a mutual honor between spouses. But for many people, the desire for these things has roots in something that is far from God’s design for his image-bearers. Unless you understand the biblical parameters of marital commitment, your spouse will become the one you fear. Your spouse will control you. Your spouse will quietly take the place of God in your life.
- Is self-esteem a critical concern for you? This, at least in the United States, is the most popular way that the fear of other people is expressed. If self-esteem is a recurring theme for you, chances are that your life revolves around what others think. You reverence or fear their opinions. You need them to buttress your sense of well-being and identity. You need them to fill you up.
- Do you ever feel as if you might be exposed as an impostor? Many business executives and apparently successful people do. The sense of being exposed is an expression of the fear of man. It means that the opinions of other people — especially their possible opinion that you are a failure — are able to control you.
- Are you always second-guessing decisions because of what other people might think? Are you afraid of making mistakes that will make you look bad in other people’s eyes?
- Do you feel empty or meaningless? Do you experience “love hunger”? Here again, if you need others to fill you, you are controlled by them.
- Do you get easily embarrassed? If so, people and their perceived opinions probably define you. Or, to use biblical language, you exalt the opinions of others to the point where you are ruled by them.

THE problem is clear: People are too big in our lives and God is too small. The answer is straightforward: We must learn to know that our God is more loving and more powerful than we ever imagined. Yet this task is not easy. Even if we worked at the most spectacular of national parks, or the bush in our backyard started burning without being consumed, or Jesus appeared and wrestled a few rounds with us, we would not be guaranteed a persistent reverence of God. Too often our mountain-top experiences are quickly overtaken by the clamor of the world, and God once again is diminished in our minds. The goal is to establish a daily tradition of growing in the knowledge of God.

## **When People Are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man Details**

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Codependency, and the Fear of Man Edward T. Welch**

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### **Tung says**

In describing the Ten Plagues that befell Egypt in Exodus, Pastor Voddie Bauchem noted that they were not merely meant to get the Israelites out of Egypt; they were also meant to get Egypt out of the Israelites. That is, it is important to God that secular worldviews are rooted out of the heart of His people. In this book, Welch identifies a critical worldview that far too often plagues Christians: we fear people more than we fear God. We fear them because they can expose our shortcomings; we fear their rejection and ridicule; and we fear their retaliation and oppression. Welch also unpacks how we have a broken conception of the word "need". The world teaches us that we have psychological and emotional needs; that it is good for us to pursue their fulfillment to achieve happiness. But the Christian needs to understand that outside of biological needs like food and water, the only real need we have is spiritual. The solution to both our fear of men and our broken perspective on need is allowing God to be bigger in our lives. That comes primarily from understanding how to properly fear the LORD (as Welch defines it "reverent submission that leads to obedience"). I found Welch's description of the problem to be insightful, and his grounding of the issues and their solutions to be Biblical. I also liked that Welch structured each chapter to be like a textbook with additional recommended reads for those that wish to dig into the topics even more deeply. Recommended.

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### **David Luna says**

I remember reading "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren in 2002, and the opening sentence was "It's not about you". I was startled, like threw the book down startled. Edward Welch has that same effect except it is throughout the entire book. Extremely insightful for Christians living in a "Me First" world. This book is highly recommended. There is no deep theology just brutal truth and embarrassing honesty, which was my guess not easy to write.

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### **Jordan Brown says**

Certainly the most convicting book I have read in recent years, Welch exposes the fear of man that all people struggle with in some measure. My pastor recommended this book for me and I highly recommend it to you.

Part 1 discusses how and why we fear people and part 2 explains how to overcome that fear. As a person grows in the fear of the Lord, he will learn to not let people control him. As Welch frequently states throughout the book, "We are to need people less and love them more."

Where I've been convicted-Ed Welch challenges the Christian to evaluate his motives for obedience to God and discipline in Christian duties (i.e. Bible reading, prayer, serving the Church). Are we doing such things so we can feel better about ourselves? If so, we are wrongfully using Christ to fulfill our own lusts. Welch goes on to explain that most of our perceived "needs" are actually selfish desires. Our greatest need is not to be happy; our greatest need is to glorify God.

I've also been convicted of how casual I am with my own sin. The following quote illustrates it well.

P. 100 "Our sinful nature can give us a sense that we are OK. Better yet, we are good. Of course, we occasionally do bad things. We might yell too loudly, or we might pick up some pornography at the airport. In these cases we should ask God's forgiveness. But, on the whole, we tend to be fairly good. And if we think we are usually good, then God is usually irrelevant."

How true is that last sentence? Such dangerous thinking leads us away from revering God as we should. The rest of the book is packed with convicting moments like this. Seriously, pick up a copy and read it!

#### Underlined Quotes

P. 67-68 "If she think she is beyond Grace, she should be corrected. Such thinking is based on the on the unbiblical assumption that our works can either keep us away from God or move us toward him. It is a denial of grace itself. It suggests that there is some righteous act she must perform in order to meet God halfway. This, however, has nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus. The gospel is only available to people who know they are unclean."

P. 135 "Daily stops in the court of the Lord cure the fear of man."

P. 107 "A growing knowledge of God displaces the fear of people, and it casts out our tendency to be casual with our secret sins."

P. 123 "When the fear of the Lord matures in you, Christ becomes irresistible."

P. 170 "This is the time when you must be controlled by the truth of God more than your own feelings. God's word, not feelings, is our standard. To be driven by our fluctuating sense of well-being may seem spiritual, but it is wrong. It exalts our interpretation above God's."

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### Denise says

This book helped me see the shortcomings of modern need-based psychology and even modern Christian psychology with its tripartite view of man.

"To look to Christ to meet our perceived psychological needs is to Christianize our lusts. We are asking God to give us what we want, *so we can feel better about ourselves*, or so we can have more happiness, not holiness, in our lives" (p. 150).

"The most basic question of human existence becomes 'How can I bring glory to God?'--not 'How will God meet my psychological longings?' These differences create very different tugs on our hearts: one constantly pulls us outward toward God, the other first pulls inward toward ourselves" (p. 158).

This book also helped me really understand what the fear of the Lord really is. Just a quick quote:

"If you have ever walked among giant redwoods, you will never be be overwhelmed by the size of a dogwood tree. Or if you have ever been through a hurricane, a spring rain is nothing to fear. If you have been in the presence of the almighty God, everything that once controlled you suddenly has less power"(p. 119).

## Shawn Woo says

<http://scarlet yarn.com/2012/08/30/whe...>

Edward Welch insists that fear of man is an insidious sin that every human being deals with one way or another. For an adult, it is called codependency, for an adolescent, peer pressure. It is a desire to be valued and wanted by others that manifests itself in low self-esteem, shame, feelings of rejection, jealousy, anger, and/or preoccupation with external appearance. Welch writes that the fear of man keeps us “in bondage, controlled by others and feeling empty,” because we are “controlled by whoever or whatever [we] believe can give [us] what [we] think [we] need” (13). In *When People Are Big and God Is Small*, Welch exposes this sin from the recesses of our hearts and prescribes ways to counteract it.

In order to demonstrate that this seemingly innocuous need to be loved by others is indeed harmful, Welch offers a fascinating critique of our Post-Modern culture. Beginning with Freud and Maslow’s propagation of the idea of psychological need, there has been a gradual shift in our culture from the older moral concern with self-control and self-sacrifice to an emphasis on self-expression, self-realization, and self-fulfillment (86). Underlying this shift is the faulty assumption that human beings are inherently moral and that their emotions (i.e. feelings), therefore, always express what is true and good (81-84). This assumption elevates psychological “needs”(i.e. love, significance, security, etc.) to the level of biological (i.e. food, water, clothes, shelter) and spiritual (i.e. redemption, sanctification, and glorification) needs (138). Many Christians have uncritically accepted this understanding of the human being as psychologically needy, arguing that there is a “God-given need to be loved that is born into every human infant ... that must be met from cradle to grave,” and that “if that primal need for love is not met,” we’ll “carry the scars for life” (88).

However, Welch contends that this psychological “need,” far from being divinely-ordained in creation, was a consequence of the Fall. It reflects an anthropocentric, rather than a theocentric, worldview. It is a “self-serving [need] ... not meant to be satisfied, ... [but] put to death” (162-163). In fact, this theory of psychological need is responsible for the unbridled self-ism and victim mentality of our therapeutic culture (89). Welch observes that the idea of “psychological need” has found support in the common conception of a person as body, which has physical needs, soul, which has psychological needs, and spirit, which has spiritual needs. However, he insists that this tripartite view of personhood is inaccurate, because the Bible uses “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably (cf. Mt. 10:28 1 Cor. 7:34; Jas. 2:26). In cases where “soul” and “spirit” are separately mentioned (e.g. Heb. 4:12; 1 Thes. 5:23), the two words form a tandem describing one inner person (141-142). If I may elaborate on Welch’s explanation, “soul and spirit” constitute a hendiadys, a rhetorical construct that expresses a single idea by two words connected with “and.” For example, when John the Baptist says, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt. 3:11). He is not saying that we need to be baptized with both the Holy Spirit and fire, but rather conveying a single idea of the “fiery Holy Spirit.”

But don’t we have genuine, God-given need for other people? Didn’t God create mankind male and female because he deemed it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18)? Didn’t Jesus intend that the Church be an interdependent body of believers that needs its various parts to fulfill their various roles (1 Cor. 12)? Didn’t God command us to love one another (Jn. 13:34-35)? Welch does not discount these realities, but he makes a teleological distinction between these genuine, spiritual needs and pseudo-psychological needs. Psychological needs are inherently self-serving, while spiritual needs are God-honoring. What we really need, writes Welch, is not to feel better about ourselves, but to repent from our ways and obey God. We are called to love others, “not because people have psychological deficits,” but “because God first loved us” (162-163).

Our problem, then, is that “we need [people] (for ourselves) more than we love them (for the glory of God)”

(19), and Welch's main thesis is that we need to "need other people less [and] love other people more" (183). This, of course, is not a natural human inclination, and for this reason we need the fear of God. If the fear of man is a centripetal orientation that uses people for one's own needs, the fear of God is a centrifugal orientation that loves people for God's glory. But wait, what about 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." That is true, but the fear that is cast out is the terror of God's judgment. For Christians who have been forgiven of their sins, the fear of God is a reverent submission to God that leads to obedience. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). "The fear of the LORD leads to life" (Prov. 19:23). "To fear the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13; Dt. 1:17). In other words, the fear of God involves seeing God as He really is—powerful, awesome, and holy—and humbly submitting to Him. The fear of man puts man under a microscope and makes small people appear big, while the fear of God sets a telescope on God and makes our big God appear as He really is.

Welch goes further than most Evangelicals by saying that the "fear of God" rather than the "love of God" is the cure for the "fear of man." It is true that God loves us, but applying this truth as a psychological balm is little more than a baptized version of Melody Beattie's prescription that to be Codependent No More one must love him or herself more (18). It spurns personal repentance and condones a self-centered worldview in which God exists merely to boost our self-esteem (18). As Welch puts it, "To look to Christ to meet our perceived psychological needs is to Christianize our lusts. We are asking God to give us what we want, so we can feel better about ourselves, or so we can have more happiness, not holiness, in our lives" (150). The antidote for the fear of man is not to think more highly of ourselves, but to think more rightly, and therefore more highly, of God. Then, we will not think so much about what other people think of us and more about how we can love them.

Those who have weathered a hurricane are not concerned about the spring rain. Those who have "walked among the giant redwoods [are] never ... overwhelmed by the size of a dogwood tree" (119). In the same way, those who have been in the presence of God fear no man: "Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him and consumes His foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim His righteousness, and all peoples see His glory" (Ps. 97:2-6).

Welch's simple, yet profound, little book offers a welcome alternative to the plethora of self-help books that pander to our self-centered worldviews.

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## Chris Wilson says

This book has been on the "to read" list for almost two years, and I just now got around to getting it read. My only regret is not having ready it sooner.

The book is divided into two sections. "How and Why We Fear Others," the first section deals with fear of man, where it comes from, and how it plays out in our lives daily. The best chapter, in my opinion, was chapter five, "The World Wants Me to Fear People." It is in this chapter that Welch points out the various ways that culture has made fear of man respectable and the aim of most of its counseling. Welch covers some modern assumptions about God and man, and from there dives into how modern psychology and even biblical psychology play off of these assumptions. The end result of dealing with assumptions rather than the Bible, for biblical psychologists, pastors, leaders, etc., is a reinforcement of the fear of man rather than freedom that comes from the fear of God.

The second section, "Overcoming the Fear of Others," applies biblical fear of the Lord to our profound and often frustrating issues surround the fear of man and ourselves. This section is rich with practical and applied theology, which is a breath of fresh air. The best chapter from this section, in my opinion, was chapter twelve. Here, right at the end of the book, Welch ties in the fear of man giving way to fear of God and how that plays out in the life of the church. I always hope for a chapter in any book that justifies, by itself, the purchase of said book and for me this was that chapter. When we rightly fear God, and not man, we have a desire to be with other believers to help magnify and showcase the God whom we fear (worship, hold in awe). Right fear of God always leads to worship and enjoyment of God and we want our brothers and sisters to join with us in "displaying the manifold wisdom of God."

I highly recommend this book for pastors, elders, deacons, small group leaders, etc. who have a shepherding component to their church service. Most churches are healthiest when they have staff (paid or lay) who can triage persons in need of counsel. This book provides a great starting framework to begin to understand how best to love and care for the people under your care. Get it and start reading today.

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## Mike E. says

This is blue-collar Christianity at its best. Welch writes a practical, readable guide to dealing with how we usually think about ourselves, God and others. He avoids Christian lingo and theological jargon. With clear and understandable ease he identifies the core struggles that human beings have. The core issue is not self-esteem or self-confidence; we are not "love-cups" that need to find the right people or environment to fill us up. We are "idol factories" that actually long for things and people that will glorify self rather than glorify Christ. As we all know, things and people will never ultimately satisfy us. God calls us to love Christ and others. Welch helps people who may have trouble seeing this in the Bible see it very clearly.

The book explains the biblical concept called the "fear of man (FOM)." This is when people play a bigger part of our lives (and how we think about ourselves and others) than God. Welch sees three aspects to FOM: 1. We fear people because they can expose or humiliate us. 2. We fear people because they can reject, ridicule, or despise us. 3. We fear people because they can hunt, attack, or threaten us.

Welch uses a variety of biblical texts and contemporary case scenarios to show how Christ covers and glorifies the shamed, accepts and glorifies the rejected, and protects and glorifies the threatened. This book will help anyone who wants to break free from the bonds of praise, criticism, or shame that often come from personal relationships.

One of the best chapters is "Biblically Examine Your Felt Needs." Welch makes the case that when we look at a felt need--like, "If only my children would obey me" what we are often really looking at is a "Christianized lust." In other words, when we think that our key to happiness is obedient children we are really far from the will of God. God does want our children to obey us. It is a sin for them to dishonor their parents. But Welch is not looking at the kids in this book. He's looking at the heart of the reader. He argues that our felt needs most often reveal our idols. A godly parent should not be controlled by whether his child obeys or not. Christ alone truly satisfies the soul, nothing else. Not money, a great marriage, or obedient children. A key sentence in the book is this:

"To look to Christ to meet our perceived psychological needs is to Christianize our lusts. We are asking God to give us what we want, \_so we can feel better about ourselves,\_ or so we can have more happiness, not holiness, in our lives (150)."

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### **Elena says**

Fear of man can take different faces. It can look like peer pressure, perfectionism, people pleasing, or actual fear of threat from another person. As Christians, fear of man is to be replaced with a healthy fear of the Lord (a deep awe-inspiring respect and knowledge of how big and great and good our God is). The natural inverse correlation between allowing people to be big (fear of man) is that we make God small in our own eyes. Similarly, Welch digs into why popular needs-based psychology is not the answer to overcoming fear of man. He argues that we can overcome our fear of man issues only when we have a clearer view of God and when our focus is on making him (rather than our perceived needs or even desires) our number one priority. This book is packed full of practical truth in battling fear of man issues. There were a few areas towards the end I felt were dragging on, but overall a great resource.

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### **Soul Survivor says**

Hard to even find it ; I ended up buying a used copy from Amazon . It was very good in covering the neuroses in the title , but I think personal counseling should be considered if you have problems adjusting to life because of any/all of these . That's what worked for me !

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### **Rachel says**

Really needed to process through this slowly. Scripture-saturated and truth-filled. Good read for the people pleaser in me.

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### **Keri Higgins says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book! It is so helpful, encouraging & convicting. Full of scripture, Gospel truths, & wisdom! Must read!

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### **Kevin Naylor says**

This is one of the most helpful books I've ever read.

Welch outlines the problem: what we "need" is what controls us. So when we feel we need people for

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validation, security, affirmation, approval, love, etc we allow them to control us. They get determine how we think, feel, and respond on a minute to minute basis. This leaves us discouraged, unhappy, confused, hurt, bitter, distant, angry, etc. Fearing others prevents us from loving others.

He helps us see biblically what is that we truly need. What we need is not so much to be loved by others as to love others. How do we get there? That's the difficult work of fearing, or exalting/being in awe/trusting in, God and not man.

The answer is to learn to fear God. In direct proportion, as our fear of God goes up our fear of man goes down and vice versa.

As marketed: a truly life changing resource!

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### **Abbie Jones says**

Wow. Challenged by every page!

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### **Tara says**

Welch's thesis is rather jarring to anyone raised in modern-day America where the individual is king and low self-esteem is a heinous offense. I kept thinking some of his statements lacked the appropriate nuances, but that may have just been me looking for an out. Ha. I will say I liked what he was saying a good deal more than how he was saying it---but that's true of a lot of his books for me. And since I can't think of any other books that address "low self-esteem" in Biblical terms (idolatry, fear of man, etc.), I'd definitely recommend it as food for thought.

I also can't help but think it'd counterbalance a lot of well-meaning marriage books, which tend to obsess over needs. (Isn't there even one called "His Needs / Her Needs?") They constant chirp that a husband \*needs\* respect, and a wife \*needs\* security -- when these are, in fact, desires/longings/lusts. True needs are biological and spiritual, not psychological. We are called to mirror God's attributes to our spouses (including respect, security, and love) but we do this for God's glory and our spouse's sanctification, not because we are called to fill our spouse's "love tank." (And not so we can get ours filled in return...) I'm not married, obviously, but I feel like that's going to be a huge temptation of mine, and I'm glad I'm realizing it now.

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### **David Harris says**

How much does the fear of man prevent us from living for Christ? Probably more than you think. Reading this book opened my eyes to a multi-faceted issue I struggle with: having a low view of God (God is too small) and having a high view of man (man is too big). Fear to evangelize, failure to confront other believers about sin, not making changes in my life for fear of what others think, and caring more about expectations of men than of God, all can be summarized by the title of this book. This book was massively influential for me for two reasons. First it helped me identify all the areas in my life where fear of man was a problem. Second, Welch shows the reader how to study God's Word and understand how big He really is. This will be one of

those books I will read over and over again.

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