

# People Pleasing Leadership

Dr. Charles Stone

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## About Me

I've been in ministry over 33 years as a church planter, a lead pastor, an associate pastor, a pastoral coach, and a church consultant. I've served churches in the South, the Southwest, the Midwest, and the far West.

I earned an engineering degree from GA Tech, an MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a DMN from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and I'm completing an Executive Masters in Neuroleadership from the Neuroleadership Institute. If you're wondering what neuroleadership is, check out this brief video animation that explains it [here](#).

I've been married to the most wonderful woman in the world for 33 years, Sherryl, and we have three children. Our oldest, Heather, is a nurse and is married to Charlie. Our middle child, Joshua, is a pastor and is married to Deborah. And our youngest, Tiffany, is studying to be a chaplain.

I'm passionate about leading for maximum Kingdom impact, teaching the Bible, and helping leaders understand how brain insight can help them become better leaders. Check out this short animation [here](#) to see how brain insight can help improve your team's productivity.

You can learn more about me and my ministry at my website, [WWW.Charlesstone.com](http://WWW.Charlesstone.com) and you can follow me on Twitter @charlesstone.

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## People Pleasing Leadership

## Chapter 1: How Pervasive is People Pleasing?

I'm a recovering people pleasing pastor. I began ministry over 33 years ago with a passion to make a difference for God. I've served as a church planter, an associate pastor, and as a senior pastor. I love God. I love my family. And I've never compromised my theology or my morals. Yet somewhere along the way I developed subtle unhealthy pleasing patterns that have hindered my growth and the growth of the churches I've served.

And, my research on over 2,200 pastors revealed that I'm not alone in this struggle. The attitude reflected in 1 Thessalonians 2.4 (*we speak not as pleasing man, but God who examines our hearts*) has often given way to the attitude in John 12.43 (*they loved the approval of man more than the approval of God*) for many in leadership.

Before I wrote the book, *People Pleasing Pastors: Avoiding the Pitfalls of Approval Motivated Leadership*, I surveyed over 1,000 pastors through LifeWay Research and another 1200 through an online survey. Here's what pastors said about their struggle with people pleasing.

- Percent of pastors who *admit to people pleasing* at some level:
  - **Survey 1 (LifeWay): 79%**
  - **Survey 2 (on-line): 91%**
- Percent who *admit that people pleasing hinders ministry effectiveness*:
  - **Survey 1: 66%**
  - **Survey 2: 78%**
- Percent who said people pleasing contributed to these problems (totals add up to more than 100% because pastors could check more than one)
  - **Difficulty in leading the church as you believe you should:... 32%**
  - **Difficulty in accomplishing personal and spiritual goals: ..... 31%**
  - **Difficulty with the lay leaders in your church: ..... 29%**
  - **Difficulty in handling the same situation down the road: ..... 27%**
    - **In churches over 250 ..... 37%**
  - **Difficulty with your staff: ..... 23%**
    - **In churches over 250 ..... 38%**
  - **Difficulty in your family: ..... 17%**

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## Chapter 2: Who was the Bible's Most Prominent People Pleasing Leader?

The Bible paints a striking picture of an approval motivated leader in Saul, the first king of ancient Israel. Although he showed tremendous leadership promise, a serious character flaw led to his failure. Rather than seeking healthy *respect* from others, *validation* from others fueled his leadership. He embodies the essence of a people pleasing leader.

We begin to see his steady downfall when he refused to heed the prophet Samuel's instructions to wait for him before offering sacrifices to God (1 Samuel 13). Israel's archenemy, the Philistines, were again preparing for battle when Saul's men assessed the situation as hopeless and began to defect. In his fear he offered sacrifices without Samuel's presence hoping that God would come to their rescue. His disobedient pattern began to repeat itself and in a subsequent battle he again cut corners by not fully obeying God's instructions to totally destroy another of Israel's enemies, the Amalekites.

After Samuel confronted him, Saul's response revealed his character crack, ... *I've sinned. I've trampled roughshod over GOD'S Word and your instructions. I cared more about **pleasing the people** (my emphasis). I let them tell me what to do.* (1 Sam 15.24, *The Message*) Saul's people pleasing tendency led to continued compromise and ultimately to his suicide. I'm not implying that all people pleasing leads to such extremes, but it will lead to diminished leadership and dampened passion that the writer of Proverbs captures. *The fear of human opinion disables . . .* (Prov 29.25, *The Message*).

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## Chapter 3: How Does People Pleasing Impact Leaders and their Ministries?

In my online survey, I provided a place where pastors could anonymously share their stories about people pleasing. Their responses surprised me, both by their stories and the sheer number they shared. All together their stories filled 100 single-spaced pages.

I've listed some of the problems they shared that their people pleasing created, along with a summary of their story.

- **More work on my plate:** one associate pastor wrote that appeasing his pastor on his decisions rather than being honest with him created enormous amounts of additional work when he tried to implement unworkable decisions.
- **Feeling like a fake:** one pastor shared that when he backed down from his convictions and went along with what others wanted, he felt like a fake, feigning excitement about programs about which he never voiced his concerns.
- **Vision confusion:** one church planter remarked that when he planted his church, he would often describe a vision to potential members that reflected their desires in a church rather than his vision, thus confusing people about the real vision.
- **We get bitten anyway:** rather than making a decision about an issue, one pastor changed his mind on a significant one simply to appease others, which eventually resulted in those people getting angry anyway and leaving the church.
- **Giving up:** One pastor simply quit vocational ministry because he couldn't please a certain group of power brokers.

Other pastors shared that people pleasing led to these problems.

- **loss of momentum**
- **diminished excellence**
- **feeling disempowered**
- **emotionality**
- **church division**
- **feeling they were taken hostage by some people**
- **loss of passion and joy**

Even before I researched this area among other pastors, I found little practical help from current books, blogs, or ministry magazines on how to overcome it. That's why I wrote *People Pleasing Pastors*. I wanted to provide a Biblically based, practical tool that

anyone in ministry leadership (or secular leadership) could use to help him or her overcome or avoid this energy sucker.

It clearly hit a nerve. Several significant ministry leaders read a pre-release version and provided these endorsements.

1. "Filled with rich insights and profound wisdom born out the crucible of decades of ministry, *People-Pleasing Pastors* is a must-read for every pastor. I was challenged both personally and in the next growth steps for my own leadership. Charles Stone has given the church a great gift!" (Peter Scazzero, pastor and author of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* and *The Emotionally Healthy Church*)
2. "My ministry mentor used to constantly remind me, 'You have nothing to prove and no one to impress.' In doing so, he gifted me with an incredibly freeing approach ministry. In *People Pleasing Pastors*, Charles Stone shows us why it's so important to find our identity and self-worth in Christ rather than ministry performance and congregational approval. Better yet, he provides practical tools to help the reader assess and then grow in this important area of spiritual and psychological health." (Larry Osborne, Author and Pastor, North Coast Church, Vista, CA)
3. "We are not called to please people so that we can achieve a more secure identity. We are called to love people out of the secure identity that we already possess, the one that was bought for us through the redeeming work of Christ. *People-Pleasing Pastors* acknowledges a real problem, and helps equip those in ministry to resist the temptation of seeking the approval of people above all else." (From the foreword by Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research)
4. "Unfortunately, I see many pastors and leaders fall into the people-pleasing trap. This creates a barrier to healthy ministry--and healthy leaders. Charles provides practical, doable and grace-filled ideas on how to tackle this issue head-on. Supported with Scripture and neuroscience insight, it's a must-read for every pastor in today's high-expectation ministry environments." (Tony Morgan, author, consultant, leadership coach (TonyMorganLive.com))
5. "Charles Stone is an excellent writer. I love his work. He hit a hot button with this book for all of us who serve as pastors. The temptation to keep people happy--and be liked--impacts all of our ministries. This is gold, pastors. Pure gold." (Ron Edmondson, blogger and Senior Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Lexington, KY)

6. "Dr. Stone tackles a topic ministry leaders nervously joke about but rarely take seriously. *People-Pleasing Pastors* is an important resource for every ministry leader. Supported by research and made relatable by personal stories, this book will challenge and propel you to lead more authentically and effectively." (Jenni Catron – Executive Director of Cross Point Church, Author of *Clout: Discover and Unleash Your God-Given Influence*)



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## Chapter 4: What is a People Pleasing Leader?

### *Take the Pleaser Quiz*

It's important to realize that not all people pleasing is wrong. To conquer and avoid people pleasing does not mean that we become self-absorbed, selfish, self-centered, or insensitive to others. God's call to service means that we often should put others first. In that sense we should please people. But serving must never degenerate into servility. Also, the Bible instructs every follower of Jesus to be filled with His Spirit and live out the fruit of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. (Gal 2.22-33, NIV) Living that way will please many. So, leaders must appropriately please others and avoid the unhealthy kinds of pleasing.

Also, pleasing God and healthy people pleasing are not mutually exclusive. In one sense we hope people will like us because we please them and make them happy. We all want to belong, feel loved, and be appreciated for our efforts. God honoring pleasing happens when we foster healthy relationships, exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, and practice the golden rule. A principle in Scripture tells us that we get what we give. Luke 6.38 says, *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*. (NIV) So when we treat people with love and respect and 'please them' in a Spirit-led way, which pleases God, we often get the same in return. However, the unhealthy people pleasing by which many pastors become unconsciously motivated is the focus of my book.

### THE PLEASER QUIZ

I created a simple inventory you can take to discover to what extent this pattern may have evidenced itself in your leadership. Be honest with yourself and check the ones with which you'd agree.

1. In my church's board or leadership meetings, sometimes I don't speak up on an issue for fear of creating tension.
2. Too easily I say yes to someone's request for me to do something. Later I regret having put that on my plate.

3. In meetings often I wait until others explain their views. I do this not because I want to show respect to them, but because I want to hear what they have to say first in case I need to adjust my views to avoid potential conflict.
4. I will go out of my way to attempt to change someone's mind who wants to leave my church or ministry.
5. Too often I repeatedly try to convince someone to agree with my view on an issue even though it appears he or she really doesn't want to listen to my opinion.
6. Sometimes I get angry at myself for not having stood up or spoken up for what I believe.
7. I have kept on a non-performing staff person or volunteer leader too long before making a change.
8. When I need to be firm with someone else, I inordinately delay the conversation and/or after I do have the conversation, I realize I didn't say everything I should have said.
9. Sometimes I try too hard to be nice.
10. With some people I carefully measure my words.
11. Deep inside I believe I can get most everyone to like me.
12. It bothers me when I upset someone. I tend to blame myself for his or her distress.
13. I try very hard to keep things peaceful and calm at home and in leadership meetings.
14. Most people would be surprised about the resentment bottled up inside me.
15. I tread lightly around some people in the church because of their moodiness.
16. When I see an email from certain critical people in my church, I instantly get anxious.
17. When those around me are angry, I become the peacemaker by trying to get them "un-angry."
18. I often feel like I have to justify my decisions if others call them into question.
19. When a leader or staff person is not performing in some area, I'd rather do the task myself than confront and correct him or her.
20. Sometimes I feel guilty when I do something for my own pleasure.

Write down the number of statements you checked here: \_\_\_\_\_

How many did you check? If you checked more than three or four you might want to pick up a copy of the book.

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## Chapter 5: How Can a Ministry Leader Avoid or Overcome People Pleasing?

The key to combating people pleasing is to develop a healthy leadership immune system (immune, that is, to people pleasing). In *People Pleasing Pastors* I share seven key biblically-based principles reinforced by some of the latest neuroscience findings that can help us develop a strong immune system. Each letter in the acronym P.R.E.S.E.N.T. represents the word that begins a short phrase that summarizes each of the seven principles.

A PRESENT leader, one with a healthy leadership immune system, seeks through his or her leadership to be fully present for others instead of becoming distracted by mental chatter that thinks, “How can I please you?” She will carry and present herself with confidence, poise, and character. A PRESENT leader freely offers his leadership as a gift to the church instead of using it to get from others what he wants. A PRESENT leader presents himself as a leader to others in a God honoring way. A PRESENT leader will embrace each of the seven practices.

One way to visualize a leadership immune system is to picture an avocado. If you peel the skin away, two parts remain: the mushy green stuff and the pit. It doesn't take much effort to remove the fleshy part of the avocado. You can easily cut it off or scrape it off. However, you can't do the same with the seed. You can't easily cut it or change its shape. Why? Because it's solid.

A pastor with a strong spiritual and emotional core (a strong leadership immune system) is like that large, solid seed in an avocado. He certainly must have a soft side, but at his center he is strong. However, a pastor with a weak leadership immune system, one where people pleasing has become more prominent, has a much smaller inner core and a much larger 'squishy' part. He easily morphs and adapts to the pressures around him and loses parts of himself when he tries to please others.

The list below contrasts the difference between a pastor who has a strong leadership immune system (solid) and one who doesn't (squishy).

SOLID	SQUISHY
Principle based	Circumstances driven
Stands on principles	Changes to avoid other's displeasure
Does what is right	Keeps the peace to keep others happy
Conviction	Comfort
Authentic	Pretends
Clings to God with pressured	Acquiesces to others when pressured
Listens to disagreement	Gives in or becomes defensive
Stays connected to critics	Fuses with critics or cuts them off
Carefully considers differing viewpoints	Quickly embraces differing viewpoints to avoid another's displeasure
Thoughtfully responds	Automatically reacts
Leads through conflict	Strives to make conflict quickly go away
Stays put in a church	Changes churches a lot
Stands on her own two feet	Wobbly and uncertain
Solid yet flexible	Porous and inflexible

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## Chapter 6: How Can Overcoming or Avoiding People Pleasing Benefit My Leadership or My Ministry?

Growing into a mature PRESENT leader does not come easy nor does it come quickly. Yet, becoming a more PRESENT leader will satisfy your heart, honor the Lord, and maximize your leadership influence.

I believe any spiritual leader can change his or her unhealthy approval motivations with the Lord's help. I'm convinced that when leaders pay attention to these tendencies and make changes I've suggested in *People Pleasing Pastors*, they can experience a fresh wave of spiritual power reflected in these ways.

- greater creativity
- healthier teams
- vision clarity
- renewed passion
- more internal peace
- clearer decision making
- successful conflict management
- decreased anxiety
- less defensiveness
- clarity in hearing God's quiet voice
- more fruit from spiritual disciplines
- less mental distractions

E. M. Bounds, who authored some of the best books ever on prayer best captures why we must conquer people pleasing. He wrote,

***If they be . . . men pleasers or men fearers . . . they cannot take hold of the Church nor the world for God.***

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## Conclusion: Next Steps

If you'd like to learn more about how to avoid or overcome unhealthy people pleasing, consider these next steps.

- ✓ Purchase the book/e-book at your local bookstore or at these online retailers. The book is available February, 2014 but is available for pre-order now.
  - [Amazon](#)
  - [InterVarsity Press](#)
  - [Christianbook.com](#)
  - [Barnes and Noble](#)
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