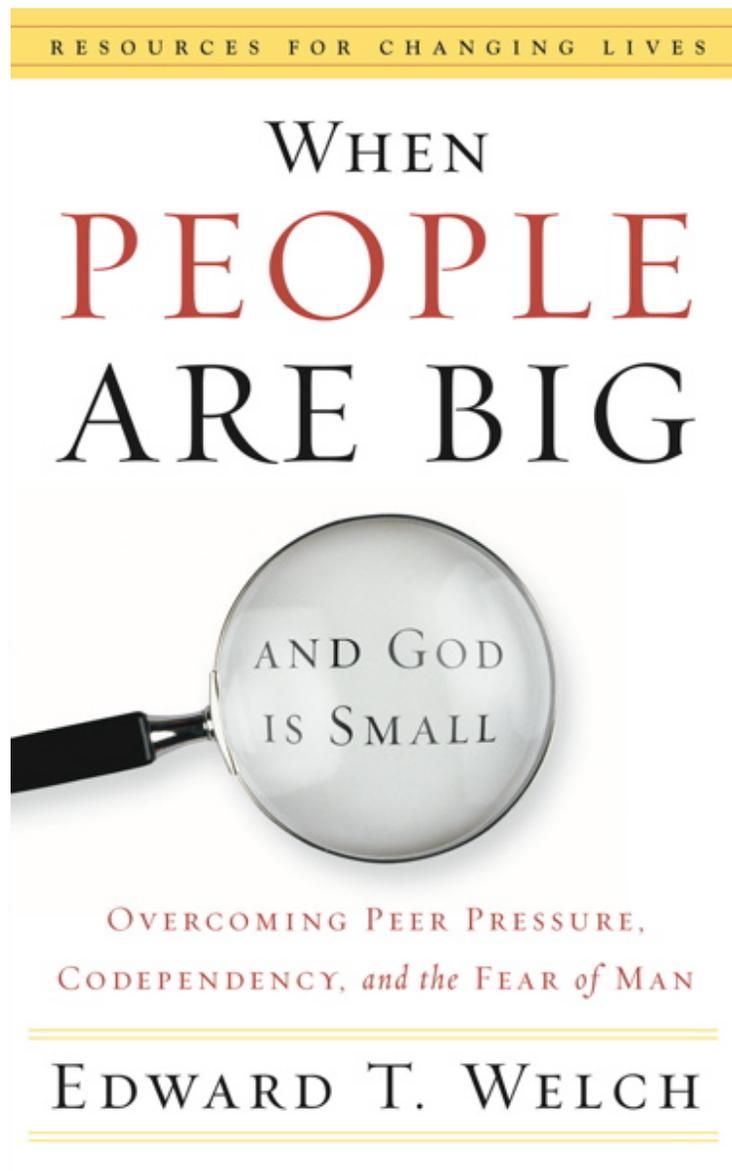


# Growth Group Study Guide

based on Ed Welch's book *When People are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man*



# Introduction

As a church, we want to take the initiative in getting good resources into the hands of our people. And as a result, we are regularly recommending books for our Growth Groups to study. We have had a number of Growth Group leaders who have been helped in the past by our providing a discussion guide to help walk through the books that we have recommended. As a result, we have sought to provide more study guides for a few more of the books that we recommend and think would be beneficial for Growth Groups to study.

Why this book? Ed Welch's *When People are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* is an extensive treatment on a ubiquitous problem: the fear of man. 15 out of 15 people in your Growth Group struggle with the fear of man. And while every person struggles with it, the manifestations of this heart issue are multitudinous and varied expressions of sin. The benefit of taking your group through this book is that every member (or at least everyone who will be honest with themselves) will be convicted, challenged, and directed to sound and Biblical counsel for how to fight this sin. This book will open the eyes of the members of your group to see in a new way just how depraved their hearts are. While that sounds discouraging, it is actually a good thing in that it pulls back the curtains on the enemy's schemes, which is effectively a tool for fighting back against those very schemes.

Now, onto some notes about this discussion guide and your discussion times. Some sessions' reading assignment is longer than others'. The reason for that is the hope of grouping the main ideas together for sessions. As a result, some weeks will only involve reading one chapter, while others have you reading two chapters (and in one case, three). Of course, you can augment the schedule how you like. But with the nature of your regular Growth Group rhythm (study-prayer-study-fellowship), we recommend trying not to extend the study too much longer than 8 sessions, so as to keep you from reading the same book for 6 months.

For each section, there are included some important ideas highlighted from the reading. Sometimes they are simply sentences. Sometimes they are paragraphs. These are the main truths that we hope to stick in a reader's mind. As John Piper has said, "Books don't change peoples lives. Sentences do." As a result, the hope is to reinforce these important ideas in your discussion. So feel free to bat those thoughts around before jumping right into the questions. Or, you might choose to jump right into the questions and reference the main ideas as you go.

Of course, your discussion times need not be constrained to the content of these discussion guides. The questions are simply there to help you highlight some of the more important ideas and themes from the book. I always recommend asking the open-ended question at the end of the session, "Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful that we have not yet discussed?" Your group may bring much better thoughts into the discussion than this guide ever

could. That's great, even ideal. So use this as a resource, as a template, but also take your own insights and insights from your group members and run with those.

With each session, we have a section of Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On. Regarding the Scriptures, we have pulled out several passages that deserve further reflection, meditation, or even memorization for those who feel so inclined. Some of those are Scriptures that Welch references in the reading, while others are ones that we have inserted. Since you'll have them on your leader sheet, you may choose to direct people's attention to the various passages as they fit the discussion. Or you may take the time to have every turn to each of them and read them as a group after you finish with the questions. The hope for those passages is that some will stick with people, and that they will take those and meditate on them throughout the week, if not memorize them.

Finally, we have some suggestions for Prayer Time to wrap up your session. You can take or leave the suggestions as you see fit, but we do recommend that you spend some time after each discussion in concentrated prayer asking the Lord to take the truths discussed and plant them deep in one another's hearts.

## Recommended Schedule

Session 1 - Chapters 1-3 (Introduction & Step #1)

Session 2 - Chapter 4 (Step #2)

Session 3 - Chapter 5 (Step #3)

Session 4 - Chapters 6-7 (Step #4)

Session 5 - Chapters 8-9 (Step #5)

Session 6 - Chapter 10 (Step #6)

Session 7 - Chapters 11-12 (Step #7)

Session 8 - Chapter 13 (Conclusion)

# Session 1 - Chapters 1-3

**Step #1 - Recognize that the fear of man is a major theme both in the Bible and in your own life.**

**Important Idea:** "The purpose of these first two [really, three] chapters is to reveal the fear of man in all of us. The reality behind this fear is much more profound than our present idea of being afraid. In the biblical sense, what we fear shows our allegiances. It shows where we put our trust. It shows who is big in our lives." (47)

**Important Idea:** "What or who you need will control you." (14)

**Important Idea:** "[We] see people as 'bigger' (that is, more powerful and significant) than God, and, out of the fear that creates in us, we give other people the power and right to tell us what to feel, think, and do." (23)

## Questions for Discussion

- In your own words, what exactly is the fear of man?

-Which of Welch's descriptions best helped form your understanding of the fear of man?

"'Fear' in the biblical sense is a much broader word. It includes being afraid of people, but extends to holding someone in awe, being controlled or mastered by people, worshipping other people, putting your trust in people, or [wrongfully] needing people. ...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." (14)

- How many times throughout these chapters did you feel like the author had just pegged your thoughts, feelings, or actions perfectly?

-On the examples from pages 14-17, which ones struck you the most? Also, don't forget his comments on evangelism at the bottom of page 17, and the questions under #1 of the 'For Further Thought' section of page 36.

- What did you learn about the root and cause of shame? How does shame play into the fear of man? Remember the language of "nakedness" that the author uses.

- What is the problem with a high emphasis on self-esteem?

"The massive interest in self-esteem and self-worth exists because it is trying to help us with a real problem. The problem is that we really are not okay. There *is* no reason why we should feel great about ourselves. We truly *are* deficient. The meager props of the self-esteem teaching will eventually collapse as people realize that their problem is much deeper. The problem is, in part, our nakedness before God." (29)

-What is enlightening about the "paradox of self-esteem" (see page 32)?

- "We are more concerned about looking stupid (a fear of people) than we are about acting sinfully (fear of the Lord)?" (40)

-Well, are you? Is this true of you?

- How is it that the fear of man leads us to avoid God? (see page 46)

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading? (see page 34)

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Proverbs 29:25 - *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.*

Galatians 1:10 - *For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

John 12:42-43 - *[42] Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; [43] for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*

## **Prayer Time**

Consider breaking into same-gendered pairs to give the opportunity to discuss specific ways in which the fear of man has been expressed in your life. In particular, use this time to confess any sins committed under the influence of the fear of man.

## Session 2 - Chapter 4

### Step #2 - Identify where your fear of man has been intensified by people in your past.

\*\*There are some more intense matters discussed in illustration form in this chapter. It may be that some of the examples given are the life experiences of people in your group. Be aware of those possibilities, and be aware that it may encourage some people to share experiences they have never shared with the group. Or, it may cause people to close up and retreat. Be open to listen and be prepared to give parameters as you think best. And commit to following up with any situation necessary.

**Important Idea:** "King David was often threatened by enemies, and when he was threatened he too was afraid. But this was not exactly the fear of man, and it didn't provoke the fear of man. The fear of man is the sinful *exaggeration* of a normal experience....Fear of man is fear fun amok. It might start with the very natural fear associated with being vulnerable and threatened. At times, however, this alarm is not regulated by faith. It becomes fear that is consumed with itself and for a time forgets God. It becomes fear that, when activated, rules your life. In such a state, we trust for salvation in others." (59-60)

**Important Idea:** "The road leading to the fear of man may be expressed in terms of favoritism, wanting others to think well of you, fearing exposure by them, or being overwhelmed by their physical power. When these fears are not combated with the fear of the Lord, the consequences can be devastating. But when God is given his rightful place in our lives, old bonds can be shattered." (71)

### Questions for Discussion

- Which of the accounts of the various Biblical figures most resonated with you?

-There was Abraham and the stories of his life from Genesis 12, 20, and 22. There was Israel on the cusp of the Promised Land in Numbers 13. There was Joshua leading the people into the Promised Land in Joshua 1 and 10. And there was David and the numerous examples from various psalms (see pages 54-61)

- Abraham's life points us to how our fear of man is not just about how we fear what man can do to us, but also what man can do to our children as well. "It is one thing to have *your* life threatened, but it something much more serious to have your *child's* life threatened." (55)

-If you have kids, how is your fear man heightened when it concerns them? How might you try to justify that in a spiritual manner? Is it any less wrong than fearing man for your own sake?

- How might you use the Psalms to help you pray against the fear of man? Beyond the ones that Welch mentions, what psalms or verses from various psalms would you suggest in particular?

Psalm 56:11 - In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalm 118:6 - The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Psalm 147:11 - But the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Others?

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- The previous chapters focused on shame-fear and rejection-fear, while this one focuses on threat-fear. Which of these do you find most prominent in your own life?
- Why is getting a grip on threat-fear important in light of persecution for our faith? If persecution were to come your way, would your threat-fear trump your fear of God?

-See Welch's treatment of Matthew 10:28 on pages 71-72.

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?

Some examples might include:

-“The clearest example [of victimization-shame] is Jesus himself. He was sentenced to death in the most shameful manner possible--naked on a cross. He felt shame, but was innocent. He suffered the shame of others that was placed on him. This is the One on whom [we] must fix [our] eyes.” (66)

-“If she [Janet's example, again] thinks that she is beyond grace, she should be corrected. Such thinking is based 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.” (66-67)

-The quotation of Isaiah 54:4-5 on page 67.

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

*Jeremiah 17:5-8 - [5] Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. [6] He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. [7] Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. [8] He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."*

*Matthew 10:28 - And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

### **Prayer Time**

On pages 54-56, we see Abraham make progress in his fear of man over the course of three glimpses into his life (Genesis 12, 20, and 22). Let us pray and seek the same for ourselves. Break into groups of three and take some time to identify some of your failures in the fear of man and pray for help and growth from the Lord in those areas.

## Session 3 - Chapter 5

### Step #3 - Identify where your fear of man has been intensified by the assumptions of the world.

**Important Idea:** "There are quiet, unbiblical assumptions in our culture that shape our thinking and dictate the questions we ask. Sometimes we call this *the world*, as in "the world, the flesh, and the Devil." These assumptions even affect our interpretations of the Bible....No matter how biblical we think we are, it is impossible to avoid being affected by these assumptions. Worldly presuppositions are in the air we breathe. We need to see that in our battle against being controlled by other people, we are fighting not only our own hearts, but the trends in our culture." (75)

**Important Idea:** "Anything that erodes the fear of God will intensify the fear of man." (79)

**Important Idea:** "Can you hear the way our culture *encourages* the fear of man? 'Needs' or 'rights' lead irresistibly into the fear of man. We've seen that whatever you think you need, you come to fear. If you 'need' love (to feel okay about yourself), you will soon be controlled by the one who dispenses love.... [This is] spiritually crippling logic." (87)

### Questions for Discussion

- In your own words, what aspect of the fear of man is Welch narrowing in on in this chapter?

-Remember, the fear of man is not as simple as being afraid of someone. It's more complex than that. One of the primary aspects of the fear of man that Welch focuses on in this chapter is the idea of being controlled by other people. Our fear of man shows when we are controlled by the approval of other people, or by other people meeting our felt "needs."

- How is blame-shifting rooted in the fear of man?

-Have you ever thought of blame-shifting this way? Are you a blame-shifter?

- Ask if anyone would like to sum up the logic of "Assumptions About Ourselves" section.

[It can be a little challenging to connect the main idea of this chapter to the cultural critiques levied in this chapter, so it might help to try to connect all of the dots together. Here's an attempt to do that, if no one ventures out to answer the above question.]

-Welch discusses three ideas that have thoroughly worked themselves into the thinking of our culture, so that now when people think about themselves, they assume these things to be true. Those ideas or assumptions are: 1) We are morally good (79). 2) Emotions are the way to truth (81). And 3) All people are spiritual (84). Each of these assumptions downplay the character and nature of God, and thus erode the fear of him. And like the important idea above teaches us, the by-product of an eroded fear of God is an increased fear of man. So, (1) because we think we are morally good, that means we fail to recognize the reality and depth of our sin problem, which makes God less important to us (and conversely makes people more important). And (2) because we think our emotions are more important than faith in revealed truth, people will become more important to us as a means to validate our emotions (and conversely God will be less important). And (3), because we tend to reduce God and our spirituality to our own standards, God will never be understood as the awesome and holy God that he is. God will be reduced in our eyes, and a fear of people will thrive.

- In talking with unbelievers about spiritual matters, have you seen these assumptions rooted in their thinking? Do you have any examples of that?
- Where else do you find the assumptions of the world? Where have you encountered them in literature or television or movies? (Drawing these out will help everyone see their pervasiveness.)
- Where do you see these assumptions in your own thinking?

-Welch says that while these assumptions might not agree with your "official theology," they may very well be revealed in the way you live (your "unexamined theology"). In other words, where is the disconnect between your official theology and your unexamined theology

[The hope is that this question generates some of the most conversation.]

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Romans 12:2 - *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

### **Prayer Time**

Spend some time praying along the lines of Romans 12:2, that we would not be conformed to this world and its assumptions, but rather be transformed by the renewal of our minds. And pray that the renewal of our minds would specifically involve a clearer understanding of "biblical teaching on who we are and how we can avoid being controlled by the things we feel we need" (91).

## Session 4 - Chapters 6 & 7

**Step #4 - Understand and grow in the fear of the Lord. The person who fears God will fear nothing else.**

**Important Idea:** "All experiences of the fear of man share at least one common feature: people are big. They have grown to idolatrous proportions in our lives. They control us. Since there is no room in our hearts to worship both God and people, whenever people are big, God is not. Therefore, the first task in escaping the snare of the fear of man is to know that *God* is awesome and glorious, not people." (95)

**Important Idea:** "Can you already get a sense of the expulsive power of the fear of the Lord? A growing knowledge of God displaces the fear of people, and it casts out our tendency to be casual with our secret sins. And the good news is that it [the fear of the Lord] can be learned. God is absolutely enthusiastic about blessing us with this knowledge." (107)

**Important Idea:** "...The person who fears God fears nothing else." (116)

**Important Idea:** "This is one of the great blessings of the fear of the Lord. We think less often about ourselves. When a heart is being filled with the greatness of God, there is less room for the question, 'What are people going to think of me?'" (119)

### Questions for Discussion

- What did you think about Welch's comparison between talking and thinking about the Christian life in "how to's" versus talking and thinking about God himself?

-Did you find that convicting? Do you have the same problem? How does that relate to the fear of God/man?

- How did the Fear of the Lord Continuum on page 97 help you better understand the fullness of what is meant by the fear of the Lord?

-Which end of the continuum do you regularly find yourself?

- Out of the three adversaries that oppose the fear of the Lord (the world, the flesh, and the Devil), which do you most often overlook or ignore? Why is that problematic?

- Out of the three resources given to us to grow in the fear of the Lord (the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the body of Christ), which one do you most often neglect?

- Why is a consistent, vibrant relationship with God essential for growing in the fear of the Lord? Put another way, how is intimately knowing God crucial for fighting the fear of man?

“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 past is not easy....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.” (113)

“The triune God delights in showing us his grandeur and holiness, and we should never be satisfied with our present knowledge of him.” (133)

- What in particular struck you about the sections on Job and Isaiah (pages 114-123)?

- Which of the nine practices suggested at the end of chapter 7 (pages 133-134) do you want to try to work on over the next couple of weeks?

-Try to stress how helpful it could be to actually do some of these things.

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Proverbs 9:10 – *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

Jeremiah 10:7 - *Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.*

### **Prayer Time**

Use the prayer given on page 133 as a template and pray accordingly as a group.

"Lord, teach your church to fear you. Your grace is not always amazing to us. We are slow to hate our sin. We are more concerned with what someone thinks about our appearance than we are about reverential obedience before you. We want to delight in fear. We want to treasure it and give it to the next generation. Amen." (133)

- Have one group member lead a prayer of confession, confessing our lack of fear of God and our sinful concern with what other people think of us.
- Have another person pray that everyone in the group would grow in the fear of the Lord, that we would fear God with a healthy and robust fear (not simply terror, but joyful and reverential obedience). Pray that God would invert the fear of man in our hearts with the fear of Himself.
- Have another person pray that our entire church would grow in the fear of the Lord, that we would all be instructed by the Word and taught to fear God appropriately.

## Session 5 - Chapters 8 & 9

- Lead with a follow-up question from the last session. Ask if anyone did any of the application steps at the end of chapter 7.

Which ones did you try?

Did you find any fruitfulness from those studies or practices?

Now onto Chapters 8 & 9.

**Step #5 - Examine where your desires have been too big. When we fear people, people are big, our desires are even bigger, and God is small.**

**Important Idea:** "When psychological needs, rather than sin, are seen as our primary problem, not only is our self-understanding affected, but the gospel itself is changed. A needs theory suggests that the gospel is, most deeply, intended to meet psychological needs. In other words, [they suppose that] the gospel is aimed at our self-esteem problem....This sounds good to us, but it is not the gospel. The good news of Jesus is not intended to make us feel good about ourselves. Instead, the good news humbles us....Jesus did not die to increase our self-esteem. Rather, Jesus died to bring glory to the Father by redeeming people from the curse of sin....But the cross deals with our sin problem, our *spiritual* need." (146-147)

**Important Idea:** "To look Christ to meet our perceived psychological needs is to Christianize our lusts." (150)

**Important Idea:** "Self-serving needs are not meant to be satisfied; they are meant to be put to death." (162)

**Important Idea:** "We need to need other people less and love other people more." (167)

### Questions for Discussion

- On page 137, Welch asks, "What would you say you really need?" How would you have answered that question before finishing the reading?

-How might your answer have changed after you completed the reading?

Right after Welch asks, "What would you say you really need?", he goes on to say, "Your answers will get to the heart of your view of yourself." (137)

- How is understanding the concept of “Where do psychological needs come from?” cleared up when we understand them in light of Genesis 3? (Look at pages 148-149 for help)

- “If I stand before [Christ] as a cup waiting to be filled with psychological satisfaction, I will never feel quite full. Why? First, because my lusts are boundless; by their very nature, they can’t be filled. Second, because Jesus does not intend to satisfy my selfish desires. Instead, he intends to *break* the cup of psychological needs (lusts), not fill it.” (149)

-How does this image (of Jesus breaking our leaky love cup) put your ‘needs’ (lusts, really) in perspective?

- Why is it that, if we are ever going to properly understand our true needs, we must understand first who God is, and then second who we are in light of who he is?

- In your own words, what does it mean to be God’s image-bearers (in your own words, yet informed by Welch’s discussion of the topic)?

“To be created in the image of God means that we are like God in every way a creature can be like him, *to the praise of his glorious grace* (Ephesians 1:6,12,14). This indicates that God has given us gifts to serve rather than needs to be served.” (167)

“The essence of imaging God is to rejoice in God’s presence, to love him above all else, and to live for his glory, not our own. 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 pulls us inward toward ourselves.” (158)

- Why is praying the prayers of Scripture an important practice? (Of course, there are many reasons, but what did we learn from this chapter?)

-They show us what we truly need. And they show us God’s desire to help the needy. (see page 164)

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Psalm 34:9 – *Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!*

### **Prayer Time**

Break up in same-gendered groups of two or three and confess to one another how the many of your “psychological needs” have really been wants, lusts, and demands in disguise.

After you have spent some time confessing those, turn to some of the various prayers of Scripture (e.g. Matthew 6:9-13; Psalm 51; Ephesians 3:14-21) and pray them through the lens of “This is what I need.”

## Session 6 - Chapter 10

**Step #6 - Rejoice that God has covered your shame, protected you from danger, and accepted you. He has filled you with his love.**

**Important Idea:** “[God] blesses us and frees us by saying, “Fear me and me alone.” This is exactly what we need. It gives us the privilege of being controlled by our loving and just Savior rather than people.” (170)

**Important Idea:** “So we *do* need the love of Jesus. Since we were created by the Divine Lover, we will never be okay unless we know deeply of that love. Without this love we are spiritually and physically dead.” (171-172)

### Questions for Discussion

- In your own words, how would you sum up the main logic of this chapter? As you try to answer, make use of Welch’s categories of ‘needs’ and ‘wants’ or ‘desires.’

-Here’s a shot: Our greatest need is a spiritual one, and fundamentally it is the need to know the love that Jesus has for us. As Welch states, “Since we were created by the Divine Lover, we will never be okay unless we know deeply of that love” (171-172). Because this is our primary need, it becomes a fundamental desire that we will seek to gratify at all costs. However, our desires are broken and distorted from sin, and so we’ll look for replacement love as we run from God. As Welch says, “We think it safer and more effective to look to other people to relieve our emptiness” (172). Because we know we need it, and because our hearts are blinded by sin, we’ll look for love in all the wrong places – particularly in other people. But the only way to keep us from looking for love and acceptance in other people is to fill our hearts with the truth of God’s love for us. This is the only way for us to move from being controlled by other people to being controlled by our just and loving Savior (170).

- Remember those three aspects of the fear of man from page 170?

- 1) We fear people because they can expose and 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.

-Out of these three, which category does your personal struggle with the fear of man most often fall into?

- Similarly, as we think about God's love overwhelming those fears, which one of these gospel realities do you need to work into your heart more deeply?

- 1) To the shamed and humiliated, God covers and glorifies.

- 2) To the rejected, God accepts and glorifies.

- 3) To the threatened, God protects and glorifies.

- What struck you in the section about Hosea and Gomer, and therefore God and his people?

- Are there any other passages of Scripture that you regularly turn to in order to remind yourself of God's love for you?

- Are there any songs or hymns that we sing in corporate worship that help you to fill your heart with truths of God's love for you?

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Romans 5:5 - *And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Psalm 103:8-13 - *[8] The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. [9] He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. [10] He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. [11] For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; [12] as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. [13] As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.*

## **Prayer Time**

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 3:14-21. Paul tells the Ephesian church that his prayer for them is that they might have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love for them, and that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Pray for this knowledge as a group.

- Pray that the magnitude of God's love would displace every other lesser affection in our hearts.
- Pray that the love shown to us in Jesus Christ would control our hearts more than any other circumstance.
- Pray that we would be rooted and grounded in this love, so that nothing we experience could ever shake our confidence in the deep love God has for us.

## Session 7 - Chapters 11 & 12

**Step #7 - Need other people less, love other people more. Out of obedience to Christ, and as a response to his love toward you, pursue others in love.**

**Important Idea:** "People are our cherished idols. We worship them, hoping they will take care of us, hoping they will give us what we feel we need. What we really need are *biblical* shapes and identities for people. Then, instead of needing people to fill our desires, we can love people for the sake of God's glory and fulfill the purpose for which we were created." (182)

- The 'shapes' and identities that Welch lists are: enemies, neighbors, and family.

**Important Idea:** "When we fear other people and either isolate or protect ourselves from them, we isolate and protect ourselves from a significant part of God's remedy [for the fear of man]—love and unity with his people....One of the greatest blessings on earth is to be united with God's people rather than to fear them or be isolated from them." (202)

**Important Idea:** "God's Word consistently urges us toward love for God and love for other people. As we follow this path, we find that we are no longer dominated by an idolatrous fear of others." (205)

**Important Idea:** "We are to love people more and need people (to satisfy our psychological cravings) less. In the same way that love for God expels the terror of God, love for people expels our fear that they might shame, physically hurt, or reject us." (216)

### Questions for Discussion

- Welch says, "It is not so hard to understand what the Bible says about people—everyone knows that we are supposed to love them—but it is difficult to apply this knowledge." In other words, we know very clearly the command to love our neighbors as ourselves, but we have a really hard time translating that knowledge into obedience.

-Why is this? Could it be that we wrestle so strongly with the fear of man precisely because we have such little love for other people in our hearts?

- What did you find to be the most helpful part of the section on what the Bible has to say about loving our enemies (see pages 183-190)?

- Is this idea of "the church as family" foreign to you? Or have you experienced this to be the case?

-Feel free to let people tell stories and give examples (like the first paragraph on page 205 encourages).

- In order to be the church and to carry out its commands, we do actually need people. For instance, we need people to teach and pastor us, we need counsel, and we need accountability. But how is that different from needing people to satisfy our psychological cravings?

-The difference is in needing people for selfless ends, rather than selfish ends.

- In Chapter 12, what descriptions of the church convicted you? Do you understand our church and your role in it in the same types of ways that Welch describes?

- Welch writes, "One implication of [church] unity is that it guarantees that the life of a Christian will be filled with greater joy—but also with greater sorrow." (207)

-Why is that true? And why is that preferable for true Christians?

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Matthew 22:34-40 - [34] *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. [35] And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. [36] "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" [37] And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

Romans 13:8-9 - [8] *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. [9] For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall*

*not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

### **Prayer Time**

- Pray for one person that you'd consider an enemy. Ask for help to love them the way God has loved you. Ask that God would show you ways to surprise them with an act of service to them.
- Pray for one neighbor. Ask for opportunities to show them the most prominent act of Christian love: pointing them to the love of Jesus.
- Pray for our church. Ask God to give us great unity, humble and self-sacrificing love, and that the watching world would be stunned by our oneness.

# Session 8 - Conclusion

## Final Thoughts

**Important Idea:** "The fear of God is the essential foundation. Without this, the fear of man with flourish." (219)

**Important Idea:** "Regarding other people, our problem is that we need them (for ourselves) more than we love them (for the glory of God). The task God sets for us is to need them less and love them more." (19)

-This is obviously not from this section of reading, but is instead the basic thesis of the book. But it is worth re-stating it to sum up the main takeaway from the book.

## Questions for Discussion

- In the stories of Martin Luther, Daniel (as well as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), Nancy, and even Ed Welch himself, did you find anything that helped illustrate some of the truths you have learned from this book?
- In the story of Nancy, the pastor/counselor asks her a series of three questions to help her see the sin pattern of the fear of man in her life. How might committing those questions to memory help you be on guard against the fear of man?
  - 1) What do you need?
  - 2) Who or what controls you?
  - 3) Where do you put your trust?
- Over the course of our study of this book and this topic, what have been some of the most striking truths that you have taken to heart?
- What Scriptures have you encountered through this study that have helped you see more of your problem with the fear of man, as well as a path forward in fighting the fear of man?

- Welch writes autobiographically, "I found that people were big, my desires for self-glory were even bigger, and God was small. I care more about the praise of men than the praise of God. I was a worshipper of people, hoping that they would give me the blessing I desired. I found that I needed [people] *for my purposes* more than I loved them. The path away from the fear of man was the path of confession of sin and repentance. There were no other options." (237)

-So what other steps are left for you to take?

- In what specific areas of your life do you see the fear of man? How does the fear of man work itself out in your life? [This is a big one. And hopefully, everyone has been thinking on this for weeks now.]

-How should you respond? Specifically, what needs to be confessed and repented of?

- After this study, would you say that the fear of man is a deep sin pattern in your life? Do you see various and multiple sin habits that are fed by the vein of the fear of man?

- How were you pointed to the gospel in this section of reading?

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

### **Scriptures to Memorize and/or Meditate On**

Ecclesiastes 12:13 - *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*

### **Prayer Time**

Take time to pray for the specific areas in each others' lives that were mentioned as particular problem spots with the fear of man. Ask God to invert the fear of man in our lives with the fear of Himself. Pray that as a result of this study, our eyes would be continually open to the problem of the fear of man as well as the Biblical solutions to the fear of man.