



## Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

### How can I make them want me?

Recently, I met a girl who shared with me a time that she'd been left out by friends.

It happened at school and started with a club her friends created. The club had its own rules, and when she overheard some girls in her class talking about it, she asked if she could join.

"Sure," they replied, and with that she was a member.

Later that day, however, she overheard the mastermind behind the club — one of her best friends — telling the girls who invited her in to pretend the club didn't exist anymore. For whatever reason, the club creator didn't want her friend to be part of this group, so she hatched a plan to continue it in secret.

As you can imagine, this girl was hurt. While she didn't reveal what she'd overheard, she spent the rest of the day dwelling on the events and feeling confused. Why would her friend intentionally lock her out? What was the point?

The more she thought about it, the more she questioned herself. She initially wondered, "Have I done something to make my friend mad at me? Am I not being a good friend? How can I be a better friend?" After giving it serious thought, she was still short on solutions. She couldn't come up with a reason why her friend might react that way or what she could have done differently.

At this point, her thoughts changed. She now wondered how she could gain *acceptance* from the club. Her overriding question was, "How can I make them want me?" As she admitted to me the ideas that crossed her mind, she laughed at herself. Her wish to be more popular and desirable prompted her to consider scenarios like:

*Should I buy cooler clothes?*

*Should I change my look?*

*Should I be more social?*

*Should I talk more and not be as shy?*

She exhausted herself in search of answers. At last, she reached a pivotal conclusion, ultimately deciding this: "If I haven't done anything wrong or mean to make them act that way, then I don't need to change. What happened wasn't my fault, so I don't need to do anything differently."

I share this story because it's relevant to everyone. Young and old, we all know what it's like to be excluded. We've all questioned ourselves as a result. We've all experienced the heart-sinking disappointment of having a friend go behind our back. Sometimes it's due to jealousy. Sometimes it's ignorance. Sometimes it's immaturity and the fact that people get hurt as everyone learns what, exactly, a true friendship entails.

In any case, it's important to keep a clear head. It's important to understand, as this girl did, whether change is necessary on our end. Rejection makes it very tempting to

transform ourselves to gain approval. And while that may secure our spot in a club, it can distance us from who God designed us to be. It can conform us to the ways of the world and make us lose touch with our unique identity in Christ.

The term for this is "people-pleasing." And according to Rick Warren, author of the best-selling book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, people-pleasing is one of the greatest barriers that keeps us from living out our life purpose. It's such an issue today, in fact, that he added a chapter on people-pleasing in the newest edition of *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

"There is nothing wrong with our desire to be accepted, appreciated, and approved by other people," Warren writes. "In fact, without the affirmation of others we never fully blossom into our full potential. But as with all of the healthy and good desires God puts in our hearts, the desire for approval can be misused, abused and confused. It can become an obsession that dominates our life and a fear that destroys our soul."

I admire how this girl figured out that blaming herself for her friend's rejection was the wrong assumption. I like how she overcame the question we've all asked ourselves — "How can I make them want me?" — with truth and logic. She has since moved on and forgiven her friend, so all is good. And what the experience taught her is to trust her instincts and know that she is *enough* just the way she is. Trying to be more desirable or popular is a misuse of time.

We all face rejection. And while some rejection opens our eyes to what we should improve upon, there is also rejection that has *nothing to do with us*. It reflects the other person's flaws, not ours. To evaluate a situation, we need *wisdom* and *courage* — wisdom to help us discern our role (if any) and courage to preserve who we are and not change for the wrong reasons.

It's a personal choice how far we walk down the "How can I make them want me?" road. When traveling this path, we live in self-doubt. We rack our brain for answers and ask questions that fuel our anxiety. But as this girl shows, *there is a solution*, and that is to turn our thoughts around and find peace with who we are.

If a young mind can draw this conclusion, surely an adult mind can, too. Surely we can all keep our need for approval in perspective and make sure that any changes we make add value to our lives, enrich our relationships, and draw us closer to the person we're meant to be.

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