

Being Popular, or Not!

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Admit it; we've all had thoughts like these: "Why can't I be pretty and popular like her?" "Why can't I be athletic and important like him?" We want to be liked, to feel important and popular. Becoming popular isn't difficult. When we impress and please people, they will admire us. But staying popular—that can be a problem.

Popularity includes responsibility; others will follow a popular leader. As Christians, we don't want to lead people astray. Besides, it's hard to please even a small group of people day after day. It's hard to be popular **and** responsible because doing what pleases people often conflicts with doing what's right.

Ask John the Baptizer. Before he was born, his parents knew God had a plan for John (Luke 1:5-20). As an adult, he lived in the wilderness and proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand (Matthew 3:1-6). Crowds came out to hear him preach, including respected priests and religious leaders. People thought he was a prophet, maybe even the promised Messiah. John was popular, but he didn't let popularity stop him from doing his job. He told the religious leaders to repent (Matthew 3:7-12). He told those whom he baptized to live a different kind of life (John 3:10-14). People asked, "Are you the Messiah?" They admired him; his popularity grew. But John told the truth: "I am not the Messiah" (John 1:19-23).

One day after John had announced that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:34), the religious leaders told him that Jesus was becoming more popular: "Behold, He is baptizing, all are coming to Him!" (John 3:26). Maybe they hoped to make John angry or start a fight between John and Jesus. John didn't get angry. He knew his purpose in life was "to make straight the way of the Lord" (John 1:22-23)—to tell people Jesus was coming. He also knew that once he finished his job, the crowds would desert him. So John told them, "This joy of mine is fulfilled. He [Jesus] must increase and I must decrease" (John 3:29-30).

What does that mean? If John did his job, then Jesus would become more popular and important while John would become less popular and important. John gladly gave up his

popularity for Jesus, the Son of God, who deserved all praise and glory because He had the power to save people from sin.

How does that apply to us today? We need to be like John the Baptizer in three ways.

1) Like John, we need to know our purpose in life. Before baptism, we live to please ourselves. When we become Christians, we live to please God. **Our purpose is to become more like Jesus every day. He must increase; we must decrease.**

2) Like John, we must always stand for the Truth, whether it makes us popular or unpopular. He told the crowds to repent. When Jesus came to be baptized, he announced that Jesus was the Son of God. These truths didn't hurt his popularity at first. But some time after Jesus became well known, John was arrested and eventually executed because he dared to tell King Herod that his marriage was sinful (Mark 6:14-29). **If the Truth hurts our popularity, it is still the Truth, and it must be upheld.**

3) Like John, we must love God more than ourselves. He might have remained popular if he had tried to please King Herod. However, John knew that popularity never lasts long, but pleasing God has eternal benefits. Later on, when the Jewish leaders told the Apostles to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter and the others said something that John the Baptizer would have liked, something we Christians must never forget: **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29).

All of us want to be liked, but we may discover that popularity costs more than we can afford. Seek instead to give people a better reason to like us—character that shines with the light of Jesus. **As Jesus increases within us, we won't be concerned about popularity, and neither will our true friends.**