Fear Example: Unwanted

Appears in #2, #4, #6, #10, #11, #12 | Areas: Pride, Ambition, Self-Esteem, Sex Relations, Pocket Book

References: Common Fears | Fear Inventory – Drill-Down | Fear Inventory – 4-Column | 4-Column Expanded

Of all the fears in this inventory, "unwanted" has the broadest reach – it touches 5 of the 7 areas of self. It shows up in marriages, workplaces, friendships, and our relationship with money and status. It is the belief that at a fundamental level, the world does not want what I have to offer – and if the world doesn't want me, I must be defective.

From Column 3: *"A real man is wanted anywhere."* – the sex relations statement that reveals the fear: if I'm not wanted, I'm not a real man/woman.

Drill-Down: Tracing "Unwanted" to Its Root

"Unwanted" is one of the most common second-station fears. Many surface fears lead to it: not good enough leads to unwanted. Not respected leads to unwanted. Disliked leads to unwanted. Left out leads to unwanted. Not needed leads to unwanted. It is the place where dozens of specific fears converge into one terrible conclusion: *nobody wants me here.*

Once you arrive at "unwanted," the trail narrows. There are fewer places to go – and they are all darker.

(a) I Fear being…	(b) Why?	(c) Why?	(d) Why?	(e) Why?	(f) Why?
unwanted	alone	emotional pain	using	dying	unknown
unwanted	disposable	worthless	~~alone~~		
unwanted	rejected	~~alone~~			
unwanted	invisible	irrelevant	~~worthless~~		

The Chain

> *unwanted --> alone --> emotional pain --> using --> dying --> the unknown --> no God --> self-reliance fails me*

Entry Paths Into "Unwanted"

The drill-down table above shows "unwanted" as the starting fear. But in most inventories, "unwanted" is not where you start – it is where you arrive. Here are the common entry paths:

- **not good enough** --> unwanted (Example #1)
- **disrespected** --> unwanted (Example #1)
- **left out** --> unwanted (Example #1)
- **not needed** --> unwanted (Example #1)
- **not acknowledged** --> unimportant --> unloved --> unwanted (Example #2)
- **not perfect** --> unwanted (Example #2)

This is what makes "unwanted" so dangerous: it is the funnel. Dozens of surface fears pour into it. And once you are there, the chain to alone, to pain, to using, to dying moves fast. That is why it appears in 6 of 12 resentment examples – it is not a niche fear. It is the common denominator.

The person who fears being unwanted does not simply fear one situation. They fear being unwanted by their spouse (#4), by their neighbor (#2), by their employer (#6), by a romantic partner (#10), by anyone who might love them (#11), and by a world that measures worth in dollars (#12). The setting changes. The fear does not.

4-Column: Brief

1. Fear of: Being unwanted – by a partner, employer, friend, family, community. Not being chosen, not being sought after, not being missed when absent.

2. Why: Insecurity, self-centeredness, co-dependency, pride, vanity, dishonesty, self-pity. I believe my worth is determined by whether other people want me around. If they don't actively seek me out, I conclude I'm defective.

3. Self-Reliance: I perform to be wanted – I make myself useful, entertaining, attractive, or indispensable. I get clingy or I withdraw preemptively. I use money, sex, or status to make myself "wanted." I resent those who don't want me enough.

4. Better Way: "Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs." (◆ BB p.63). When I seek God's will instead of others' approval, I stop needing to be wanted and start being useful. God wants me – that is enough.

4-Column: Medium

1. Fear of: Being Unwanted

Not being chosen. Not being sought out. Not being missed. The fear that if you walked out of a room, no one would notice – and if they did notice, they would be relieved. This fear operates in marriages ("Others should see what a great catch I am" – #4), in workplaces ("A real man would not have to ask for a raise" – #6), in friendships ("Others should see what a likable guy I am" – #2), in the desperate pursuit of romantic love ("I want to be loved, pursued, adored – Wanted" – #10), in the belief that love must be earned ("Others should want me and value me" – #11), and in the conviction that money is what makes you wanted ("I am what I have and earn. I am powerful and attractive" – #12).

2. Why: Character Defects

Insecurity: The root. I do not believe I am inherently valuable. My worth must be confirmed by external evidence – someone choosing me, pursuing me, needing me.

Co-dependency: I have welded my identity to other people's desire for me. Without someone wanting me, I don't know who I am.

Vanity: I want to be wanted for how I appear, not for who I am. I polish the surface and neglect the interior.

Self-centeredness: The fear of being unwanted is, at bottom, obsessive self-focus. I am so consumed with monitoring whether you want me that I cannot actually be present with you.

Dishonesty: I pretend to be someone I'm not in order to be wanted. I adopt your values, your opinions, your interests. "I'll be anything and do anything to be loved" (#11).

Self-pity: "Why doesn't anyone want me? What's wrong with me? Everyone else gets chosen." The victim posture that makes genuine connection impossible.

People-pleasing: I say yes to everything, tolerate anything, bend myself into whatever shape I think you want – all to avoid the moment when you stop wanting me.

Lust: I substitute sexual desirability for genuine connection. If someone wants my body, I tell myself they want *me*.

Envy: I look at the people who are wanted – the popular, the chosen, the sought-after – and I resent them. Their wantedness is evidence of my unwantedness.

Self-seeking: I perform acts of kindness, generosity, and service not because I care about you but because I want you to want me in return. My giving has strings attached.

SDSF Breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I want you to want me more than I want to genuinely love you. My need to be wanted comes first.
- *Dishonest:* I present a manufactured version of myself – the version I think you'll want. I hide the parts I fear will make you leave.
- *Self-seeking:* I keep score. Every act of kindness is an investment I expect to be repaid in the currency of your attention.
- *Fearful:* Underneath all of it: I am terrified that the real me is not enough to be wanted. So I never show you the real me.

Areas of Self: Why 5 of 7

"Unwanted" touches more areas of self than almost any other fear. Here is why:

- **Pride** – *"Others should see what a great catch I am"* (#4). *"Others should want me and value me"* (#11). Pride demands that others recognize my worth. If they don't want me, they are failing to see what they should see.
- **Ambition** – *"I want to be loved, pursued, adored – Wanted"* (#10). *"I want people to help me be successful and rich"* (#12). Ambition drives the pursuit of being wanted – I chase the feeling the way I once chased substances.
- **Self-Esteem** – *"I am what I have and earn. I am powerful and attractive"* (#12). *"I am desirable. I have what he/she wants"* (#10). Self-esteem rises and falls with whether someone is currently wanting me. I am a stock price that fluctuates with demand.
- **Sex Relations** – *"A real man is wanted anywhere"* (#2). *"A real man would not have to ask for a raise"* (#6). *"Real Women/Men have Power, Control Others and get what they want"* (#10). This is the most revealing area. Being unwanted strikes at my identity as a man or woman. If I'm not wanted, I'm not a real man. Not a real woman. Not real at all.
- **Pocket Book** – *"Others should help me succeed and give me a break"* (#12). *"Others should see that I have enough Money to attract someone"* (#10). Money becomes the tool for making myself wanted. If I can't be wanted for who I am, I'll buy my way into being wanted.

The two areas it does not typically touch – **Security** and **Personal Relations** – are affected by the fears that "unwanted" leads to (alone, abandoned), not by "unwanted" itself. The fear of being unwanted is about the verdict. The fear of being alone is about living with the consequences of the verdict.

The Self-Fulfilling Cycle

1. I fear being unwanted.
2. I perform to be wanted – I become useful, entertaining, attractive, indispensable. I shape-shift into whatever I think you want.
3. The performance is exhausting. I cannot sustain it.
4. Resentment builds. "I do so much for them and they don't even appreciate me." I begin to withdraw, become passive-aggressive, or lash out.

5. My resentment and withdrawal push people away.
6. They stop wanting me – or I interpret their normal behavior as not wanting me.
7. My fear is confirmed: "See? I'm unwanted."
8. I conclude that I need to perform *harder* next time. Or I give up and isolate.
9. Either way, the cycle begins again.

Behavioral Patterns

- **Shape-shifting:** Becoming whoever I think you want me to be. Adopting your interests, your opinions, your personality. "I'll be anything and do anything to be loved" (#11).
- **Performing:** Making myself useful, funny, attractive, indispensable – not because I enjoy it but because I need the validation.
- **Score-keeping:** Tracking who calls first, who texts back fastest, who includes me. Interpreting every social interaction as evidence for or against my wantedness.
- **Preemptive withdrawal:** Pulling away before I can be rejected. If I leave first, I control the narrative.
- **Clinging:** The opposite – refusing to let go. Calling too often, texting too much, demanding reassurance. "I never let go" (#11).
- **Buying wantedness:** Using money, gifts, favors, or status to make people want me. "Manipulate, lie, play favorites, use people to get ahead" (#12).
- **Resentment collecting:** Keeping a mental ledger of the people who didn't want me enough. Using their failures as evidence that I am unlovable.
- **Overpowering:** "Overpower and Intimidate. Fake Listening to them" (#10). If I can't make you want me through charm, I'll make you need me through force or manipulation.

Literature

> *"This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it."* (◆ BB p.67)

The fear of being unwanted is one of the most pervasive threads. It weaves through marriages, jobs, friendships, finances, and self-image. It corrodes everything it touches

because it turns every relationship into a test: *Do you still want me?*

> *"Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life." (* ◆ BB p.63*)*

The solution is not to become more wanted. The solution is to stop needing to be wanted. When I am established on the footing of trust in God, I become interested in what I can give, not what I can get. I stop monitoring your desire for me and start asking: how can I be of service?

> *"The chief activator of our defects has been self-centered fear – primarily fear that we would lose something we already possessed or would fail to get something we demanded." (12&12, Step 7)*

Being wanted is something I demand. When I don't get it, my defects activate – self-pity, resentment, dishonesty, manipulation. The demand itself is the problem.

Prayer

"God, remove my fear of being unwanted. I have spent my life performing for the approval of others. I have bent myself into shapes that are not my own. I have made other people's desire for me the measure of my worth. Remove this obsession. Teach me that You want me – that I do not need to earn Your love or anyone else's. Direct my attention to what You would have me be. Help me show up as I am, not as I think they want me to be."

Cross-References

The fear of being unwanted often appears alongside these resentment patterns:

- **#2 Mrs. Jones:** Resentment at being snubbed. "Others should see what a likable guy I am." The fear underneath: if she doesn't want me around, maybe no one does.
- **#4 My Wife:** Resentment at being misunderstood. "Others should see what a great catch I am." The fear: my wife doesn't want me, so I must not be worth wanting.
- **#10 Not Fulfilled Without a Relationship:** The entire resentment is built on the fear of being unwanted. "I want to be loved, pursued, adored – Wanted."

- **#11 I Am Unloveable:** “Others should want me and value me.” Unwanted is named directly under Pride.
- **#12 Not OK Without Money:** “I am what I have and earn.” Money becomes the proxy for wantedness.

4-Column: Expanded

Why – Expanded

Character defects and their manifestations:

- **Insecurity:** I scan every room for evidence of whether I’m wanted. I interpret neutral behavior as rejection. I need constant reassurance. Even when I get it, the relief lasts minutes.
- **Co-dependency:** I define myself through others’ desire for me. Without someone actively wanting me, I lose my sense of identity. I latch onto anyone who shows interest.
- **Vanity:** I obsess over my appearance, my presentation, my “brand.” I want to be wanted for how I look rather than who I am – because I’m afraid who I am isn’t enough.
- **Self-centeredness:** I am so focused on whether you want me that I cannot see you at all. Every interaction becomes about me. Your bad day is about me (“Why are they being distant?”). Your good day without me is about me (“Why don’t they need me?”).
- **Dishonesty:** I hide my real self and present a manufactured version. “I’ll be anything and do anything to be loved. Adopt other’s values, opinions & beliefs” (#11). I don’t tell the truth because the truth might make you not want me.
- **Self-pity:** “They always leave me. It will never work out for me” (#10). I build an identity around being the one nobody wants. The victim story becomes the excuse for never showing up authentically.
- **People-pleasing:** I say yes when I mean no. I over-function. I volunteer for everything. I make myself indispensable – not out of generosity but out of terror that if I stop being useful, you’ll stop wanting me.

- **Lust:** I use sexual desirability as proof of wantedness. I pursue conquest rather than connection. "Put on an 'ACT' to 'Attract'" (#10).
- **Envy:** I resent people who are wanted effortlessly. I compare their social lives, their relationships, their ease with people to my own desperate striving.
- **Self-seeking:** Every act of kindness has a hidden invoice. I give to get. "Manipulate others to get affection and recognition. I am clingy and needy" (#11).
- **Pride:** I believe I *should* be wanted. Others should see my value. "Others should 'stand in line' to be with me!" (#10). When they don't, my pride is wounded – and wounded pride is the seed of resentment.

Cognitive distortions:

- **Personalisation:** "They didn't invite me because they don't want me." Every social event I'm not included in becomes evidence of my unwantedness. Every cancelled plan is a rejection. I make everything about me.
- **Belief in mind-reading:** "I can tell by how they acted that they don't really want me around." I interpret facial expressions, tone of voice, and response time on text messages as definitive proof of what others think of me – without ever asking.
- **Emotional reasoning:** "I feel unwanted, so I must be unwanted." The feeling becomes the fact. No amount of evidence to the contrary penetrates the feeling. People can tell me they love me, include me, choose me – and the feeling says they're lying.
- **Splitting:** "Either someone actively wants me or they don't want me at all." There is no middle ground. Neutral becomes negative. Absence of enthusiasm becomes rejection.
- **Filtering out the positive:** I fixate on the one person who didn't call, the one group that didn't include me, the one partner who left – and I ignore the people who *are* there, who *do* want me, who *have* chosen me. The ten people who showed up are invisible. The one who didn't is all I see.

Areas of self – expanded explanations:

Pride – *"Others should want me."* The Pride statement reveals entitlement: I deserve to be wanted. In #4, the Big Book character believes "Others should see what a great catch I am." In #11: "Others should want me and value me." Pride turns wantedness into a right. When that right is not honored, resentment follows. The pride-driven person who fears being unwanted does not simply feel sad about it – they feel *wronged*.

Ambition – *"I want to be wanted."* The Ambition statement reveals the pursuit: I actively chase the experience of being desired. In #10: "I want to be loved, pursued, adored – Wanted." In #12: "I want people to help me be successful and rich." Being wanted becomes the goal itself – not love, not connection, not service – just the feeling of being pursued. Like all addictive pursuits, the high is temporary and the tolerance always increases.

Self-Esteem – *"I am desirable."* The Self-Esteem statement reveals the identity: who I am depends on whether I am wanted. In #10: "I am desirable. I have what he/she wants." In #12: "I am what I have and earn. I am powerful and attractive." When I believe my identity is my desirability, being unwanted does not just hurt – it erases me.

Sex Relations – *"A real man/woman is wanted."* The Sex Relations statement reveals the gender identity threat: if I'm not wanted, I'm not a real man or woman. In #2: "A real man is wanted anywhere." In #6: "A real man would not have to ask for a raise." In #10: "Real Women/Men have Power, Control Others and get what they want." This is where the fear cuts deepest. Being unwanted is not just painful – it unmans me. It unwomans me. It strips me of my fundamental identity as a man or woman. That is why this fear produces such intense reactions: rage, despair, obsessive pursuit of validation.

Pocket Book – *"I need money to be attractive."* The Pocket Book statement reveals the transaction: if I can't be wanted for who I am, I'll buy my way in. In #10: "Others should see that I have enough Money to attract someone." In #12: "Others should help me succeed and give me a break." Money becomes the insurance policy against being unwanted. If I have enough of it, someone will want me – even if they're only wanting the money.

Psychology:

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs places "love and belonging" as the third level – above physical safety but below esteem. Being wanted is a belonging need. When it is unmet, the entire hierarchy above it becomes unstable: esteem crumbles, self-actualization becomes impossible. The person whose belonging need is chronically unmet will sacrifice almost anything to fill it – including their integrity, their values, and their sobriety.

Attachment theory (John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth) describes how early experiences with caregivers create internal "working models" of relationships. A child whose caregivers

were inconsistently available – sometimes present, sometimes absent, sometimes warm, sometimes cold – develops an anxious attachment style. The anxious attacher is hypervigilant to signs of rejection. They crave closeness but constantly fear losing it. They monitor their partner's behavior for evidence of waning interest. They interpret ambiguity as abandonment. This is the adult who fears being unwanted – not because of anything happening now, but because the template was set in childhood and every subsequent relationship is filtered through it.

The anxious attachment style produces two seemingly opposite behavioral strategies, both driven by the same fear. The first is approach behavior: clinging, performing, people-pleasing, making oneself indispensable. The second is avoidance behavior: withdrawing before being rejected, building walls, pretending not to care. Both are attempts to manage the same terror. The clinger says: "If I hold on tight enough, you can't leave." The withdrawer says: "If I leave first, you can't reject me." Neither strategy works because neither addresses the core belief: *I am not inherently wanted.*

Social comparison theory (Leon Festinger) adds another dimension. We evaluate our own worth by comparing ourselves to others. The person who fears being unwanted compares constantly – not to feel good, but to confirm the fear. They look at the person who gets invited to everything, the colleague the boss favors, the friend everyone calls first – and they use the comparison as evidence. "See? They want *him*. Not me." The comparison is always rigged: they compare their rejection to others' acceptance, their worst moments to others' best, their insides to others' outsides.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle – in full:

1. **The belief:** I am fundamentally unwanted. Something about me – something I can't fix – makes people not choose me.
2. **The strategy:** I must *make* myself wanted. I will perform. I will shape-shift. I will be useful, entertaining, attractive, indispensable. I will say what you want to hear. I will become who you want me to be.
3. **The performance:** I adopt your interests. I laugh at your jokes. I'm available whenever you need me. I anticipate your needs before you voice them. I never say no. I never

disagree. I never show you anything that might make you not want me.

4. **The exhaustion:** The performance cannot be sustained. I am running on empty. I resent you for not seeing how hard I'm working. I resent myself for needing to work this hard. "My needs are more important than your needs. Boundaries don't exist for me" (#11).
5. **The resentment:** I start keeping score. I did X for you and you didn't even notice. I gave up Y for you and you took it for granted. The resentment leaks out as passive aggression, irritability, or emotional withdrawal.
6. **The withdrawal:** I pull back – either because I'm exhausted or because I'm punishing you for not wanting me enough. I become distant, short, unavailable.
7. **The reaction:** You notice the change. You pull back too. Or you confront me. Or you simply move on.
8. **The confirmation:** "See? They didn't really want me. I was right all along."
9. **The restart:** I find a new person, a new group, a new relationship – and the cycle begins again. Or I give up entirely and isolate, which confirms the fear even more completely.

SDSF – in full detail:

- **Selfish:** I want you to want me more than I want to genuinely know you. My need comes first. I use people as mirrors – not to see them, but to see myself reflected in their desire for me. When I'm with you, I'm not really with *you*. I'm with my need. "If I get my needs met First, then I'll be able to care about you" (#10).
- **Dishonest:** I am not who I say I am. I present a crafted version of myself designed to maximize your desire for me. I hide my flaws, my opinions, my actual personality. "I am in the delusion that becoming whatever I need to be loved, will not have consequences" (#11). I am in the delusion that if I perform well enough, the performance will become real. I don't tell the truth because the truth might drive you away – and the truth is, I have built my entire life on a lie about who I am.
- **Self-seeking:** I give to get. I serve to be seen. I help to be needed. "Manipulate others to get affection and recognition" (#11). I use money to buy attention. "Manipulate, lie, play favorites, use people to get ahead, take shortcuts, take undeserved credit, only hang with the rich and successful people" (#12). Every relationship is a transaction, and the price of my generosity is your continued wanting of me.
- **Fearful:** I am afraid that if you saw the real me – the one underneath the performance – you wouldn't want me. I am afraid that the performance is all there is. I am afraid that

without someone wanting me, I am nothing. I am afraid that if everyone left, I would find out that the reason they left is because there was nothing worth staying for.

Better Way – Expanded

The literature speaks directly to this fear:

> *"Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life." (◆ BB p.63)*

The fear of being unwanted is the ultimate form of self-interest. It turns every human being into a judge and every interaction into a verdict. The solution is not to perform better so the verdict changes. The solution is to stop caring about the verdict – and that only happens when I am "established on such a footing" of trust in God that my worth is no longer up for vote.

> *"We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity." (◆ BB p.68)*

> *"We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear." (◆ BB p.68)*

> *"We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too." (◆ BB p.66-67)*

The people who didn't want me are not villains. They are sick people, like me. The neighbor who snubbed me (#2), the wife who pulled away (#4), the employer who overlooked me (#6) – they have their own fears, their own defects, their own inventories to write. Their failure to want me is not a statement about my worth. It is a statement about their condition.

> *"None of us is perfectly good or perfectly bad. We are people who have assets and liabilities. Most importantly, we are human." (NA, Step Seven)*

Connection to the actor analogy:

The Big Book describes us as actors trying to run the whole show (◆ BB p.61). The actor who fears being unwanted is the actor who has confused himself with the audience's opinion. He plays his part not for the Playwright but for the crowd. When the applause comes, he exists. When the theater is empty, he vanishes.

But the actor's job was never to be wanted by the audience. The actor's job is to play the role the Playwright assigned – faithfully, honestly, without concern for the reviews. The actor who plays Hamlet doesn't need the audience to want him. He needs to play Hamlet. The audience's response is none of his business.

When I play the role God assigns – father, friend, worker, neighbor, sponsor – I don't need to be wanted by the people I serve. I need to serve them. God wants me in this role. That is enough. The audience may cheer or leave. The Playwright is still watching.

Prayer:

"God, remove my fear of being unwanted. I have spent my whole life performing for an audience that was never meant to be my judge. I have bent myself into shapes that are not mine. I have lied about who I am to be wanted by people who never knew me. Take this fear. Take the need. Take the performance. Teach me that You want me – not a manufactured version of me, not a performing version, not a useful version – but me. The real one. The one I've been hiding. Direct my attention to what You would have me be. Not what others would have me be. What *You* would have me be. At once, let me commence to outgrow this fear. Amen."

Practical actions:

1. **Stop performing.** Identify one relationship where you are shape-shifting – being someone you're not to be wanted. This week, tell that person one true thing about yourself that you've been hiding. Not to test them. To practice being real.

2. **Practice being authentic even when it costs you.** Say no to something you would normally say yes to just to be wanted. Disagree with someone you usually agree with to keep the peace. Let your real opinion be heard. Notice what happens – both externally and inside you.
3. **Let some people not want you and sit with it.** This is the hardest one. The next time someone doesn't call back, doesn't include you, doesn't choose you – don't chase. Don't perform. Don't retaliate. Sit with the discomfort. Pray through it. Let the feeling of being unwanted be present without letting it define you. You will not die from it.
4. **Find your worth in service, not in being wanted.** Do one act of anonymous service this week – something no one will know about, something no one will thank you for. Clean the coffee maker at the meeting. Leave a note of encouragement with no name on it. Help someone who can't help you back. Notice how it feels to be useful without being noticed.
5. **Inventory the people who DO want you.** The fear of being unwanted filters out the positive. Right now, write down three people who have chosen you, stayed for you, shown up for you. You are filtering them out because they don't fit the narrative. Let them back in.

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous ("Big Book") pp.60-68, 84-88; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Step 7; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Chapters 3-5, Step Four, Step Seven; Abraham Maslow, A Theory of Human Motivation (hierarchy of needs); John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss (attachment theory); Mary Ainsworth, Patterns of Attachment (anxious attachment); Leon Festinger, A Theory of Social Comparison Processes; Sponsorship Workshop Packet 2024

From the Big Book Awakening Step Four guide at bigbook.it/step-4/ · a page of the guide, not the workbook itself: the workbook's own pages are linked from "Originals & sources." · source examples/fear-unwanted.md