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A Measure of Grace

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Emotional Dependency, Part 2 *By Roger Jones*

In last month's newsletter, I began discussing the topic of emotional dependency. Within that article, I shared a little bit of my personal story and experiences with the issue. Also included was a checklist to test if a person is experiencing this from the booklet titled *Emotional Dependency* by Lori Rentzel. This month, I want to talk about some of the things we can do when we find ourselves facing this issue in our lives.

Before we delve into the steps out of emotional dependency, I think we need to understand why it is so difficult to let go of these relationships in the first place. One reason is that we each have a sin nature within us which causes us to turn to things other than

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God to meet our needs.

Another reason why it is so hard to stop any kind of repetitive sin “cold turkey” is that something within us is being satisfied through it. With emotional dependency comes a sense of security. There is that one, special person who understands me. We have legitimate needs for emotional connection with others. Some of our needs for companionship, love, and understanding are met, even though the relationship may be sinful.

Sometimes the reality of our lives seems too painful to face. This type of relationship provides an escape from that reality, as we become more and more wrapped up in another’s life. And, these relationships can be *very* intense, causing other, more healthy relationships to seem boring in comparison.

When the choice to leave an emotionally dependent relationship feels like leaving the only thing that is giving us life, comfort, safety, escape, etc..., it is no wonder that we feel like we are dying!

The first thing to do when walking away from an emotionally dependant relationship is to pray. Confess to God the sinful aspects of the relationship, including how it may have supplanted Him as the primary source of meeting your needs. Ask Him to give you discernment and the ability to see truth about the relationship, rather than deception about what is happening.

Having several relationships where we can be real lessens the intensity of the emotionally dependent one.

“Don’t put all your eggs into one basket,” the old saying goes. Wise investors are encouraged to diversify their investments, so that they don’t lose everything if one investment goes south. This wisdom is true for relationships as well and is two fold. Hav-

ing several relationships where we can be real lessens the intensity of the emotionally dependent one. Also, having multiple friendships reduces our risk of entering into an emotionally dependent relationship in the first place.

Accountability is another important element to have in place when leaving an emotionally dependent relationship. We need a rational,

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Public Image ~ Does it Matter?

Part 2

By Mary Heathman

Thirty-six years ago, fresh from *Evangelism Explosion* training, I was sharing my new faith with a friend. He said, “You seem to think I haven’t had any experience with this Christian thing. I was saved once. I was invited to a camp for kids, and the leaders were running around saving souls and hanging them on their belts like scalps, mine included. I went back home to my crummy life and I never saw or heard from any of them again. They didn’t care about me.”

I was stunned in the moment; but made an important decision that day. Never again would I “share Christ” as a project, but would pray that the Lord would make me truly interested in people. I decided to build relationships, enjoy and love people, and let Jesus bring them to Him on His timetable, not mine. My decision was reinforced by scripture in the second chapter of Acts where we read that after Pentecost, all the believers “*were together, and had all things in common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in*

*the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. **And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.***” (Acts 2:44-47)

Apparently, in the beginning days of the early Church, “They” were intrigued enough by what they saw in “Us” to allow themselves to be gathered into the ranks!

Looking at the way “They” see “Us” is not just my idea, not just a file of notes and clippings I have kept over the years. In a recent book, Un-Christian, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, we read some troubling news about the public image of Christianity. They have written a book that contains what George Barna describes as “*rigorous research and the difficult process of communicating statistics in everyday language. . . it is a logical carefully reasoned narrative about the past, present and future state of society and the Christian faith.*”

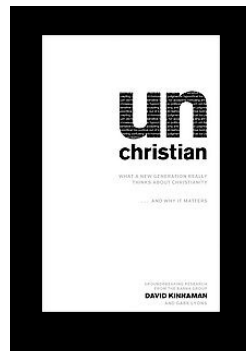
In the reading of UnChristian, I find it underscored and reinforced what

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we have experienced for years—a growing negative perception of Christianity. So, for this second article in this series, I would like to report a few points from UnChristian, and suggest that those who are serious about reaching out to our culture in the name of Jesus, should not just read, but study this book, discuss it among themselves, and make it a key part of their prayers and planning for outreach and evangelism.

“They” are “outsiders” as defined by David Kinnaman, in UnChristian. According to his research of the perceptions of these folks, they wouldn’t be offended by this label, as they are “looking at the Christian faith from the outside. This group includes atheists, agnostics, and those affiliated with a faith other than Christianity . . . and other unchurched adults who are not born-again Christians.” When they say, “Us,” they mean insiders, those who



would call ourselves followers of Christ, Christians, born-again believers, and who practice our faith regularly.

According to the research, there are six broad themes—the most common points of skepticism and objections raised by outsiders—that are important to understand about how “They” see “Us”. Those six themes are outlined in the following excerpt from UnChristian:

*1. **Hypocritical.** Outsiders consider us hypocritical—saying one thing and doing another—and they are skeptical of our morally superior attitudes. They say Christians pretend to be something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate. Christians think the church is only a place for virtuous and morally pure people.*

*2. **Too focused on getting converts.** Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people. They question our motives when we try to help them “get saved,” despite the fact that many of them have already “tried” Jesus and experienced church before.*

*3. **Antihomosexual.** Outsiders say that Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians. They say Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and on leverag-*

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Scholarships Available

(Public Image continued from page 4)

ing political solutions against them.

4. Sheltered. *Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality. Outsiders say we do not respond to reality in appropriately complex ways, preferring simplistic solutions and answers. We are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people's lives.*

5. Too political. *Another common perception of Christians is that we are overly motivated by a political agenda, that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues. Conservative Christians are often thought of as right-wingers.*

6. Judgmental. *Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people. They doubt that we really love people as we say we do.*

The next six chapters of this book explore these six critical perceptions, describing how outsiders arrive at these viewpoints and how these viewpoints affect their understanding of Jesus. Each chapter also articulates a desirable new perception—a biblical vision for how Christians should be known. This desirable perception is not an effort to be popular or merely to accommodate outsiders, but to engage

them with the life-changing Jesus rather than an unchristian version of him.

Let me reiterate that you may not agree with the views of outsiders, but you should not ignore them. We have to deal with [them] as they are—candid, irreverent, and brazen. If we do not, it makes their criticism even more forceful because it goes unanswered.” Excerpts taken from UnChristian by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Published by Baker Books, copyright by David Kinnaman and Fermi Project, 2007

I almost want to apologize for this list of hard to hear criticisms of “Us.” Almost, . . . but it is too important to ignore. “Outsiders” represent 37% of the population between eighteen and forty-one, 40% of those ages 16-29. Moreover, the perceptions aren’t just “out there”. To make one final quote from Un-Christian, “. . . we must grasp the idea that young people in our churches are also feeling the heat of these negative perceptions. They are bringing up some of the same challenges, questions, and doubts facing those outside the church.”

Public Image—Does It Matter? I think it does—if we want to share the Good News, we need to face the truth about how “They” see “Us.” Next month, we will look at the antidote to some of this bad news. ☆

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outside voice to speak truth into our lives. We must be committed to complete honesty with this person in order for it to be effective. The accountability partner can help to set reasonable goals for the relationship.

Next, some kind of separation must occur in order for the emotionally dependent relationship to end. The type of separation depends on the type of relationship. In a marriage, practicing clear boundary setting can be all that is needed, where in a friendship, a complete and total separation may be required. Or, a commitment to see one another only in group settings may be necessary for a season, giving the emotional intensity a chance to ebb a bit. The extent to which your lives have become integrated may define the type of plan you need to develop.

We also need to be prepared for the grieving process. Leaving or changing any relationship brings sadness. Because of the intensity that goes hand in hand with emotional dependency, the grieving

can be just as intense. No matter how many other relationships we have in place, we will still be aware of the absence. Talking about it will help, but to some extent, we need to allow ourselves to go through the grieving process. We have lost something which was meeting needs within us, and it is okay to feel sad about that. God knows this is true. Let the sorrow lead you to Him.

***We need Him
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Finally, we need to continue to pray. We need to ask God to give us vision for right relationship. We need Him to lead us to the friendships which will meet the needs we have for one another in healthy ways. We need Him in us to keep our emotions in check, so that we do not find ourselves in the same situation again.

Emotional dependency is a trap that anyone is susceptible to. I encourage you to take a look at your relationships and submit them to God. It may be time for a "tune up!" ☆



January

At a Glance

January 23-25th: Mary, Scott and Roger attended the Exodus Leadership Conference in Orlando

January 18th: Commitment Group Retreat. This group of men meet weekly through June

January 26-27th: Mary spoke at a missions weekend at a church in Wyoming

Thursday Night Group

January 3rd: 36
January 10th: 44
January 17th: 39
January 24th: 41
January 31st: 58

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

February

And Beyond

February 12-20th: Mary ministering in the Philippines.

March 1st: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00-9:00 am at the WGA offices

March 18th: Scott and Roger will be presenting to staff and mentors at Save Our Youth

March 18th: Mary will be speaking at Tuesday Morning Joy, Abundant Life Church

April 25-26th: WGA's Family and Friends Retreat. Look for more info to follow!

September 19-21st: Mary will be speaking at the New Hope Family and Friends Retreat in San Rafael

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Where Grace Abounds
exists to guide and support
men and women who seek to
understand sexuality and
relationship, and to inspire
all people to know and
personally appropriate
God's plan for their
sexuality and relationships.

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