

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS in a DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

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FAMILY

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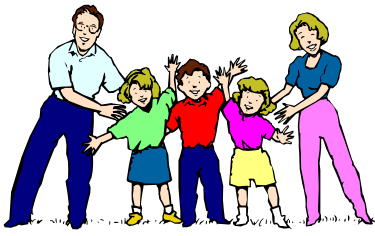
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CODEPENDENCY, DYSFUNCTION AND
FALSE GUILT

HOW TO COMMUNICATE LOVE



JERRY SCHMOYER
252 W. State Street
Doylestown, Pa 18901
Phone 215-348-8086
email jschmoye@ptd.net



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DAVID: EXAMPLE OF A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

King David is probably one of the best loved people in the bible. The stories of how he fought the bear, lion and even Goliath never cease to thrill us. He was well liked and popular with everyone, even God. He was a skilled musician, a poet, a mighty warrior and best of all he was “a man after God’s own heart.” Yet all wasn’t perfect in his life. He sinned with Bathsheba, but he confessed that and sought reconciliation with God. Where David failed, however, was with his own family. That is a bad place for a Christian leader to fail (I Timothy 3:4-5). Actually, the groundwork for that failure was set much earlier.

SEEDS OF FAILURE SOWN Ruth and Boaz seemed to have a good, healthy relationship. Not much is known about their son Obed, but his son Jesse seems to have had problems meeting his son’s needs. He didn’t consider David equal to the older brothers (I Samuel 16:4-11). They never learned to treat their younger brother with respect. They were very rude to him when he came to bring them food in the army (I Samuel 17:28-29). Not only was this hard on David, but he didn’t grow up with a good example of how to be a godly father and man. Although he developed a good, mature intimacy with God, it doesn’t seem he ever accomplished this in his family relationships. They are characterized by a lack of emotional intimacy. The sad story starts in II Samuel 11.

SIN PLANTS THE SEEDS OF DYSFUNCTION David wasn’t where God wanted him to be (II Sam 11:1) when his army went to war and ended up committing adultery with Bathsheba (II Sam 11:2-5). When he found out she was pregnant he should have had the courage to face up to his sin. Instead he tried to cover it up, even to the extent of having Bathsheba’s husband killed so no one would know the baby wasn’t his (II Sam 11:14-27). Then he married Bathsheba and ignored everything else. When confronted by God for his sin, David repented and was restored (II Sam 12:13). Still, there were grave consequences to David’s sin.

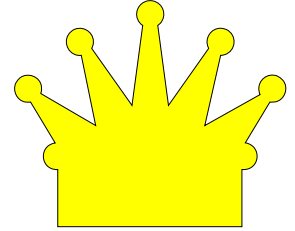
First, the baby died (II Sam 12:16-18). David never allowed his feelings of grief to surface, he stuffed his pain down and tried to ignore it (II Sam 12:21-23). Then he ignored the emotional impact this must have had on the others in the family. How would his grown children feel when they learned about the adultery and murder? However they felt, there was no open ground for communication. They had to follow David’s example and bury their feelings. David dealt with the sin between himself and God, but never between himself and his family.

DYSFUNCTION REPEATS ITSELF IN THE NEXT GENERATION Family dysfunction often begins with an inability to handle emotions and tends to become more extreme as time passes. Amnon, David’s oldest son, was sexually attracted to his step-sister, Tamar (II Sam 13:1-2). In the same way that David had planned to manipulate circumstances so he could have the woman he lusted after without facing consequences, Amnon planned to do the same thing. He manipulated his father (II Sam 13:6) so he could get in a position to rape his sister (13:11-18). Then when he had to face the consequences of his action he lacked courage to do so, blaming and hating Tamar for it.

As could be expected, Tamar was devastated (13:18-19). Her brother Absalom saw her and suspected what had happened (13:20a). Why hadn’t he done something to head it off? Because in David’s family problems were buried, emotions ignored, and everyone had to pretend everything was all right. In fact, that’s how Absalom responded to Tamar’s desolation. Instead of giving her a hug and

some reassurance that justice would be done, he told her, in effect, to not take this seriously because it is a family matter and we must not make a big thing out of it (13:20b).

When David heard about what happened he was furious (13:21) but didn't take any action to right things, comfort Tamar, or even enforce God's law which required stoning or at least exile of the guilty party. Everyone had to pretend it never happened.



UNRESOLVED PAIN GOES UNDERGROUND On the surface everything seems smooth, but underneath a storm is raging. David is furious, Tamar's life is ruined, Amnon hates Tamar, and Absalom hates Amnon. As in dysfunctional families, these feelings do not lessen as time passes but grow stronger.

After two years of denial Absalom moves to end the stalemate. He approaches David about getting the whole family together but David balks at the suggestion. For some strange reason he allowed Absalom to invite Amnon over, although he knew of the problem between them (13:23-27). Direct communication is difficult in dysfunctional families. Change only occurs in crisis situations. This was David's last chance to resolve this issue in a mature, peaceful way, but he again avoids the whole issue. Thus Absalom, who has lost trust in and respect for his father, takes the issue into his own hands and kills Amnon (13:28-29).

Again David is grieved and Absalom must go into exile, but nothing else is done. Often in dysfunctional families one 'rebel' doesn't play by the rules (ignore the pain, pretend things are OK, cover over all emotions, etc.). He acts out the pain that has not been faced by the rest of the family. The blame for what is wrong in the family gets heaped upon him instead of those who are really responsible. He becomes the scapegoat. In David's family it was Absalom. In fact, many today still see Absalom as the rebellious son, not understanding the forces that drove him.

For 3 years Absalom was in exile, David not allowing him to return but not handling the root issues, either. This rejection made Absalom's bitterness grow. He was continually reminded of Tamar's pain for she lived in his household. That so impacted him that he even named his only daughter 'Tamar.' He had never learned from his father how to correctly handle pain and hurt, though.

Finally David allowed Absalom to return from exile and live in Jerusalem. Absalom had to really force the issue to finally, after being back for two years, get to see his father David (14:30-32). It's important for a child, especially a son, to know where he stands with his father. David kissed Absalom (14:33) but it was very superficial and no change or reconciliation took place, despite Absalom really wanting and needing this. This seems to have been the last straw for Absalom, who has been trying to get things straight for the last seven years since the rape took place.

DYSFUNCTION DESTROYS Absalom now starts telling the people that their king will not hear their needs or complaints, which was really a direct reflection of Absalom's assessment of his family life. Before long most of the nation was supporting Absalom in a revolt against David (15:1-23). Eventually David's faithful soldiers were able to put down the revolt and kill Absalom. When he heard of Absalom's death it seems something broke in David. "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you -- O Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33). Finally all his grief could no longer be ignored and pushed down, and David is crushed. In fact, he was so carried away in it all that it offended the soldiers who defended David so much that they almost deserted him. Still, though, nothing is really changed. Lives are ruined: Tamar, Amnon, Absalom, even David's life continues to go downhill from here.

Dysfunctional families are nothing new. Still, they don't need to be. We can change ours so we don't pass these things down to our children. What was your family of origin like? Was it similar to David's family? In what ways? Who in David's family do you most identify with? What can you do right now to start moving into healthy relationships? Each journey starts with one step. Take your first one now.



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DAVID: LESSONS FOR DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES TODAY

God never makes a mistake. He didn't make one when he revealed that David -- spiritual giant that he was -- had family problems. The story of David's family shows that God has a far greater understanding of and concern for our most intimate family relationships than we realize. Like David, we may be growing spiritually and close to God, yet still struggle in our interpersonal relationships. The solution isn't to confess, submit or rededicate. It is to understand and work through the negative affects our pasts have had on us.

While having close intimacy with God, David didn't seem able to have the same intimacy with other people. As a result his family became very dysfunctional. Before long the family broke up and even the nation. It wasn't until 1947 that the nation was reunited as one. Dysfunction can have far lasting consequences!

From the family of David there are some characteristics of dysfunctional families that we can look at and apply to our families today.

Instead of facing problems, dysfunctional family members cover them up and instead manipulate situations. David tried to manipulate circumstances by passing the blame for his sin to Uriah, and when that didn't work having him murdered. Parents today manipulate in many ways: "I guess your father and I will just have to spend this Thanksgiving alone...." Guilt, shame or reward are used to manipulate. Love and acceptance is given or withdrawn as a tool to control the behavior of others. This is definitely wrong!

Psychometric illnesses are common in dysfunctional families. Amnon so desired sex with his step-sister that he became physically ill. Some say 80% of all illnesses today have their roots emotional stress and strain. For example, a child with asthma in a high-stress family will generally have more frequent asthma attacks than a child from a more nurturing family.

Pain is avoided or denied in dysfunctional families. David took the route of denial in his affair with Bathsheba. He didn't face the pain of the death of the baby he and Bathsheba lost. Even though a father will sometimes abuse his children, a wife won't do anything because the children seem to be doing fine so she says what is happening must not be that bad.

Relational boundaries are broken in dysfunctional families. Amnon felt nothing wrong with having sex with his step-sister. Absalom usurped his father's role and tried to solve the family problems. When the roles of each in the family aren't clearly defined and followed along traditional lines something is wrong. When emotional and physical boundaries aren't set and privacy respected, then again something is wrong.

Emotional reaction instead of healthy response characterized dysfunctional families. David was furious when he heard about Amnon raping Tamar -- but didn't do anything. Various happenings in his family bothered and upset him, but he never took corrective action.

Trying to change another's behavior instead of directly communicating with them is common in dysfunctional families. Absalom wanted to solve the family's problem by having a big get-together where everyone could have a good time with each other. Today, too, fathers often give gifts or things to family members to help them through a hard time instead of sitting down and talking heart-to-heart.

Stopping talking to a family member is one of the wrong ways dysfunctional families handle conflict. Absalom wouldn't speak to Amnon. David cut off all contact with Absalom for several years. Tamar cut herself off from the outside world. Many people still do that today.

A scapegoat is found to blame for family problems in many dysfunctional families. Absalom was clearly the scapegoat in David's family. He acted out the pain everyone else felt. He didn't go along with the 'rules' of keeping everything quiet and stuffed within, of blaming oneself and avoiding the real issues. Thus to those in the family HE was the real problem. If he'd have kept quiet all would have been fine! Actually his attempts to do something showed more signs of emotional health than others in the family. The family 'scapegoat' has the best chance of moving out of the cycle of dysfunction.

Dysfunctional family members create increasingly serious crises to communicate their pain. Absalom just couldn't keep his emotions locked in. He created crisis after crisis. He murdered Amnon, set Joab's fields on fire and started a national civil war. Children in dysfunctional families today may develop eating disorders. They may do other things to get attention: become sexually active, use drugs or alcohol, develop an 'attitude,' rebel in any number of ways, even attempt suicide.

Dysfunctional family members hope that the passage of time will heal the problems. After Tamar was raped, no one did anything. Even Absalom waited two years before killing Amnon, then waited five years to see what his father David really thought of him. Dysfunctional families ignore hurts and emotional pain, hoping that time will heal the soul as it does the body. Instead of fading, the hurts go deeper and continue to grow.

Unfortunately it wasn't only David's family that has these problems. They are common today, even in the best Christian families. In fact, being a good Christian family doesn't guarantee immunity from dysfunction. These things are usually passed on from generation to generation: trouble handling emotions, denying feelings, inability to express motions correctly, blaming others, overreacting to small things, etc.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION? There is no quick and easy solution to this. There is no simple one-two-three step procedure to remove it. These things are learned over time, and must be unlearned over time as well. The first thing to do, though, is to recognize and admit the dysfunction in your family of origin and see how that has carried on into your current family. Feel the hurt and pain that you have been stuffing. A time of anger is natural, but don't let it set in and fester. Forgive and move on in life. Start changing your behavior by working on the areas God reveals to you as needing work. Wherever He shines the light is where you start changing your behavior. Go by your mind and what you know is right instead of letting your emotions control and dominate. Let your mind explain reality to your emotions. Good, godly counsel can be most helpful in moving this process along quicker. With God's help and a willingness to work these things through no matter the price there can and will be gradual freedom. The truth really will set you free (John 8:32), don't fear it! God promises that when He begins to work in your life to make you more like Jesus He won't stop (Philippians 1:6). Trust Him to do the work. He does a good job!



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SOLOMON'S FAMILY: RESULTS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

Solomon was remarkable! He was unbelievably wise, unimaginably wealthy, immensely powerful and incredibly gifted. He wrote three books of the Bible (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Proverbs). Being David's youngest son, he seems to have had a closer relationship to his father than his older siblings. Changes were taking place in David over the years. Still, it was too little too late. Imagine how he must have felt when he heard the servants whispering about how his father had his mother's first husband killed because he had gotten her pregnant, and that that baby had died. How did he respond to his older sister's despair when rumors of her rape circulated? What about the two older brothers that tickled and played with him -- what was he to think when he found one killed the other and he didn't see either any more? No one talked to him about these things, and there was no one for him to talk to. This had a deep impact on making him the person he became. He lived out these hurts in his adult life.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-16 chronicles some of the ways he attempted to deal with the inner pain in his life. He filled himself with pleasure, laughter, wine, sex and foolishness. He undertook great projects, building gardens, parks and entire cities. He amassed more wealth than anyone. He educated himself as thoroughly as possible. In the end, he achieved the American dream, but it didn't help him feel better. Still, everything was empty and meaningless (Eccl 1:2).

From his life we can see traits and characteristics of adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families. This can help us pinpoint symptoms in our lives so we can get to the root cause and heal them. Below are some of the symptoms:

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often go to extremes: overachieve or underachieve. For Solomon it was overachieving. He built the temple and a great palace. He was known worldwide for his wisdom. He wrote 1005 psalms and 3,000 parables (I Kings 4:32). Still, it didn't meet the void in his heart. It was empty (Eccl 1:2).

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often get addictions. Something is found to deaden pain. For Solomon, by his own admission, it was alcohol (Eccl 2:3; Prov 23:29-35). He seems intimately acquainted with the symptoms of alcoholism. Also, one could say he was addicted to work and sex as well. In order for those who are addicted to get victory today, the hidden pains that are being ignored must surface and be worked through.

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have a hard time with intimacy. Solomon had 600 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3) -- the ultimate in seeking closeness but not being able to find it. He gave up quality for quantity. He wasn't able to relate intimately one on one, the same problem his father had. Despite all the people around him, he often talks of his loneliness (Eccl 4:8). Many, many men especially have a hard time with intimacy today. Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families are often unable to have deep, consistent and meaningful relationships with others.

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have trouble labeling and expressing their feelings and emotions. Substitutes are found: sex, power, success, etc. But they don't satisfy. For all his wisdom Solomon wasn't able to label his feelings in order to get a handle on them and deal with them in a mature way. He wasn't able to truly express his needs, his fears, his hurts and his anger. This is another common symptom today.

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often have a pattern of getting into one destructive relationship after another. Solomon married one ungodly woman after another, despite the fact that they turned his and the nation against God (I Kings 11:2). How often do we see a woman go from one abusive man to another, or a young man be used and drained by a succession of selfish women?

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have trouble doing what they know is right. Solomon knew God's word and had all wisdom, but he chose sex, alcohol, overwork and pagan idols over the living, true God. Knowing what one should do and then following through on that are very hard for adults who grew up in dysfunctional families. Thus the solution isn't to educate them about what to do, but to remove the inner pains and bad patterns that keep them from doing what they know they should.

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often continue to feel (and sometimes act) like children well into adulthood. Solomon often refers to himself as a little child (I Ki 3:7). Often these adults feel like a small, vulnerable child who doesn't measure up to the adults around him. A fear of failure and/or rejection permeates everything. Often childlike reactions and behaviors are also present.

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have a hard time handling success. While they strive for it and need it to feel good about themselves, they have a hard time handling it when it does come. Solomon brought Israel to its high point but ended up a failure, not able to handle the role of a great king.

Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families pass on the family dysfunction to their children. Solomon was influenced by his father David who was influenced by his father Jesse. Perhaps this went back through Obed and Boaz. Solomon then passed these traits on to his son Rehoboam. Instead of trusting the wisdom of those older and wiser than he, he put his own selfish greed first and increased the taxes on the people when he became king. This caused the nation to split. He was unable to take criticism and advice, he couldn't handle emotions in a mature, open way. What devastation that brings!

WHAT KEEPS DYSFUNCTION GOING? When a child grows up with a deep feeling of worthlessness, inadequacy and failure they affect every part of his life until they are removed. Unless a child has a good, healthy self concept they won't have confidence or security to feel or express emotions. Everything will be geared to protecting themselves. Substitutes to real love and acceptance will abound, but none will satisfy. Guilt, fear, shame and manipulation will be the controlling factors in life. Only as one finds his security in Jesus' unconditional love and acceptance can this be broken. If this sounds like you, turn to God for healing, forgiveness and an awareness of God's unconditional love and acceptance. What better place to start?

***HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
in a DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD***



ABIGAIL: PICTURE OF CODEPENDENCY

God created the family to, among other things, provide love and security for children. Children need to feel unconditionally loved and totally secure to mature emotionally into healthy adults. When they don't feel that from their parents, they must substitute or compensate in some way. They can't really mature past that until they find unconditional acceptance. Many never find it, and that's why so many turn to addictive or compulsive behaviors. They are trying to meet a legitimate need, but it will never be met by illegitimate means. I myself turned to sports in college and then good grades in college to impress people, because I needed everyone's approval. I didn't think people could like me for myself so I had to do things to earn their approval. This carried over into my ministry when I found myself 'serving' others more to meet my needs of approval and affirmation than to meet their needs. With God's help I have been able to make progress in breaking this, but it is dangerous because it so closely counterfeits Jesus' commands to die to self and live a life of service to others. Dysfunctional families also cause children to grow up as compulsives and addicts, but these are so obviously wrong as Christians clearly see their wrong. Codependency is much more difficult to point to as wrong and destructive. Putting others first can seem so virtuous. We even admire the person.

Maybe we should stop and define codependency before we go any further. The way I see it, a codependent person is one who is dependent on another to have emotional needs met. A wife who makes excuses and covers up for her alcoholic husband does so for her own sake, because she needs to feel like she is 'helping' him. She is dependent on his doing well for her to feel all right about herself. She cannot leave him to the consequences of his own wrong choices and still feel good about herself. She only finds meaning and purpose as she pours her life into 'helping' him, which in effect means she allows his sin pattern to continue. It takes both of them doing their part for his alcoholism to continue.

Codependents are well-adjusted, loving, caring, sincere people. Their love for God and others is true. However they have been programmed from childhood on to take on more responsibility than they should have to have. They can handle high levels of pain with seeming ease. They can give and give and give. However they become deeply angry inside that no one notices the great personal sacrifices they make. They never show the anger, for that would bring rejection. Instead they stuff it inside and it turns to depression and causes them to dysfunction. With an already empty love tank, this extra drain on their emotional battery eventually leads to burnout and apathy. It's not a pretty picture.

ABIGAIL Seeing this in operation makes it easier to understand. Abigail and Nabal are such a couple. On the outside they seem like they have it all. She is beautiful and intelligent. He is wealthy and successful in business (1 Samuel 25:2). However he was surly and mean (3). No one ever held him accountable for his behavior, instead they bailed him out and enable him to continue in it. We see this in the story of Nabal's encounter with David and his men. Because all of Nabal's men were busy shearing his 3,000 sheep David was a good neighbor and protected the rest of Nabal's flocks and herds. When David's men went to collect their customary payment, Nabal was rude and insulting to them and refused to pay (4-11). David got 400 of his men and marched to destroy Nabal and all his family (12-13), which seems to have been a bit of an overreaction. David isn't our concern at the moment, though.

Obviously this kind of thing had been happening regularly, for everyone knew what to do. The servants bypassed Nabal and went to Abigail (14-17) who dropped everything and very efficiently handled the situation. She could be counted on to come through, putting the needs of others before her own no matter the personal sacrifices. Codependents feel they need to

rescue or fix whatever goes wrong around them. They are great in a crisis and thrive on the responsibility, for it gives them a false sense of self-worth. They feel needed. Abigail came through, gathering much food (18) and taking it to David without telling Nathan (19). Codependents are used to facing problems alone. What is worse, they feel the problem is somehow their fault. If only they had been better or done this or that then the problem wouldn't have occurred. Abigail actually takes the blame for the whole thing when she meets David (20-25). She says she is at fault because she didn't find out about David's men, intercept them, and take care of the issue before they got to Nabal. Talk about enabling someone else to continue in their sin! That's like the woman who blames herself because her husband beats her, saying it wouldn't happen if she could just be a better wife.

Codependents are often very able, competent people. They can exert power when necessary. Abigail was able to persuade David to not take revenge (26-35). They are quite good at what they do, with excellent people-skills developed over the years. They are sincerely trying to help others, but things never work out for them, for they don't do anything to change destructive behavior, they just allow it to continue.

Abigail kept all this to herself, unable to talk to Nabal about it. Because he was drinking she knew she couldn't talk to him about it right away (36). When she did tell him he got so angry he had a stroke and eventually died (37-38). While his alcoholism contributed to this, Abigail didn't really help him by constantly bailing him out. She was just carrying on a codependent pattern she had probably learned earlier in life. These things just end up in destruction all around. The story didn't end nicely for Abigail, either.

Instead of taking time to get her life together (she was financially set for life) and relax for awhile, she immediately married David. She needed to serve someone, and said she would serve David as well as David's servants (40-41). She never did get the personal relationship with a husband she needed, for David had already had other wives and married several more after Abigail. While excellent in his intimacy with God, David wasn't the best in his interpersonal relationships with family members. Thus Abigail continued her pattern of giving and not getting for the rest of her life (or until she burnt out). I can almost imagine her blaming herself for David's multiple wives, thinking it was because she wasn't wife enough to satisfy him in all ways. Abigail was an excellent, godly woman with a very giving heart. However she never learned that sometimes you can do more for someone by doing less for them. Her poor self image caused her to have to do anything she could to feel good about herself and have others think highly of her. It drove her her whole life.

SOLUTION What about you? If you are unable to say no, feel guilty for not putting others first, neglect your own needs for the sake of others, and they feel drained and resentful about all you must do, you have codependent traits. Doing the same thing out of service for Jesus means being able to say no if that is what is best for the other, not being concerned about who knows what you've done or how it all turns out, and you come away with peace and joy because you gave of yourself. When it's done for Jesus it is true giving, when it's codependency it's really done for selfish reasons. Search your heart. Next we'll see from Joseph's life how to break this cycle, but for now it's important to recognize and admit the pattern in your own life. With God's help it can be broken, but it must be admitted to first of all.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS in a DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD



ABIGAIL: PICTURE OF CODEPENDENCY

God created the family to, among other things, provide love and security for children. Children need to feel unconditionally loved and totally secure to mature emotionally into healthy adults. When they don't feel that from their parents, they must substitute or compensate in some way. They can't really mature past that until they find unconditional acceptance. Many never find it, and that's why so many turn to addictive or compulsive behaviors. They are trying to meet a legitimate need, but it will never be met by illegitimate means. I personally used sports in high school and then good grades in college to impress others. I assumed no one would like me for me so I hid the real me and tried to earn the admiration of others by what I did. It sort-of worked for awhile, but never really touched the deep inner needs I had. When I found myself as a pastor being too needy of the gratitude and admiration of the people I ministered to, I realized I was using others, not serving them. Today that behavior would be called codependency. God has been helping me mature through that as I find my needs for love and acceptance met in Him and Him alone. As Christians, though, we correctly reject addictive and compulsive behaviors but often applaud codependent behavior as being Christ-like and servant-motivated. Usually people caught up in it have good, sincere hearts for God but too much of their motivation is a need for others to think well of them. That's not right.

Before we go too far we should pin down this often-used term 'codependent.' To me a codependent is a person who tries to control others for their own benefit. The reason this is done is to make one happy by having others impressed with what is done for them. Another reason for the control is to keep negative things from happening. Codependents feel responsible for the problems of those around them and are compulsively driven to correct them. Because of their low self image, they feel their happiness must come from others.

ABIGAIL Codependency is easier to understand when it is illustrated in operation. Abigail is such an example. Codependents may appear to have everything going for them, but that is just the outer appearance. Abigail and Nabal seem to be the couple with everything. He was a rich rancher and property owner. She was intelligent and beautiful. However when we look closer we see he was surly and mean (1 Sam 25:2-3). Success and financial security offer no protection against relational difficulties.

Nabal's pride and lack of responsibility soon become apparent. It was sheep shearing time and his servants were busy with their own 3,000 sheep so David's men helped out by protecting the other animals from robbers and harm. However when David asked for his due payment Nabal rudely refused to pay (4-11). David and 400 of his armed men marched to Nabal's estate to destroy it (12-13). Here's where Abigail's codependency becomes obvious.

The servants told her about the problem, knowing she could be counted on to bail Nabal out (14-17). They also knew not to go to him. She came through, making whatever personal sacrifices were necessary to soothe the wounds, mend the fences and keep the family functioning. She was obviously skilled at this (18). Perhaps as a girl growing up she found herself in the role of taking care of responsibility one or both of her parents should have assumed. She was 'trained' to rescue and fix. Her needs and feelings had to go on hold.

She became good at dropping everything to rescue another or solve a crisis. Actually codependents thrive on this responsibility for it gives them a false sense of self-worth. It is their substitute for the unconditional love and acceptance they missed growing up.

Anyway, Abigail jumped into action, not even telling Nabal. She was obviously used to functioning without his help. Feeling isolated and alone is common among codependents.

Resentment and anger build but aren't shown. Instead the anger is turned inward to cause depression or other forms of dysfunction. That adds to the drain on their emotional battery and before long they are burnt out and emotionally exhausted. Their love tank is always empty and when their emotional battery goes dead they are in poor shape.

One of the major contributing factors to this is the codependent's belief that they are responsible for all that goes wrong. Abigail believed that she should have headed off the problem, therefore it is her fault (20-25). Codependents feel guilt for others' sins. The classic example is the woman who feels it is her fault that her husband beats her. If she was just a better wife he wouldn't get so angry.

Abigail was quite persuasive. She was an intelligent, beautiful, godly woman, very sincere in what she was doing. She greatly impressed David and he changed his mind about killing her family. When she returned home, though, she didn't tell Nabal anything right away for he was drinking (36). She protected him from the consequences of his actions and kept her feelings to herself. When she did tell him, the shock killed him (37-38). Her sacrificial giving of herself all those years to protect him didn't really help him in the long run -- it never does. It would have been better if he had to face the consequences for his actions much earlier. Perhaps his mother had started this pattern in him and Abigail just picked it up and kept it going. Nevertheless, codependency is destructive. It destroys the one being protected as well as the one doing the protecting. No one wins.

Unfortunately Abigail didn't enjoy her freedom, she married David as quickly as possible, getting into another codependent situation. She needed someone to serve, to pour her life into (40-41). In David's large family there was plenty of opportunity. David soon married another woman and then another and Abigail again lacked an intimate love relationship with a mate. I'm sure she continued to serve, though, perhaps even blaming David's sin on her not being totally satisfying to him as a wife.

THE PROBLEM Codependents are fine, sincere, godly people. Because of their needs for approval and their lack of self-esteem they live for others, using others for their needs of worth, feeling they are responsible to fix what is wrong in those around them. Unable to relax and say no, to see their own needs as legitimate and their own feelings as true, they push until exhaustion. They end up bitter, drained, lonely and depressed and withdraw into isolation. They go to the opposite extreme to compensate. What a waste this is of a fine, gifted person.

THE SOLUTION We'll see more of that next time when we look at how Joseph broke out of these things in his family. The first step is to recognize the problem. Do you see something of yourself in Abigail? Then ask God to show you where you fit into this. The truth WILL set you free! How can we know the difference in sacrificially serving Jesus by putting others first and being a codependent? Outwardly you can't tell, but inwardly there are entirely different motives and reasons. The codependent can't say no, really does it for themselves, becomes bitter and empty, and resents those they 'serve.' The Spirit-filled Christian does it because God wants him to (and can say no if it isn't what God wants), does it for the sake of the other person no matter who knows or what results, and has joy and peace about doing it. Which is true of you?



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS in a DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

By Jerry Schmoyer

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JOSEPH: BREAKING CODEPENDENCY

AREN'T WE ALL DYSFUNCTIONAL? We live in a fallen world in which nothing is perfect. No one is perfect, no relationship is perfect, no family is perfect. We all dysfunction in some ways. It's inevitable. We all bring our own emotional 'baggage' into our relationships. It's not a matter of IF we dysfunction but HOW and TO WHAT EXTENT we dysfunction. Just the same, it's not a matter of IF we are codependent, but HOW and TO WHAT EXTENT. All people have difficulties. All families have difficulties. What matters is what direction we are heading! Are our dysfunctions becoming more or less severe? Are we growing through and out of them, or are they getting more and more control over us?

JOSEPH: A VICTIM OF A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY Joseph's dysfunction pattern actually started with his great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah. To protect himself Abraham said that Sarah was his sister (Genesis 12:10). He was interested in his own survival no matter what happened to her. In fact, he did the same thing again later in life (Gen 20:1-18). Then that same destructive behavior repeated itself with his son, Isaac (Gen 26:7-10). This selfish pattern also exhibited itself by each parent, Isaac and Rebekah, choosing a favorite child. Deception and trickery between them and their children, Jacob and Esau, continued unabated. In a story that sounds like a soap opera, Jacob married Laban's two daughters. He had his favorites and the sisters became very competitive for his attention. As a result Jacob ended up with twelve sons and one daughter. The sons competed intensely for their father's attention. Lying, resentment, jealousy, favoritism, manipulation, hatred and deception were a 'normal' part of their lives. Joseph, the choice of his father, was given special treatment (Genesis 37:3-4) and the brothers took their anger and hurt out on Joseph, selling him as a slave to a caravan headed to Egypt. This forced Joseph to begin a new life. He had to break old patterns and rely solely on God. He developed unusual strength and confidence in God's love and provision. He had to break old patterns to survive. It must have been painful, but it obviously happened for when his brothers showed up to buy food during the famine, Joseph handled it in a very mature way. Despite the conflicting and painful emotions raging inside him, he didn't brush off past hurts nor punish them for the past. Today we would call it a plan for intervention, for it was a way of causing each one to assume responsibility for their own actions and then challenging them to take positive steps to change their dysfunctional actions. The plan involved keeping one brother so they would have to bring Benjamin, then when Benjamin came planting his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack of grain. The brothers took responsibility for their sins against Joseph, and Judah even volunteered to suffer instead of Benjamin. Joseph had the courage to approach them in a way that would bring healing and reconciliation, and that is what happened. God used those 20 years in Egypt to do many things in Joseph's life, but one of those things was having him grow through his family's dysfunction. What happened? How did this happen? Probably it went something like this:

FACE THE PAIN What fuels dysfunction and codependency is fear of pain. Instead of feeling the pain of childhood rejection, abuse or neglect these are ignored and denied. It takes a lot of emotional energy to deny and ignore this pain, though, so there isn't enough emotional energy to be used for healthy, 'normal' life and relationships. The love tank is always empty. There is no emotional depth, no flexibility, no real stability. Fear is always just below the surface. The solution isn't to get in healthier relationships or act in less self-defeating ways. The solution is to look inside, recognize and admit the pain so healing can take place, and continue the growth process that stopped when the pain started. You have to explore your past and admit the truth of it in order to grow past it.

What wrong roles did you play? Were you the family Hero (like David) who was addicted to recognition and success, who always had to achieve more and more so he could uphold the family name, and who became an empty perfectionist? Were you the family Rebel (like Absalom) who deliberately underachieve, who became the family scapegoat who, by getting into trouble, kept the focus off the real problems in the family? Or maybe you were the family Caretaker (like Abigail), the little parent who was super-responsible, self-sacrificing and did everything possible to cover for the failures of others in the family? There are many other roles, too. To be free you must recognize the role and rewrite a more healthy script to follow.

What wrong rules did you learn? All homes have rules, some are unhealthy and inappropriate such as: Don't talk about anything that upsets your parents. Don't think for yourself, just believe what you are told. Don't show or even feel 'bad' emotions. Be perfect. Don't make mistakes. Don't embarrass or bother others. Don't reveal family secrets. Recognize these when you find yourself applying them. Rewrite them by memorizing appropriate Scripture passages.

What wrong recordings did you hear? These are messages we have been given, statements made which play in our heads throughout life. 'You should be ashamed of yourself.' 'You'll never amount to anything.' 'Just look what you are doing to your mother!' 'Stop acting like a baby.' 'I'll give you something to cry about.' 'Why can't you be more like _____?' Recognize when they play in your head. Counter with God's truth. Reprogram your recordings.

Good Scripture passages to memorize include Rom 8:1, 15, 31; Psalm 103:11-14; Isaiah 49:15-16; Zeph 3:17; Mt 11:28-29; Psalm 103; etc.

STOP THE SUBSTITUTES To make the pain/love hunger/low self-esteem bearable a substitute for real love and intimacy is often used. These include work, sexual activities, food, spending, rescuing, romance novels, computer work, hobbies, drugs, alcohol, gambling, TV or any other number of addictive agents. Although they provide temporary relief, they don't remove the root problem. The guilt from the addiction and its consequences causes more pain, so a stronger dose of the agent is needed next time. The whole process is like a series of downward cycles. This must be recognized, admitted to and freely dropped. It isn't easy but is necessary. In fact, the pain gets worse before it gets better. Allowing the pain to surface while denying ones self any pain-killing substitutes can get really tough! That stage is the darkness before dawn, though.

REPLACING THE UNHEALTHY WITH HEALTHY Once that place is reached, then new self-perceptions and experiences can be molded to replace old, unhealthy ones. It's a long, slow process, but progress upward begins. Confidence develops as real intimacy and sound relationships develop. There is no one way, its a little different for everyone. Still, these are the basic steps to be followed to bring deliverance from codependency and dysfunction. It isn't easy, but most worthwhile things aren't. Remember, with Jesus all things are possible (Matt 19:26).



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS in a DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

By Jerry Schmoyer

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DAVID: EFFECTS OF FALSE GUILT ON A FAMILY

There is an old Jewish proverb that says “Shame is an iron fence that guards us from sin.” That’s true. Feeling shameful (guilty) for sinful behavior acts as a preventative. It’s only helpful, though, if the shame and guilt we feel is true, legitimate, God-given shame. Unfortunately we learn to feel guilty about many things that we shouldn’t feel guilty for, such as our own legitimate needs and thinking of ourselves as equal to other people. While God created guilt to motivate us to keep from sin, and to confess it as soon as we commit it, many people are taught to feel guilty about things that aren’t sinful. This leads to much confusion.

ADAM & EVE were the first to feel any shame for they were the first to sin. They covered themselves and hid from God (Gen. 3:7). This was healthy, legitimate spiritual shame because they had done something dreadfully wrong. True guilt stems from the violation or transgression of God’s principles as expressed in the Bible. It motivates us to ask for forgiveness. However, like Adam and Eve, we often don’t take the blame for our sin but rationalize it, deny our actions, or blame others. Adam and Eve tried to hide their sin, then tried to remove it (cover themselves) themselves and finally blamed someone else. Sin brings shame, but it must be confessed and removed. This is true humility. Seeing ourselves in comparison to God’s greatness brings healthy guilt (Isa 6:1-8).

If we don’t deal with legitimate guilt according to God’s standards or repentance and forgiveness, then it becomes a toxic force that leads us down an increasingly destructive path. God has freely provided for the removal of our legitimate shame by the blood of Jesus. He doesn’t want us to wallow in that misery and guilt. When Jesus talked to the woman at the well He pointed out her sin of immorality, but only to show her her need of Him. He didn’t rub it in or put her down.

HEALTHY SPIRITUAL SHAME convicts us of sin, prompts us to repent, and draws us toward God. Toxic spiritual shame, that which doesn’t come from God, makes us feel distant from God and causes us to believe we are too bad or somehow unworthy of God’s love. This results from not handling healthy spiritual shame by confessing and accepting God’s forgiveness. It can also come from wrong ideas of what is shameful that have built into us in childhood. The same is true of guilt that comes from wrong behavior in our dealings with others.

HEALTHY RELATIONAL SHAME, like spiritual shame, shows us a relationship has been damaged by something we did (or didn’t do). In the spiritual realm this affects our relationship with God, but the same thing is true in our relationships with others. Healthy relational shame enables us to say “I’m sorry” when we have injured others. It helps us to set legitimate boundaries in areas of health, privacy and modesty. It is the foundation for a healthy embarrassment. False guilt in relationships with others, though, just pushes us further into perfectionism. We think we must be perfect to like ourselves or to have anyone like us. It causes us to need other people’s approval (codependency) and we end up buying the law that we never can be good enough. We deny and ‘stuff’ our feelings and problems instead of facing them. Healthy shame lets us know when we have violated a law or principle and need to make amends. That’s why it’s so important for children to learn true, healthy limits and values. Building guilt into children for things which God doesn’t label as sin can be devastating. Using false guilt or shame to manipulate behavior is extremely damaging!

DAVID’S SHAME MESSAGES from God were heeded and led to his repentance. Spiritually he received and handled shame messages well. Unfortunately, the relational shame messages he

internalized were primarily toxic. He put guilt on his children for things they weren't guilty of. Tamar was made to feel guilty because she was raped and wanted justice done. Absalom was shamed for trying to bring the family problems into the open so they could be addressed. When they believed these messages from David their healthy behavior became unhealthy. Accepting false guilt as true guilt causes a person to adopt dysfunctional, codependent, compulsive and addictive behaviors in a vain attempt to anesthetize the bad feelings of toxic shame. People in recovery are actively working to internalize healthy shame messages and let go of the toxic shame messages that have kept them in dysfunction.

Individuals in shame-bound families tend to place the blame for their difficulties on other family members, not themselves. Amnon blamed Tamar for being raped and so did David by his silence. A husband may blame his affair or his drinking on his wife's lack of sexual responsiveness to him instead of taking responsibility for his own sin.

In shame-based families, feelings are considered to be 'bad,' so emotions are ignored, denied or punished. That happened to Amnon and Absalom. Certain members of shame-based families tend to dominate and strive to maintain the status quo. David was afraid of change and wouldn't face the family problems. He kept certain family members apart so things would go 'smoothly on. There is much controlling going on in these families.

People are made to feel worthless by rejection, shame, silence or other means. David wouldn't talk to Absalom for years, and Absalom told Tamar to be silent about her problems.

TOXIC SHAME MESSAGES IN CHILDHOOD come to children in dysfunctional families because they have normal needs and desires to be held, emotionally nurtured, ask questions and test boundaries. Children in dysfunctional families receive shame and guilt when they express these normal needs. Thus they grow up feeling guilty because they have these needs. Not only are the needs never correctly met, but rejection comes for even having the need. Children feel something is wrong with them, they are inferior, sinful, 'bad' and unworthy. They push all this into their subconscious because facing the hurt from it is too painful. Children are unable to realize that their parents are sending wrong messages and they are too immature to handle these messages in a healthy way. These end up totally affecting the way a person will relate to others as well as God. Normal daily interactions with people trigger deep feelings of toxic shame from within. Fear, rejection, failure, legitimate needs and many other hidden feelings start the cycle of shame, guilt, withdrawal, defensiveness and substituting with other means of meeting legitimate needs.

Perfectionism results, for that is the only way of feeling worthy. Of course it is never attained. Unattainable standards make it impossible for the person themselves or those around them to ever measure up. Thus more guilt is felt and the standards get even higher and higher. Forgiving self or others is impossible, for we don't feel worthy of being forgiven and we are caught in the trap proving we are better than others. Forgiving them just doesn't fit. Bitterness and anger build. Denial of all of this keeps the pain hidden within. God seems distant and grace is just an abstract term.

RELIGIOUS SHAME makes this even worse. Often churches and Christians communicate that it is not permissible to admit deep hurts or confess personal struggles. Negative emotions are to be hid to be a 'good' Christian. Anyone who breaks these rules is looked down on, thus adding to their shame and guilt. Sometimes even God Himself appears to be in on it, for parents often use the Bible to support these wrong opinions. Too often Christians see having problems as being sinful, that they must be perfect, and that emotions (especially negative ones) are sinful. Fun and pleasure are looked upon as sinful, as is sex. Success is sinful, and so is lack of success. If one is a Christian but still struggles shame is felt, for often we are told that if we prayed enough, had enough faith, or whatever, our problems would be gone.

CHANGE IS HARD as well as scary, but it can be done. It is a gradual process of recognizing that some of our feelings of shame and guilt are wrong, false, unhealthy. They must be labeled and identified, then God's truth must be held up against them. Our mind must explain reality to our emotions until the truth starts replacing the lies in our minds and hearts. The idea isn't just to change outer behavior but replace inner lies with truth. God's promise stands true: The truth still sets man free (John 8:32).



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS in a DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

By Jerry Schmoyer

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JESUS: RECOVERY FROM CODEPENDENCY, DYSFUNCTION AND FALSE GUILT

As in all things, Jesus is our model of healthy Christian living. Often we think He wouldn't care or understand, but that just isn't so! He knows all we go through, not just because He is God but because He went through everything we go through (Heb. 4:15-16). *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

If you wonder how He could possibly understand, just remember His life. His mother was pregnant before getting married, and the gossip and criticism of that followed Him His whole life (John 8:41). He was born in a barn (cave) far from home to young parents who faced fear, anxiety, tension and shame because she was pregnant before getting married. Before long a powerful king was doing everything he could to have Him killed. He lived in four different homes before He was four years old!

When He was 12 He had to start setting appropriate boundaries with His parents so He could pull away and be the Person God wanted Him to be (Luke 2:41-52). He had to take control of His own life instead of letting His parents control Him. The same thing happened in Cana when His mother gave Him orders of what she wanted. Jesus had to lovingly draw the line (set a boundary) (John 2:4). A little while later His brothers came with His mother to take Him home because they thought He had lost His mind (Mark 3:31-35). Talk about lacking family support and approval!

He had to set boundaries against evil, too (Mt 4:1-11). Standing up to everyone when He cleansed the temple (done twice) was quite a stand which brought much rejection (Mt 21:12-16). He needed to set boundaries to protect His time, often withdrawing from the crowds and sometimes even from the disciples so He could have much-needed time alone (Mt 14:13-24).

He set boundaries for others, too -- protecting children when they were criticized by the disciples (Matt 18:5-6; Mark 10:13-14). Thus it is easy to see how Jesus can understand our hurt, pain, rejection, misunderstanding and loneliness. He truly does know -- so turn to Him for help (Heb 4:15-16).



A TIME FOR EVERYTHING ...

- 1 *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:*
- 2 *a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,*
- 3 *a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,*
- 4 *a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,*
- 5 *a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,*
- 6 *a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,*
- 7 *a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,*
- 8 *a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. - Eccl 3:1-8*

This well-known passage sums up how we are to handle the changes taking place within and where we are to go from here with them. It's good wisdom in all areas, and its truths apply very well to overcoming dysfunction.

A time to plant and a time to uproot. Farmers learn patience, and that is important in having victory over dysfunction. It takes time. Seeds are planted unseen and germinate without any visible change, then the results start popping through the surface. That happens in the changes God makes within. He will patiently keep them growing until they yield fruit -- in HIS time: *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6)*. Also remember that things grow in cycles: growth then rest to absorb the growth, strengthen, and get ready for the next growth spurt. This happens all over physically, and also is the way God works spiritually and emotionally, too.

A time to be born and a time to die. We can't control the most important things in life, birth and death, so we shouldn't try to the things in-between, either. Emotional health means giving up trying to control everything and letting God be the one in control.

A time to kill and a time to heal. Notice the order: death comes first, then healing. There are thoughts, patterns, ideas and memories that need to be killed. We have monsters to face, pain to feel, fear to work through and bitterness to confess. Then, and only then, will God heal.

A time to tear down and a time to build ... a time to tear and a time to mend. Tearing down must come before mending. Barriers we have built up, walls to keep others out, dysfunctional patterns -- all must be torn down for new to be built. Instead of tearing down others around us we need to tear down the dysfunctional responses that have been built into us.

A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. We need to allow ourselves to experience the whole realm of emotions. We must give ourselves permission to feel and express the deep emotions that have been shut down for so long. Until we get in touch with our own feelings we won't be able to be in touch with the feelings of others. This is especially true of men. Weeping is allowed! Jesus wept (Jn 11:35). Emotions stuffed inside since childhood must be allowed out. Laughter, too, is important. We must give ourselves permission to laugh and enjoy life, realize we are worthy of pleasure and deserve it.

A time to embrace and a time to refrain. An embrace communicates so much, but often it is a big risk to reach out and touch someone or allow someone to touch us. That is an important part of healing. Sometimes this can become a crutch, a substitute, or bring back painful childhood memories of abusive touching. That's when it's time to refrain.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. A time to search and a time to give up. A time to keep and a time to throw away. Recovery means dealing with new feelings, redefining one's identity, rediscovering new ways to relate to people, and changing the rules we live by. Change can be scary. Many would rather stay in pain and dysfunction than face the unknown that change brings. Talking with other helps. Putting your feelings into words allows you to put a word label on them so you can handle them. Journalizing is a good way of accomplishing this, too.

A time to be silent and a time to speak. Part of healthy maturity is knowing what to say when and then when to not talk. Silence can speak volumes at the right time and in the right way.

A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace. Recovery means an increased ability to experience the full range of emotions that God created. That's the goal of maturity. Spiritual growth is so dependent on emotional maturity that one can't just grow as a Christian without working through hurts and issues from the past. We aren't to dwell on them, but they must be faced and removed. There is a time to focus on them and a time to set them aside and go on with life. Only God can give wisdom to know which to do when. He will provide that for us -- just ask Him. He waits to help you walk this new path, but you must ask.