

Shop Vac:

A Picture of Codependency

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The following insights are not presented as a one-size fits all nor as a cure all. These insights were gleaned from one particular struggle to attain to the liberty Christ gives. The following insights are presented in the hopes that someone else may also find greater liberty in Christ.

The River of Guilt

The Lord gave a dream to Jane, a woman with codependency issues, as follows:

Early this morning I dreamed that I was standing in the mountains near a narrow canyon with a rushing river at the bottom. Some other people were there too, whom I didn't know. I told them that I heard that a woman had fallen into the river earlier and no one had seen her again. One of the men walked over to the canyon, leaned over to look down into the river, as though he was curious or didn't see the danger, and fell in. Another man did the same, and then another. I was amazed and couldn't believe what I was seeing.

Then I was suddenly down river, and saw the three men flow past me in the river. The first man was clearly dead because his body was limp and was thrown around by the current. The other two men came soon after and seemed as though they may still be alive because they were more rigid and fought a bit against the current and rocks. I knew I couldn't do anything to help them because the current was so strong and fast, and I wasn't willing to get pulled in myself.

The river, in this dream, is Jane's deceptive dependency, her "neediness" (both real and perceived.) The woman who had fallen into the river before was Jane's mother who had also been codependent. The three men were Jane's two ex-husbands and her current husband. This river was the guilt (both real and perceived) which she felt for her relationship with her mother and the guilt she was accruing because she was literally spiritually killing the men in her life. Jane's Dad had "programmed" deep into her soul that she needed a husband, a man, to fulfill the longings and yearnings in her heart. There is a healthy aspect to these needs and desires but her Dad had done this in such a way that she drew too strongly upon her life partner and failed to learn how to draw only from God's Spirit in her life. Her programmed fleshly neediness was simply more than they could supply.

But this dream was not simply one-sided and it represented a fairly comprehensive view of Jane's entire life in the flesh. The persons she did not know were those who have, over the years, provided various kinds of influence upon her without her realizing it. As for the men, her first husband was already dead in the river because he no longer produced any more guilt in her. The second and current husbands were still contributing to her feelings of guilt. She was unwilling to dive into that guilt because it is indeed a lethal river. She was compelled to completely abandon them or she would be destroyed herself. Cutting off of soul-ties (the connections between her soul and the souls of her husbands) was required.

But it is not to be supposed that these men were innocent victims. These men were also predators in their own rights. They were immersed in guilt because they were guilty of finding a codependent (vulnerable, needy) woman whom they could devour her life force just to satisfy some inward, emotional, even demonic hunger. These men were basically human "vampires" and "meat grinders" in their own personality issues.

Shop Vacs

The Lord also gave a picture that graphically portrays the dynamics of Jane's codependent relationship to her narcissistic husbands. The picture was that of a vacuum cleaner, particularly an industrial strength "shop vac." Particular emphasis was given to where the hose slips onto the body of the vacuum cleaner. The hose was removed from its normal place on the shop vac and Jane held the hose in her hand.

Jane took the hose and reached out to various people with that hose seeking to gain something from them. Love. Spiritual light. Friendship. Fellowship. Healing from the pain within. All and only good things did she seek from these other people. She did not grind these other people into little pieces in the same way her narcissistic, abusive husbands did to her – though she was and is a shop vac and "vampire" in her own ways, she was not of the "meat grinder" variety. If one could peer long enough into the mists that surrounds the other end of the hose she was holding, one would see that it goes toward her belly, right into the center of her existence, into her soul, into her spirit.

Into the picture comes another shop vac, her first husband, who in deeply subtle ways somehow reminds one of her Dad and Jane put the hose on his shop vac and he drained her dry. God set her free from her first husband and she put her hose on another shop vac who also resembles her Dad in various ways and he too drained her dry. God mercifully set her free again and yet again she put her hose on still another shop vac who also resembles her Dad and, unsurprisingly, he too drains Jane dry.

Jane is seeking for fulfillment and satisfaction and completion and all she gets is drained. Why? Because the hose is the flesh. Why does she still have and use that hose? Because her Dad used her to gain his own emotional, narcissistic supply – and she must choose to forgive him for this for he surely did not know all that he was doing to his own daughter – he was unwittingly a shop vac too.

The Lord gave another supplemental picture to help understand the dynamics involved.

Picture an unborn baby in the womb drawing its life from the umbilical cord. The baby is born but the umbilical cord is never cut. The baby continues to draw life (or something resembling it) from that cord and never fully or independently develops its own inner abilities to be autonomous, independent, free, self-propelling and self-sustaining by drawing life only from its own cerebral cortex. This is a picture of the emotional "life" of the husbands as it is also a picture of Jane's emotional "life." The difference? Jane seeks life. Her husbands devour life.

But the hose is made only of flesh and the umbilical cord is an abomination – both must be crucified and cut off. The hose reaches out in the present to others but the umbilical cord stretches back through the past through Jane's husbands to her Dad. It is a soul tie to all of these men but not in the same sense as what is normally considered a soul tie because it was not formed by sexual interaction and relationships but rather through her dysfunctional, unbalanced, distorted relationship with her parents, particularly Jane's Dad but also her Mom and how her Mom interacted with her and her Dad. It is probably more right to call the hose and the umbilical cord a flesh tie. Her flesh seeks to draw life – just as the hose does, just as an uncut umbilical cord on a newborn infant would – from a source that is not God. The hose and the cord are both based on the lie that she is needy – of course, Jane, as do we all, needs life and the things of real, abundant, eternal life – but the lie is that she can obtain these for herself by her own efforts from some source other than God because no one has, or ever will, freely give them to her. In her programming, there must be a cost involved (pleasing the other, giving them narcissistic supply, etc.), there must be a fleshly connection (to fulfill her own programmed neediness) or it is not

“love.” This deeply buried definition in her internal dictionary must be erased and re-written by God. The truth is that God’s love is freely given and there is no cost to receive His love and nothing can separate her from His love which is her real self’s true and only source for genuine love.

It is not and never will be enough for Jane to take her hose and turn it toward God and attach it to Him. The hose that seeks supply in the present is only flesh and it cannot come near Him – it is an abomination to Him. The unseen end of the hose that attaches to her soul and spirit must be completely cut off. This is a surgery that only God can do but she must agree to it. Equally important, the umbilical cord that reaches into the past must also be rejected and the connection to Jane’s soul and spirit must be completely cut off as well. More than all this, Jane must persist and demand that God remove it from her as she renounces and rejects all the spiritual forces of darkness who control it, own it, use it and who will resist her submitting to this divine “surgery,” a thing that will be more of a process than an event.

To do this, Jane will have to trust God and Him alone that He will supply all her own narcissistic need, that is, her real self’s true need for genuine love. Yes, Jane’s codependency shares roots with narcissism (practicing fleshly self love that interferes with her love for God) and she does draw off of people in ways similar to her husbands but with differing results and different dynamics. Within the new creation (Jane’s identity in Christ) is a built in supply line from the center of her existence, her soul and spirit, to the secret place of the Most High God (Mt. 6:6, Psa. 91:1), that “portal” at the deepest part of every truly born again believer’s existence that opens into the throne room of grace wherein we can come at any time to our heavenly Father and find help in our time of need (which, in truth, is all the time – pray without ceasing! – Heb. 4:16, 1 Ths. 5:17) Jane must know that the hose is not only unnecessary, she must know that it is the very thing that keeps her from her heavenly Father and it is the very thing that keeps her locked onto the shop vac that is literally sucking out and grinding up her inner parts and leaving her feeling like she’s been slugged in the gut whenever she would challenge the shop vac’s right to suck her dry.

The hose into the present must be killed and the cord into the past must be cut off, taking all flesh to be crucified at the cross of Christ. The hose and the umbilical cord, the seeking of life apart from Him, must be renounced and rejected. Jane will never regret taking this step though she won’t always enjoy the process and the uncomfortable, even painful, situations this decision will take her into. But that is, after all, the nature of life – real Life.

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