



OVERCOMING

Unhealthy Dependency



January 4, 2010

*I*n one way or another, we all find ourselves depending on others. There is a saying which states that, “No man is an island”. This means that we all need each other. However, the extent to which we rely on others can make or break us. Any kind of reliance that leaves a person completely dependent on others is dangerous. It is unhealthy. It takes away the belief that one can be self-reliant and rely only on God. If all the people who support you today withdrew their support, would you still remain on your feet? If your husband / wife, your children, your boss, your friend or any other person who supports you is no longer available for you, would your life continue as usual?

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All over the world, including the developed countries, many people find themselves trapped in unhealthy dependency which ends up making them slaves and victims of hopelessness and desperation. Unfortunately, this unhealthy dependency starts slowly and innocently in the lives of its victims and before they realize it, it is already a force within themselves that they can hardly control. The African continent is the hardest hit by this epidemic. The church in general and the missionaries in particular have played a very big role in this enslavement to unhealthy dependency. This explains why many churches cannot survive on their own. They must rely on foreign aid and foreign personnel to run their affairs. If the church as an institution is not self reliant, what about its followers? A follower is usually not better than the one leading him. This shows exactly how the ordinary Christian is enslaved by unhealthy dependency. This further explains why many Christians are hardly successful in their day-to-day lives. The consequence of the above situation is the stagnation of African Christian churches and their followers. Many church ministers and leaders rush to the western countries in search of assistance while leaving behind a lot of resources at their disposal back in Africa. To understand these teachings clearly, I will start with some definitions. I have also borrowed a lot from Rev. Glenn Schwartz’s book, “When Charity Destroys Dignity”. This book is very comprehensive on the dangers of

unhealthy dependency, and I highly recommend that you get a copy and read it. It will greatly challenge and change your life. Rev. Glenn is the founder and Executive Director Emeritus of World Mission Associates and a campaigner against unhealthy dependency.

DEPENDENCE

This is a situation in which a person leans on the help and support of someone or something else in order to exist or be successful. It is a situation where someone is addicted to something. Did you know you can be addicted to relying on others?

UNHEALTHY

This means something that is harmful and likely to make you ill, weak or even kill you. It can be an unhealthy food, drink, behavior, environment etc. It is dangerous to the existence of the person in such a situation.

UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCY

This is a kind of reliance upon something that is harmful and likely to make you ill, weak or even kill you. Unhealthy dependency leaves a person free of personal responsibility and therefore looking to someone else for his or her existence. Without this help and support, the person cannot exist or be successful. This means that the person's life is not in his own hands or under his own control. It is controlled by external forces making the person a slave.

SELF-RELIANCE

This is a situation in which a person does not depend on the help and support of someone or something else in order to exist or be successful. Such a person is in full control of his own life and existence. He is not subjected to external forces. He is, therefore, not a slave to anyone and he therefore exists freely and is able to lead a successful life.

WHERE IS GOD IN SELF-RELIANCE?

Maybe you are asking me, "Pastor, how can I be self-reliant when we are supposed to lay all our burdens at the feet of Christ, then relax and have a good time? Friend, The Bible says that the Lord

will bless the work of your hands. If you are not doing anything with your hands or your head (brains), what will God bless in your life? Paul said that he who doesn't work should not eat. If you can relax and do nothing, and not be a burden to anyone, that is well and good. Go ahead; sleep the whole day and the whole night. However, this can only happen in another world, not the one we live in. I must state clearly here that self-reliance does not exclude God from the control of our lives. It means that the person is fully responsible and accountable for his / her life as a good steward in line with the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Any other influence or dependence is subjected to scrutiny so that it liberates, empowers and equips the person to be more productive and fruitful as opposed to enslaving through unhealthy dependency. God is the initiator of liberation. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God knew that Satan wanted to enslave mankind and take away their self-reliance and submission to God. That is why the devil tried to discredit God by telling Eve that God was not honest with them when He told them not to eat the fruit. God, however, was quick to restore mankind to freedom. This redemption was finally fulfilled at Calvary through the death of Jesus Christ. In my view, any church or religion that does not liberate its followers from unhealthy dependency is not worthy of calling itself a church or claiming to rely upon the Lord.

If you over-rely on other people or other things for your existence or success, it is the high time you re-evaluate your life, go back to the crossroads and take the right direction towards self-reliance. God did not purpose that you be forever dependent on your parents, your husband, your wife, your brothers, your sisters, your children, your employer, your friends, your neighbors, your church, your government, etc. He did not give you those people so that you could be a burden to them. No!!!! They are meant to facilitate or help you to be self-reliant. They are not supposed to give you the fish to eat. They are supposed to give you the fishing equipments to catch your own fish.

Therefore, God is a supporter of and an advocate of self-reliance. God does not enslave, He empowers, equips and liberates. In Part Two, I will try to show how African and other developing countries and their inhabitants became and are still becoming slaves of unhealthy dependency.

PART TWO

BACKGROUND OF UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCY IN AFRICA

To solve a problem effectively, it is always important to understand its background. How did the problem start? What is its foundation? How deep is it? Who started it? How do I start tackling it? In our case, we must ask ourselves the same questions regarding unhealthy dependency in Africa. I am here zeroing in on Africa because as you will see later, unhealthy dependency is more of an African or third world problem.

Unfortunately, we cannot talk about the background of unhealthy dependency without mentioning two groups of people. The first is the missionaries and the spread of the Christian Gospel. The second is the colonialists and their rule in Africa. While no one can defend the colonialists, when I mention the missionaries and the spread of Christianity, some of you who are over-spiritual may start vying for my blood. Before you do that, please be patient as I explain my point.

Over time, the Gospel has been spreading rapidly from Jerusalem and the Holy Land into Asia Minor, then to the Roman Empire. It then spread to Northern Europe, the Scandinavian countries, North America, Brazil, South America, Korea, India and Nigeria. All these countries have been very successful in spreading the gospel and sending out missionaries. However, the Church in East, Central and Southern Africa has failed in both missions and evangelism. The African Church has lagged behind for a long time. The church in Africa is not reproducing itself. There are places in Africa which are over-evangelized while others have never heard the gospel, and yet

they are close to each other. In these same places, people are still receiving missionaries and money from outside. They are not giving back to the Christian movement some of what God has given them. Why is this? There are several reasons that form the background of this problem. They include the following.

QUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

John S. Mbiti once said that Africans are heavily religious. In my view, this has a lot to do with their traditions. Africans have very deep roots in their traditions and their customs. This makes them have divided loyalties even in their Christian life. They are good Christians and totally believe in God when things are easy; however, during times of crisis, they turn to their original traditional worldview. That is when they consult witchdoctors, ancestors, etc. while still claiming to be Christians. This is common in times of death in the family, terminal illness, failure in business, marital problems, lack of jobs, etc. When one wants to have a second wife, he hides under traditions. That is Dualism. The problem with divided loyalty is that such Christians are unable to truly and fully trust in God. They have never known exactly what God can do in their lives because they have never experienced Him in their lives. They believe that their solution is somewhere, but they do not know exactly where. They believe that the solution is not within themselves but somewhere else and with somebody else, either in their churches or in their African traditions. They come to God to TEST whether He is the one with their solutions. This is why many pastors and witchdoctors have taken advantage of such Christians to benefit from their unhealthy dependency.

This kind of Christian conversion where the new believers are not trained to rely on God only affects the outer person but the inner person remains unchanged. It is therefore a low quality conversion. It does not liberate. It enslaves and confuses the Christian. Such a Christian cannot become self-reliant. He can only rely on others

resulting in unhealthy dependency. Such a situation makes Christianity a religion of convenience where I become a Christian only when I want to benefit from it.

What is the quality of your conversion? Could it be the reason for your unhealthy dependency?

IMPORTED STRUCTURES

The second background problem is the structure of the church which was brought by the missionaries. I have problems with the whole structure because it was a pure importation from abroad. Look at our church buildings. Do they look African? Look at the vestments. Do they have any African relevance? Look at the way of dressing. The list is endless. The worst of it all is the leadership structure. For all the time the missionaries were in Africa, many never believed that Africans could lead themselves. Most pastors and priests were white or at least outsiders. Everything used in the church was western including the wine and the bread for the Lord's table. All the money used in mission work was brought in from abroad.

Why am I against all this? First, because it portrays the African as someone who is unable to THINK, has no STRUCTURE and has no RESOURCES of his own. Secondly, the white missionaries assumed that they found a vacuum in Africa. Therefore, they went ahead to fill the vacuum without consulting or considering the Africans. That is why I somehow agree with most Kikuyu politicians who claim that "Gutiri ngurani ya muthungu na mubia." (There is no difference between a missionary and a colonialist). They both played a role in enslaving Africans Christians to unhealthy dependency. Thirdly, this situation created a mentality in Africans that they CANNOT THINK; that they CANNOT GOVERN themselves and that they are POOR. If you doubt it, why does almost everyone, including you, believe that America and other western countries are the only ones that can solve our problems? Do you make your own decisions? Do you govern yourself? Do you think or even

imagine that you are poor? You are a product of imported structures and influence from the west.

IMPORTED CULTURE AND BRAIN WASHING

The third cause of unhealthy dependency is imported culture. Somebody said that if you want to enslave a person, take away his identity, his language and his culture. That is exactly what was done to Africans by both the missionaries and the colonialists. Our names were taken away and we were given English names. Perhaps they were good names, but they took away our identity. Some of us do not even want to mention our African names because they sound African and outdated. We want to be modern with modern names. Some of us cannot even speak our own African languages. We prefer using English even when nobody understands it. Our cultures are being forgotten. When the missionaries came, they sometimes gave us the impression that everything in our culture is bad. We therefore discarded many things, including the most valuable virtues. "Twateire mwana hamwe na thigira." (We threw away both the baby and the placenta.) That is why Africa has become like Sodom and Gomorrah. In some places you cannot buy a dress unless it is made in England. Sometimes you cannot buy even rice or sugar unless it is made in Europe or the East.

Do you have an identity? Do you speak your native language? Do you still retain the morals from your culture? If you don't, you are a modern and westernized POOR African suffering from unhealthy dependency. You have been brainwashed and enslaved in all your ways.

THE TRUTH ABOUT AFRICA AND AFRICAN CHRISTIANS

Brothers and Sisters, the truth about Africa and African Christians is that we were all fearfully and wonderfully created by God. We are as gifted as all other people in the world. We have enough brains to make our own decisions, we can come up with our own structures of governance, and we

have all the resources that we require to support our families, our projects and our churches. We are RICH. Silver and gold belongs to God who is our father and creator. The missionaries did not bring us a God. No!!!! We still had God even before the white people came. Our problem is not physical. No, it is both spiritual and psychological. We need to have a total transformation through the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:1-3). We are not poor, we were just lied to that we are poor and we believed the lie. We are not foolish. We can govern ourselves. We are as good as the people who made us feel inferior. Let's wake up from that dream and face the truth. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

Practical Examples of Successful Cases

I have two practical examples of successful cases of overcoming unhealthy dependency. These two stories can be found in chapters 1 and 2 of the book I mentioned at the beginning of this article – When Charity Destroys Dignity.

The first story is about the Presbyterian church of East Africa (PCEA). In the 1970s and under the wise leadership of Moderator John Gatu (I highly respect this man), the Presbyterian Church did what many other churches did not dare to do. It told its supporters and financiers from the Mission Society to KEEP their MONEY, their MISSIONARIES and their DECISIONS. The PCEA no longer needed them. The church mobilized its resources, started paying their pastors, their bills etc. It started making their decisions and coming up with their own structures. Today, the PCEA church is the richest in Kenya. It is the most self-sustaining church; it has the best church governments in Kenya. Their members are the least affected by the unhealthy dependency syndrome.

The second example is the Assemblies of God in South Africa. Once per year, the Rev. Bhengu used to go to North America to raise money for his church. One day, while he was fundraising in America, God told him, “Go back home and get the money from your own people”. He was so surprised that he asked God, “How will I do that

when the only people I have in my church are children and unemployed women?” God told him to go back and do the following four things.

1. Teach the women how to care for their families.
2. Teach them how to bring their husbands to the Lord.
3. Teach them how to make something with their hands and earn a living.
4. Teach them how to give some of it back to God in thanksgiving.

When he did this, the church became self-reliant and the members were delivered from unhealthy dependency. Once a year this church in South Africa takes a collection at their annual conference. In 2008 at that conference the amount they collected was over fifteen million South African Rand which was over two million US dollars at the time. That shows how effective the transformation in their thinking was.

The two examples are meant for you. It can be done. There is hope. We are not destined to poverty and over-dependency. Unhealthy dependency can be eliminated.

Assignment: Think about anything else that may be a cause of unhealthy dependency in our lives.

PART THREE

SYMPTOMS OF UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCY

Anything that exists within someone or something can only manifest itself through some identifiable signs. These signs are also called symptoms. A syndrome is a condition which shows that you have a particular illness. It is a sign that a serious problem exists. In the same way, there are signs or symptoms that show that someone is suffering from the unhealthy dependency syndrome. The good thing is that no one can hide the symptoms. However much you hide, people will still know that you are sick. “Hauwezi ficha kikohozi.” (Translation: You cannot hide or hold a cough)

People suffering from unhealthy dependency syndrome show the following symptoms:

1. He/she often uses such terms as “I am poor” “I am unable to do that”, “It is not possible”, “That is difficult”, “I fear to fail”, etc.
2. They often claim that they do not have money or the resources to do whatever they want to do. They use terms like, “If someone gives me money today, I would do this or that”.
3. They often say that they have no one to help them. They also claim that some things are only possible for others and not for them
4. They often say that they are unable to decide. They claim that they have very good plans, but they are unable to choose which one to implement.

HUMAN (PERSONAL) CAUSES OF UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCY

Besides the background issues of missionary and colonial influence that contributed towards the development of unhealthy dependency syndrome in Africa, there are others that have a lot to do with the individual person. They vary from one person to the other depending on our upbringing, the prevailing environment and our worldview. These include the following.

a) **Lack of self-confidence / faith.** The success of any individual is largely determined by how much he or she believes in himself. It is important to note that those who find it difficult to believe in themselves also find it difficult to believe in God. Faith in God gives one a healthy self-image. Also, a healthy self-image helps to strengthen our faith in God. However big a vision or a plan you have, it can never become a reality if you do not have self-confidence. The Bible says that we were not given the spirit of fear but the spirit of courage and confidence. This is what keeps our faith strong and working. Those who are confident in themselves are the only ones who can say, “I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13) These are people like Caleb who can say, “Let us go and conquer the land because we are well able” (Numbers 14). If you lack this, then be prepared to remain a victim and

slave of unhealthy dependency.

b) **Misplaced Priorities.** We all have a multitude of needs and wants in life. No one can meet all his / her needs at a go. We must therefore prioritize our needs and wants to handle them one at a time. This is what I call using the principle of divide and rule. Unless you divide your needs and wants, you will never rule over them. The first step is to differentiate between your needs and your wants and your essentials from your luxuries. You then prioritize them according to their importance and urgency. Unfortunately, most Christians never bother to do the above differentiation. In fact, most Christians pursue their wants and luxuries at the expense of their needs and essentials. That is why most of them live in very costly rental houses, eat the most luxurious meals, wear the most expensive clothes, drive the best cars and yet their tomorrow is not even guaranteed. If you are such a person, you are a victim of misplaced priorities which you will soon regret. You will end up suffering from unhealthy dependency, not because you are poor but because you have your priorities upside down.

c) **Lack of Planning.** Someone said that failure to plan is planning to fail. A plan is something you have already decided to do. We plan for both short term and long term. Short-term plans are the things you plan to do and finish within a short time while long-term plans are the things you intend to do over a long time. Planning helps to avoid doing unnecessary things that may not be important or even urgent. Even simple things like shopping and traveling need to be planned for. Many Christians seem to be in such a big hurry that they never plan. Therefore they end up becoming broke before the end of the month and have to depend on others for the remaining part of the month. This eventually becomes a habit, and they become a burden to others. In fact, such people think that they do not earn enough. The problem is not the amount of money you earn but how you plan to spend your money. If you are a poor planner, even a salary of one million will be too small for you. If drunkards plan before they go to the bar, why not us Christians? How comes some drunkards are not victims of unhealthy

dependency like you, and yet you always condemn their drunkenness?

d) **Extravagance** is a situation where a person spends a lot of money on things that are not important. This is usually as a result of lack of planning. I have found that it can be a problem to have money in our pockets that is not budgeted for. Even entertainment money should be budgeted for. Have you ever gone to the supermarket and bought a lot of things, but when you get home you realize that you bought some things that you do not need while you forgot something very essential? To make matters worse, you realize that you no longer have extra money to buy what you need. There are also some Christians who are carelessly generous. The Bible says that the children's bread should not be given to the dogs (Matthew 15:26). Every time you are so generous that you give others what is meant for your family, you are giving the children's bread to the dogs. Extravagance also leads to compulsive spending. This means being addicted to spending regardless of whether whatever you are buying is good or bad. Beware, extravagance leads to unhealthy dependency.

e) **Lack of stress** **Stress** means the pressures and demands of life as felt by a person. There is positive and negative stress. Negative stress is when the pressures and demands of life are unmanageable and therefore cause unnecessary anxiety and worry. Positive stress is when one has enough pressure and demands to keep him active and progressing. Lack of stress is very dangerous. It makes people inactive, unfocused and even makes their mind dormant. When such a person is faced by even the simplest challenge, they must rely on others for help. They become victims of unhealthy dependency. This is where charity kills initiative and integrity. That is why it is dangerous to do everything for your children, your wife, your husband, your employees, your pastor, your members etc. If you thought you can live a carefree life, you are wrong. Even God expects you to think. That is why He put brains in your head. Most Christians who avoid responsibilities are the ones who avoid stress in their lives. They end up becoming victims of unhealthy

dependency.

CONCLUSION: As much as we would like to blame the missionaries and the colonialists for the unhealthy dependency syndrome in Africa, we also have equal blame to share for entertaining the above behaviors in our lives. In fact, if we can avoid the above, the effects caused by the missionaries and the colonialists would be completely defeated and all of us would become self-reliant. In part four, I will deal with the way forward. Now that we have known the facts, what next? Shall we remain in bondage of unhealthy dependency or have we decided to set our selves free? Think about this before the next lesson.

PART FOUR

STEPS TOWARDS SELF-RELIANCE

Now that we have learnt about unhealthy dependency, its causes and dangers - and that it is possible to overcome it - the next question is, "How can I overcome unhealthy dependency and become self-reliant?" I personally believe that there is always a way out from every situation. The following are eight steps toward self-reliance.

1. **Decide to be self-reliant.** You are a product of your decisions. Whatever you have is a product of your decisions. This means that your decisions determine how far you can go in life. You are relying on others because you have decided to rely on them. You are poor because you have decided to be poor. The day you decide to change that decision, you'll be surprised at how soon and fast you will reach your goals. Even a rich man can become poor if he decides to be poor. Decide to be self-reliant today.

2. **Know your destiny.** The destiny of every individual is in his or her own hands. God enables you to get to your destination. You must therefore know exactly where you want to go and what you want to have in life. If you do not have a destiny, you will spend your lifetime helping other people get to their destiny. What do you want to achieve

in life? How far do you want to go? What is your destiny?

3. Commit it to God. Once you have decided what your destiny should be, you need to commit it to God. He will give you directions and guidance on how to accomplish it. He will also give you his favor and the enablement to be successful in your journey towards your destiny. Have you committed your destiny to God? Are you doing what God is blessing or you are forcing God to bless what you are doing?

4. Take charge of your destiny. Some people know their destiny but they have not taken charge of it. They want other people to help them get to their destiny. These people forget that other people have their own destiny, and they are busy working toward it. Who is in charge of your destiny? If you are not in charge of your destiny, do not expect success. In the fear of the Lord, take charge of your destiny today.

5. Give it a time frame. Anything that doesn't have a time frame is not likely to be accomplished. A time frame lets you know whether you will be late or not in arriving. You should know what you want to do when. A long journey should be divided into smaller portions for it to be easy to finish. Have you divided your destiny into small manageable portions? Apply the "divide and rule" principle and you will succeed.

6. Strategize. Without a strategy, you can never achieve anything. Most of the people who fail in life are victims of trying to achieve something without a strategy. Once you know where you want to go, you must come up with a way of getting there. A strategy helps you to go the full journey psychologically and mentally even before you take the first physical step. It also helps you to foresee the possible obstacles or challenges and prepare to face them. With a strategic plan, one is also able to evaluate his/her progress along the way. Next time you see signs of failure in your life, re-examine your strategy.

7. Make a Commitment. Commit your mind, time, money and other resources to implement it.

Without a long-term commitment, do not expect to succeed. Commitment means being fully prepared and ready to sacrifice anything for the success of a certain goal. A committed person does not need to be pushed to do something. He/she does not withhold anything needed to accomplish something. God was so much committed to our redemption that he could not withhold his own son. Abraham was so much committed to God that he did not withhold his son Isaac when God asked him to sacrifice him. If you are committed to self-reliance or you will not stop until you become fully self-reliant. Be committed to your goal and you will achieve it.

8. Start. However good a plan is, it can only be achievable and beneficial if it has been started. Anything that has not been started has no guarantee that it will succeed or become a reality. The people who succeed are those who take the first step of faith. We are all proud of Peter because he was bold enough to take the first step onto the water. If he chose to remain in the boat the way the other disciples did, he would not have walked on the water. If you remain on the shores, you will never get the fish at the middle of the sea. The secret to get to wherever you want to go is to take the first step. What is your goal, start moving towards it today. In all this, you must remember that God must be part of all you do. Do not think that your human effort alone will be sufficient to reach your goal.

9. Keep evaluating yourself. Without evaluation, you can never know whether you are making progress or not. Lack of evaluation makes a person think he/she is making progress while he may be stagnant or moving backwards. Evaluation is the measure by which we know our progress. It also helps us to know where exactly we need to adjust or change strategy. Evaluation makes a successful person more successful and a person moving to the wrong direction change to the right direction. Keep evaluating yourself.

In conclusion, it is important to know that unhealthy dependency can be overcome and all of us can move towards self-reliance. There is still hope to those who are still suffering from the

Unhealthy Dependency Syndrome. This is an epidemic that can be easily eradicated if each one of us would play his/her role and fight against it at individual level. Take the first step towards self-reliance by beginning to make use of the available resources you have today. When you are attacked by an enemy, you fight back using the available weapons. Let us all use the available resources and we shall win this battle. May you enjoy the joy of self-reliance through out your life and help others to be self-reliant.

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