

A Support Structure for Staying the Course

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There was a young lady who thought monastic life offered purely communal and spiritual bliss until she visited a monastery and overheard two monks arguing about whose turn it was to do the dishes.

In the book, *Celtic Daily Prayer: Farther Up and Farther In*, the authors who are part of Northumbria Community share about the very human side of monastic life in the following manner:

*Monastic diseases are coping mechanisms—attitudes and actions that can bring dis-ease to ourselves and others around us. All of us have the potential to catch any and all of these diseases—the main problem lies in denial or wrong diagnosis, or no diagnosis at all, i.e. being unaware of them.*¹

Let us use this thinking as a window to peek in at our own attitudes and actions that create the diseases of unhealthy dependency. Missional diseases are coping mechanisms—attitudes and actions that can bring disease manifested as unhealthy codependency to ourselves and others around us. All of us have the potential to catch any and all of these diseases—the main problem lies in denial, wrong diagnosis or no diagnosis at all.

There is so much that tempts us to ignore our convictions, wise advice from others and lessons from past experiences when it comes to unhealthy dependency. My husband and I faced a barrage of temptations when we served as missionaries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. **Denial**, **wrong diagnosis**, or **no diagnosis at all** play out in different ways:

¹ *Celtic Daily Prayer: Book 2* (The Northumbria Community Trust, 2015), 1148.

- Seeing someone struggle pulls on our heartstrings, and we quickly decide that short-term gain is better than the long-term pain that might show up because of our hasty solutions. We go with our impulse and ignore the warning signs.
- We know better, but sometimes we compromise because of expectations from our donors, churches and sending agencies. They want to know what we are achieving or what they can achieve vicariously through us.
- Helping and directing others has a way of making us feel needed and feeding our sense of self-importance. Our self-identity, which easily gets entangled in our projects and work, is hard to let go of when making decisions and plans to move into the shadows in order to allow the local people to shine. It requires heaps of humility and surrender, which is sometimes hard for missionaries who are highly driven and motivated to begin with.
- We want to make something easier and better for us—less wear and tear on our bodies, faster results and fulfilling to our own dreams—so we settle for *non-reproducible methods*.
- Everyone around us seems to give little thought to the causes and consequences of unhealthy dependency, so why bother to swim against the stream?
- If we don't offer fringe benefits, local people will simply go to other organizations. We can't keep people if we don't act as patrons.
- We try to solve unhealthy dependency by substituting a problem with another problem because we aren't thinking of solutions outside the dependency mindset. In this case, our solution lands us right back in the same place.

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Many people know by personal experience that it is hard to stay the course once we have made up our minds to not be the instigators of creating unhealthy dependency. There is way more shouting at us to go ahead and ignore the crippling effects of unhealthy dependency than there is to be wise and aware. It takes intention, prayer, patience, evaluation and wisdom to recognize our blind spots, stick with our convictions, swim against the stream, close the gap between theory and practice and not substitute a problem for a problem.

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With these challenges in mind, I strongly suggest that you form a support group around you made up of people who are committed to avoid perpetuating a culture of unhealthy dependency. In this way, you can hold each other accountable and learn from one another.

Five Stones Global has created a relational and instructive support structure for this very purpose. If you are interested, we will guide you or your team as you:

1. work through a sequence of two-page worksheets that build upon each other on the topic “Avoid Creating a Culture of Unhealthy Dependency.”
2. process the worksheets with a coach or peer group.

3. create a paradigm statement, guiding principles and practices.

This process will not only save you a lot of heartache, it will equip you to be a catalyst for creating a culture of dignity, sustainability and multiplication in place of unhealthy dependency.

If you are interested in receiving interactive instruction and coaching to “Avoid Creating a Culture of Dependency,” please visit the Five Stones Global website at www.fivestonesglobal.org for more information or email Maria Gilbertson at maria@fivestonesglobal.org.

In the meantime, may God help us all to transition from denial, wrong diagnosis, and no diagnosis at all to recognition, right diagnosis and taking responsibility. We can do this, if we help one another. 

