

# PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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## Toxic Positivity

(Being positive isn't always a helpful solution to life's problems.)

As a counselor...scratch that...As a child of God, I know how difficult it can be to sit with someone who is going through a hard time. I so often find that my heart yearns for dear friends and family members to feel better about a situation, to see themselves through a different lens, and to receive hope that God hasn't had the last word. When sitting with these friends, I want their resolution and happy ending to come quickly. Based on this, I bypass their current mood and go straight for the solution. However their response doesn't seem to show that I offered any help at all. In fact, sometimes I am told that I have made things worse. Let's take a look at a few examples before continuing.

### Example #1 - The Teenage Girl

Crying to you in dismay over her appearance and weight, your 16-year-old, 110-pound daughter shares with you that she is fat and hates the way she looks, as she can't even stand to look at herself in the mirror. What do you do?

### Example #2 - The Barren Woman

Over the years, your friend has shared with you her struggle with infertility and the fact that her dreams aren't being fulfilled. She questions why God hasn't provided and doubts about the future. What do you say?

### Example #3 - The Passed-Up Employee

Your neighbor has worked so hard and faithfully at his job for the past 15 years and again has been passed up for a promotion. He is discouraged by this and doesn't know what to do. How do you encourage him?

These are everyday situations that will cross our paths. As Christians, I believe it is wise for us to learn how to approach people experiencing difficult times in loving and helpful ways. Key word there is HELPFUL. I will give us all the benefit of a doubt in assuming that when we speak "words of encouragement" we are doing so out of love, but we need to recognize that our well-meaning positivity is not always helpful or necessary.

In Example #1, it is so easy to respond to the tearful teenager with the words, "No you're not sweetie, you are not fat. You are so beautiful". These words can be said from the heart with absolute sincerity, but from my experience they aren't helpful and often aren't believed.

In Example #2, you might be inclined to encourage your friend to "Be positive" that a successful pregnancy is right around the corner or to quote bible verses that "God knows the desires of your heart". Again, this may be a genuine attempt to encourage your dear friend,

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but it isn't found to be helpful in the moment.

Finally, in Example #3, you are desperate to encourage your neighbor and share that he should be "Thankful for the job that he has and positive about what's ahead". This sounds nice, but probably isn't what your neighbor wanted to hear.



So, if those responses aren't helpful... what is?

Maybe next time, before you give one of these quick responses you can take a step back and follow this 2-step process.

**SIT.** Before heading into "Fix-It Mode" take a moment or maybe a few moments and sit with your loved one where they are at. Sit in the ugliness. Sit in the heartache. Sit in the discouragement.

**EMPATHIZE.** Show them you understand how they are feeling, without trying to change how they feel.

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# Healing Binge Eating:

## A Journey Toward Wholeness

■ by Jessica A. Parks, MSW, LCSW



Most of us have had the experience of overeating. An abundance of food is often available at social gatherings, church potlucks, family meals, and it is not uncommon to have the occasional experience of eating until feeling physically overfull. Binge-Eating Disorder (BED) is different; BED is frequent, “out-of-control” and compulsive episodes of overeating, followed by intense shame or guilt. One study found that approximately 3.5% of adult women and 2% of adult men experience BED during their lifetime, commonly beginning in adolescence or young adulthood (Hudson JI, Hiripi E, Pope HG Jr, and Kessler RC., 2007). Many who struggle with BED also struggle with their weight and with obesity-related illnesses.

### Markers of Binge-Eating Disorder include (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- Eating significantly more food than most people would eat under similar circumstances during a specific period of time (e.g. during a two-hour period), at least one episode per week for at least three months

- A sense of lack of control over the amount of food consumed, with related distress
- Three of the following:
  - Eating much more rapidly than normal
  - Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
  - Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
  - Eating alone because of being embarrassed by how much one is eating
  - Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty after overeating

Binge-Eating Disorder twists and warps our relationships to our bodies, our social environments, and our God. Those who suffer with Binge-Eating Disorder struggle to see food as God’s loving provision, instead often seeing food as an enemy or a vice. Social occasions and family gatherings, meant by God to provide fellowship and connection, end up feeling like dangerous minefields. Bodies, gifts from God, temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), are seen through eyes of shame. These are lies that Binge-Eating Disorder tells. These lies pull those who struggle with BED away from being fully present to the joy in His provision that God intends for His people.

Recovery and healing are possible with Binge-Eating Disorder. If you notice some of the markers in yourself, your child, or another loved one, consider the following:

- How we talk about food matters! Leave the moral judgments about food behind. Food is not inherently “sinful,” “cheating,” or “a guilty pleasure.” Food is nourishment. When you talk about food, especially around someone struggling with BED, talk about its other qualities. Is it satisfying? Is it delicious? Does it give your body the energy it needs?
- Notice physical cues. Is your stomach rumbling? Do you feel sleepy after that meal? Did that food help fuel you with just the right energy? Learn from the wisdom that God built right into our bodies. Our bodies are wiser about what we need than we typically notice. Slow down enough to learn.
- Our culture objectifies bodies, but God tells us that our bodies are not merely a product to present as pleasing to the world. Our bodies are temples; our bodies are gifts. Your value does not come from the way your body looks. Your body is a tool for living beautifully for the glory of God.

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### *Cont’d from p 1 - Toxic Positivity*

If you look for it, you will find a hint of grief in all of the scenarios mentioned above. We need to be sensitive to grief in all of its forms, so watch out for when a loved one could be grieving the loss of a job, the loss of a dream, or the loss of self-esteem. Grief doesn’t just come with the loss of a loved one. You wouldn’t tell someone who just lost their parent to “Be Positive” - you express empathy and say that you are sorry for their loss. The same applies here.

Don’t get me wrong. I understand the importance of positive thinking. What I am questioning is the need for us to be positive all the time and the belief that being positive will solve all of our problems. That’s simply not true, nor do I think it is biblical. There are so many examples in the Bible of people crying out to God in distress, such as David when he was being chased by Saul intent on killing him or Jesus crying out to God to “remove this cup from (him)”. If you look in the Bible, these emotions weren’t immediately resolved or depreciated. They were heard and cared for by a loving God.

Before rushing in with the positive side and pointing out godly hope, pray about your timing. Depending on the situation and the person, these comments may fall on deaf ears. Comments such as “That sounds frustrating”, “My heart breaks for you” and “I can understand how you would be discouraged” may be more welcomed. We need to figure out how to provide helpful validation and hope for our loved ones without straying into the land of “toxic positivity”. Don’t miss out on opportunities for deep connection and understanding by quickly trying to make things better. Afterwards, keep an eye out for God’s timing and the right words to say when your loved one is ready to hear more. ■

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# CODEPENDENT

## (the disease of the lost self)

■ by Kim Pronoitis, MA, LCPC

### Who Am I?

At one time or another we all have asked ourselves this question. It is an appropriate question for a college student picking a major or someone making a career choice. It is different though when a person can't identify themselves as an individual, or when a person's happiness is dependent upon another person. This is called a codependent relationship.

One result of a codependent relationship pattern is that God comes second to the relationship. Instead of fully relying on God, we look to the relationship to meet emotional needs. Codependents rely on another person's opinion first. Christian interdependence is vital to the body of Christ and its independent members. We are to love one another, avoid selfish ambition, and use our individual gifts from God to help others. If we cannot exercise our individual purpose because of a toxic relationship, we are going against God's plan for us. This is contrary to the selfishness, dishonesty and destruction of codependent relationships.

Not knowing who we are or who we have become apart from someone else is where many get stuck. Often this relates to a codependent relationship, resulting in a person engaging in maladaptive coping skills for a pseudo sense of wellbeing. One of my therapeutic clichés is to "never compromise your own wellbeing for someone else." The complexity of a codependent relationship is that over an extended period of time, the unhealthy behaviors become the "norm" and the only way to know and understand. Having healthy judgment becomes clouded. Change begins with an honest look at ourselves and acknowledging the codependent relationship.

### What is codependency?

Originally codependency was coined in alcoholic or addictive type relationships. The term has been around a long time and doesn't necessarily have to be directly related to alcohol, or what most would perceive as "addiction". Codependency comes in many forms but all are similar in nature. It's what one person can get from another. Today many clinicians look at the behavioral aspects of relationships and the ability of an individual to function independently. For codependents, being open and honest can be difficult. Codependency is when one person relies on another for their own self-worth, the need to be needed, or the inability to be able to rely on their own independence. Codependency is a behavioral condition where a person enables another person's addiction, underachievement, poor mental health, irresponsibility and/or inability to move forward in a positive direction. For the people involved, codependent behaviors can be difficult to detect as they become a "normal" way of life and are seen as supporting instead of enabling.



### Signs of codependency

- Struggling with boundaries – codependents do not know what a healthy boundary looks like.
- Becoming controlling through manipulation or guilt to get what we want.
- Feeling overly responsible for others feelings and wellbeing, because as a child we learned that to survive in the family, we had to be the responsible one.
- People pleasing - feeling like we have to please others or make them happy to receive acceptance, love, or approval.
- The need to be needed and often giving unwanted advice.
- Relying on what others think of us for our own self-worth and happiness.
- Being sensitive to criticism.
- Afraid that conflict will cause others to reject or abandon us.
- Lack of trust. Because those close to us have hurt us, it is difficult to trust in relationships as we fear getting hurt.
- Feeling alone or like "someone should" be helping us.
- Always having to be right - being a right fighter.
- Always feeling like the victim - not taking responsibility for our own actions.
- Justifying or making excuses for our own or someone else's poor behavior.

### What causes codependency?

Most often codependent behaviors start to develop in childhood and follow into adulthood. If we come from a home where we are the caretaker because parents lack the ability, we learn to take care of our siblings or ourselves, filling in the gaps our parents did not fill. For children, taking on adult responsibility before developmentally ready leaves an impact on how a person views the world and behaves in it. Codependency can also develop after a traumatic event. Behaviors are learned and generational. When learned behavior is reinforced, it continues and becomes an automatic pattern.

### Courage to change the things we can

It takes courage to look at ourselves and our relationships and acknowledge unhealthy behaviors. That is the first step. We cannot change what we do not acknowledge. Counseling can help identify codependent behaviors and work to change old ways of thinking. Support groups are also helpful.



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## Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

### Cont'd from p 2 - Healing Binge Eating

- Binge eating is often related to shame. Ask God to illuminate ways in which shame plays a role in unhealthy eating patterns.
- Every journey needs a guide. Pray. Consult a therapist. Seek out family support. Recovery is harder alone.

God empowers recovery from Binge-Eating Disorder through healing relationships with bodies, food, communities, and Himself. Psychotherapy is a vital component of this healing, alongside family support and prayer. In Romans 12:1, God urges us to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices in worship. Working towards healing from Binge-Eating Disorder allows us to have the kind of loving, grateful stance towards our bodies that enables us to live worshipfully. God is gracious and compassionate towards us as we strive and move towards healing. If you struggle with Binge-Eating Disorder, call out to him. He will guide you in your journey toward wholeness. ■

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### Cont'd from p 3 - Codependent

What causes us to feel the need to continue unhealthy codependent behaviors in a relationship? In Romans 7:15-20 Paul speaks of doing the things one hates to do, and asks why we do these things. The concept of letting go for many is a scary thing to do— let go and let God.

When becoming healthier, it's not uncommon to get "push back" from others in the unhealthy relationship. A codependent person feels extremely uncomfortable with the new healthy boundaries. One person in the relationship may feel like they are losing the other and dig in emotional "hooks" – through guilt, shaming, or manipulating the other person into doing what they "should" be doing.

Remember, we have had "stinking thinking" for a long time. Changing the way we think takes time, and is a process. Self-growth is not always comfortable! Isaiah 14:27 For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? ■

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