

The Barnabas Letter

a newsletter from The Barnabas Center,
a nonprofit counseling, discipling,
and teaching ministry in Charlotte, NC

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Depending ON GOD *to fill us*

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By Roger Edwards:
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.

It All **Depends**

“There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” Blaise Pascal 1623-1662

Dependence on God, I am told, is a good thing. But honestly, it scares me. The whole idea of dependence sounds weak, like you can't do for yourself. It's hard to be attracted to something that feels like a loss of dignity. Truthfully, when I think of 'dependence', I get the same feeling as when I think of 'Depends' underwear.

So, as part of my research for this article, as a way to face my fear, I decided to purchase a package of Depends incontinence wear. I thought, 'Yes, perhaps if I do this symbolic act of courage and face my encroaching weakness, then maybe I will be persuaded to reach out to God.' Many great medieval thinkers placed a human skull on their desks to remind them of life's transience. Buying Depends, I reasoned, could do the same for me. Maybe this will warm me up to the dependence idea.

With this in mind and parking near the entrance, I walked boldly into Harris Teeter in search of my mortality. I found it on aisle 7. In fact, I found three shelves full of all types of Depends (and other brands), in all shapes and sizes. Incontinence, I have since discovered, is a large problem, affecting over 12 million people. None of them, however, happened to be there with me as I squinted at labels. Facing mortality is something you do alone, I suppose.

There were others around; mothers down the aisle selecting Pampers, young athletic-looking men trotting past on their way to pick out a steak. But no one even looked at me (unless you count the surveillance cameras), no one stared. But I certainly felt conspicuous. You could even say that I felt naked. The only available extra clothes were the Depends, which didn't help.

'This is working', I thought, encouraging myself. 'I'm getting in touch with my true state; I'm facing the human condition.' The Bible quotes Job saying, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart.' 'Yes,' I thought, 'I am like Job...' Well, except that Job was covered with boils, was sitting in ashes, and had lost everything. And, oh yes - he was the most righteous man on earth. OK, so I wasn't exactly Job. But even so, even in my khakis and dress shirt, even standing in an air-conditioned supermarket, and even though my loss of bladder control was only vicarious, I could still feel it. I could feel the vulnerability. My experiment had edged me closer to the truth of human dependency.

No, I'm not like Job. I haven't lost everything; I haven't come to the end of myself. At least - not yet. But that time will come, perhaps many dozens of times. Times will come when disease will grow in or on my flesh. Times will come when I will sit broken in grief's ashes. And that inevitable time will come when I will lose all earthly attachments. I know these things. They frighten me.

Small, Medium, and Large

Depends, I found out, are conveniently sized for everyone: small, medium and large. I decided to get my size, you know, to make it more realistic. That way, if someone stopped me and demanded to know why I was buying incontinence wear, I wouldn't have an out. I tucked the green package under my arm and in the spirit of discovery, made sure the label was facing visibly outward. Then I started toward the check-out line.

“I haven't come to the end of myself. At least - not yet. But a time will come when a disease will grow in or on my flesh... when I will sit broken in grief's ashes...and when I will lose all earthly attachments. I know these things. They frighten me. I avoid them if I can.”

I felt I was walking in slow motion. The package seemed brighter, almost flashing with light and the plastic crinkled loudly with each step. My face was hot. I glanced this way and that, hyper-aware of the eyes of others. This was hard. The mere association with a product about the loss of control was making me feel out of control. I'd expected to feel strange, but this was worse. Was I that insecure? Was I that fearful of vulnerability? Evidently so. I was ready for my experiment to end.

The young cashier smiled professionally and asked, "Find everything you need?" There was, I perceived, a hanging emphasis on the word, 'need'. I felt the urge to explain that I was just doing research and that I really didn't have 'needs' at this present time. I wanted to assure him of this, but the other clerk, who was bagging, looked like she probably wouldn't believe me. In fact, she appeared to have the whole thing sized up, as she stuffed my Depends into a bag. She didn't even ask; 'Paper or plastic?' She just crammed them in - like she was trying to help me cover something up.

I guess I didn't mind that so much. When I get close to something that makes me face my dependency I try to cover it up too. For example, when someone I know gets a tough diagnosis, I suddenly decide to start eating healthy. A close call on the road and I hone my driving skills. Then I feel safer. I feel like I have things more under control.

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There isn't anything wrong with healthy eating or improved driving skills of course. But I'm a fool if I think they make me independent. I'm simply not big enough to make my life last, nor deep enough to self-manufacture meaning. Job's riches didn't protect his life. Job's possessions didn't secure his fulfillment. My efforts or techniques don't secure my life or significance either. The truth is - I am not sufficient unto myself. I cannot meet my own needs. A sobering thought. If I think about it too much, I become uneasy. So I pretend it isn't so.

Dependence is a Fact

But my denial doesn't change reality. The truth is that I'm no more independent from God than a fish is independent from water or a tree from soil. To live, I must be placed in a larger life. To thrive, I must tap into a larger energy. To think otherwise is only pretending about what I really am. The truth is - I am made for God. He must uphold me; He must fill me. Otherwise I die. That's the truth - and there's not enough paper or plastic in the world to cover it up.

This means that if I am ever to accept dependence on God as a 'good', I must first accept it as a 'fact'. We talk of depending on God as if it were a choice, like deciding on whether or not we will retain E.F. Hutton. But at the basic level, dependence isn't a choice, it is the given order of reality. God is Creator; all else is created. God is Sustainer; all else is upheld continually by the 'word of His power'. As for dependence: God is Provider; all else - by definition - is dependent. 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' We may have a choice about whether we admit our dependence, but we don't have a choice about whether it is true.

Mercifully, life gives multiple opportunities to confess this reality. For what does disappointment, aging and death teach us, if not that 'our lives are not our own'? As you age, you discover with increasing frequency and intensity that your life - its length, breadth and depth - is in the hands of God. If life teaches anything, it teaches this: you do not have control.

Now, it may seem strange to think of aging and death (or any suffering) as merciful. We avoid those things like, well, like the plague. But suffering has a redemptive function; it exposes our real problem and invites us to the real solution. All along, we have thought that our problem was 'dependency'. That 'sense of need' feels like an internal 'hollowness' that hurts. So we conclude that it is a flaw. Eliminating dependence, we believe would eliminate the hurt.

So we try to eliminate this 'imperfection of hollowness' by filling it with anything we can. But as it turns out, human dependency isn't a flaw. On the contrary, that 'hollow' is intentional. It is the unique human attribute. Dependence is the space in us where God intends to pour Himself.

Imagine a wine glass thinking of its hollowness as a flaw. Imagine that the glass could succeed in backfilling itself with molten glass to eliminate the hollowness. You can see that an imperfection hasn't been corrected, but rather created. The wine glass hasn't become something greater; it has become something less. The same is true for us. When we try to eliminate dependence as if it were a flaw, we only succeed in eliminating the essence of who we are. Just as the backfilled wine glass ceases to be a glass, the backfilled human ceases to be human. The desperate attempt to eliminate human emptiness only makes it impossible to be divinely filled.

That is why suffering is, as C.S. Lewis puts it, a 'severe mercy'. It calls us from the folly of self-sufficiency by confronting us with our true state. It reminds us of our high calling: we are made to be a container for God. Ironic isn't it? Something as inconvenient as incontinence, something as cruel as cancer can be used by God for a greater good. These dread things, which diminish and scar your life outwardly, God uses to replenish and restore your dignity inwardly.

On Being Human

I paid the courteous cashier, took my bag and walked out. I walked out knowing that the people behind thought me incontinent. "It's a shame," I imagined the cashier saying to the bagger, "That man looks too young." Then the bagger would say, "Well, *things like that* happen to *some people*."

Out into the evening, I went, my Depends swinging loosely on my arm. I wondered, 'How much mental energy have I wasted trying to pretend that I am not one of those *'some people'* who have *'things like that'* happen to them?' So much work to portray myself as strong, tall, smarter than the average bear, even bulletproof. But walking out of the store, I was feeling differently. The truth was tapping me on the shoulder, challenging my denial, "You are too one of those *'some people'*."

'Yes,' I thought, 'I guess I am. Things will happen to me. They already are. I am aging. I have all kinds of disappointments. I am hungry for things beyond me. I'm dying. Why, I'm not bulletproof at all. I am just like all the rest. I am human.' I tossed the bag into the back seat and stared out the window. People were milling around, short and tall, young and old. Human beings doing human things; shopping, walking, laughing, breathing.

It is odd, really, to admit your humanness. Once you get back to the basic facts about yourself, you experience certain mixed feelings. On the one hand, you experience the sheer volume of that hollow in your soul. Like standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon, you are overwhelmed and frightened. You realize that the space inside of you is far bigger than you have let yourself

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a counselor and teacher
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Steps Toward Dependence

Don't you love the story of David and Goliath? We all relate to David. We all have our own giants. There are too many places where the world around us feels dangerous and we want to know that we can face it with courage. Let me illustrate with three quick scenarios:

1. I just dropped my son off at the airport. It was his second time ever flying and it was 7AM on Monday morning. The place was jammed! As I let him off, we agreed that it was a little nerve-wracking to walk into an unfamiliar place where you don't know the rules and the ramifications of screwing up seem large. I call that fear.

2. When my children were younger, there were times when Lynne and I didn't give in to their desires that seemed so important to them at the moment. Sometimes the results were pretty wild temper tantrums. My daughter would go crazy and scream at her mom and me. "I hate you!" she would say. "I want to kill myself!" When that would happen, I felt my insides start to crumble. Did I really need to discipline her this time? Couldn't I give her what she wanted? I call that fear.

3. My next door neighbor's wife bought him a basketball goal for Christmas. I, though I know myself to be mechanically declined, volunteered to put it together for her. It cost hundreds of dollars. I began to put it together, only I was not sure which parts went where. Lynne and I had an interchange in the kitchen while I searched for the right tools. "Are you angry?" she asked. "Do you think you can do this?" I fumed, "No, I'm just a little frustrated!" Surprise, surprise. I was afraid – that I couldn't do it right; that I would disappoint my neighbors; that I needed to call them and tell them that I didn't know what I was doing. I call that fear.

Life can feel overwhelming. There is so much that can go wrong. What does it mean to face life dependent upon God? What does it mean to find our strength in Him? I want to give you three not very simple steps toward Dependence. They all require self-awareness, much courage and humility- especially humility.

Step 1 – Identify places of fear in our lives. Whether it is walking into a strange airport, facing a difficult child, or dealing with our limitations and frustrations, we all face many situations in which we don't know what we are doing. There is much at stake. And we are afraid.

Admitting fear is hard for us to swallow. We are adults. We aren't supposed to be afraid. We prefer to say that we are uncertain or hesitant or even that we really do know what to do. But you know that sense of dread, of uncertainty. What is the right thing to do here? Can I do it? How do I know it is right?

Fear was one of the first consequences of the Fall of Man. In Genesis 3:10, it says "Adam heard the sound of the Lord in the Garden and he hid because he was afraid." Adam and Eve were afraid – and so they hid. Fear is inherent in the human condition. We are all afraid.

But of what? **Failure** is one thing. We fear that we do not have what it takes to do life. We fear that life will expose us as inadequate. For me, I'm afraid I will choose the wrong line in the airport and miss my plane. Or, I will choose the wrong way to discipline my child and do damage that is irreparable. Maybe I really can't put this basketball goal together. I fear, and we fear that we can't handle life.

But we also fear **rejection**. We can't risk disappointing or failing people. If I get lost in the airport, what will my friends think of me? If I do discipline my daughter, will she hate me? Might I harm her in a way that permanently damages our relationship? If I discipline her, will she pull away? And what if I tell Lynne that I am angry? I want to say "frustrated" (if I admit to anything at all) because I am afraid of what she will do with me if I admit I am angry. I am afraid of rejection. Just like Adam and Eve were afraid of rejection – both by God and by one another. So they hid.

Do you know the places in life where you are afraid, uncertain, hesitant? Sometimes you have good reason. Often you don't, but the fear is still there.

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"Life can feel overwhelming. There is so much that can go wrong. What does it mean to face life dependent upon God? What does it mean to find our strength in Him?"

Step 2 – Ask yourself: How do you handle those moments? On what and on whom do you rely? We all depend on someone or something somehow in these moments.

In the airport, I try to tell myself that the worst thing that can happen is that I miss my plane. This isn't really a big deal. I'm an adult and I can handle this. At least that is what I tell myself.

With my child, I turn to Dr. James Dobson's Dare to Discipline or some other book to reinforce my courage to set limits. Someone please tell me what to do! Or I give in "this one time" because she "needs some grace". At least that is what I tell myself. I really don't know what she needs. I do know, though rarely admit, that I need her to like me (at that moment in time) – and the fear that she won't like me can affect my decision..

And what about the basketball goal? The fact of the matter is that I would probably screw it up if I tried to fix it. I did try for an hour or so and I didn't understand which part went where. What should I do? Keep on keeping on? And what about the anger? Can I admit my frustration? Or do I just try harder to be nice? Do I muster up the efforts or face what is true? I really am angry and I really do feel and am in fact impotent when it comes to mechanical things.

The natural tendency for us all is to somehow take charge of the circumstances in a way that keeps us from what we fear. We deny/minimize our hesitance in the airport. We react to the fear of being rejected by our child or the fear of not being "tough" enough on them.

Step 3 – Ask yourself: Will I let those situations (the fearful ones) take me to a reliance upon God? Will I depend on Him?

Most of the time, I don't want to even admit that I fear. It feels weak, more than it does human. And my fears would seem to be overcome by "confidence" rather than by recognition.

Sometimes I must recognize that weakness is my own sin. I do get angry when I just can't do it. I can "cave in" to my kids because it is so unpleasant when they are "mad" at me. My motivation is not what is best for them, but what feels best for me at the moment. I get anxious at the airport and take it out on the attendant at the gate.

Sometimes I must recognize that weakness is just a reflection of my own limitations. I am

"mechanically challenged". It isn't sin – it's just true. There is no moral failure. Yet I feel like it makes some kind of shameful statement about me. And that is my problem. Why do I expect myself to be able to do everything? Because I fear what my inability says about me...

What does dependence mean for me in these situations? It means admitting to myself and to God that I do feel fear in the airport. It means leaning into Him in my uncertainty while being committed to loving those in my world.

With my kids, it requires admitting my own desire to be loved by them and my proclivity/tendency to make that happen, even when it is not best for them. If I can't handle their anger and disappointment, how can I do what is best for them? They hold me hostage. Really, I hold myself hostage.

Dependence in the basketball situation required that I face my anger and apologize to Lynne. Then I had to face my inadequacy and call my next door neighbor, telling her that I couldn't do what I said I would do and asking for her understanding. (She was great by the way!)

Often in life, dependence on God requires facing the places I am controlled by fear and submitting those places to the love of Christ. And the great by-product of depending on Him, of needing Him, is that I am drawn closer to Him. He becomes more central to my every day life. And that is a good thing.

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Bill of Materials

- A (1) Hoops Roof Mount Triangular Frame Bracket
- B (1) Hoops Recreational or Flex Rim (based on backboard size)
- C (2) 5/16"x2 1/2" Hex Bolts & 5/16" Locknuts

E (1) 36"x48" or 38"x60" Alum
F (10) 5/16"x2" Lag Screws &
G (5/16"x3/4" Hex Bolts

NOTE: Immediately unpack all components and cross check against bill of materials
Hoops customer service at 1-866-944-6677.

Instructions

1. Unfold the Hoops Pro Style Roof Mount to form a triangular frame. Fasten the lower corners of the frame using two 5/16"x2 1/2" hex bolts spacers and 5/16" locknuts.
2. Position the frame at the desired location on the garage or roof top making sure the frame is level. The frame to the roof by first drilling pilot holes with a 1/8" drill bit (not included). Snug the lag screws BUT DO NOT tighten (recommended).

HOOPS
Basketball Goals & Sporting Equipment
Hoops Pro Style Roof Mount Basketball Goal
Assembly Instructions



The Barnabas Center

413-B South Sharon Amity Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
Tel: (704) 365-4545

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Depending on God

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believe. You realize that you are made for a beauty that art, sex and relationship only foreshadow. And you long for a security far beyond what portfolios and covenants could ever provide. You realize that you are made for something larger than the world. And so you stare, wondering, 'Can that space really be filled?' And you feel afraid, 'What if it can't?'

But then, to admit your humanity confirms something too. That voice that you've been hearing, even if only as a faint echo, is really there. That silent ache, that background hunger that you've felt all your life, is real. You weren't making it up. There truly is a immense space inside of you. It is so grand; it must be made for some grand purpose.

I sat and wondered, 'Is it possible for a guy like me to come to terms with my dependence on God? Could I ever come to a place where I won't despise my vulnerability so much.' If God could ever get me that far, then perhaps I could see that dependence doesn't mean that I am less than something, but rather that I am made for something. Perhaps I could accept that the space in my soul - the one that I have so desperately tried to eliminate - is a 'God-shaped vacuum'. Perhaps I could come to believe that the 'hollow' is, in some miraculous way, a 'home' for God?

Dependence is Good

So dependence on God is a good thing after all. It is, by

design, the best thing about being human. Hollow is the unique human shape, giving us the capacity to carry God. The Christian life is about coming to terms with what the space inside of us means. We must embrace the truth that to be human is to correspond to the Divine. That is, we need God and God delights in our need of Him.

But in order to embrace our dependency as a good - three things must happen. First, you must drop your denial and admit that you are dependent. Second, you must submit yourself to the dying-to-self process (suffering) over and again in increasing ways. (Don't worry about how to find the lessons; they will find you) And third, you must learn to delight in your dependency. You must embrace it as the very best thing about you. You must believe that dependency doesn't remove your dignity; it is your dignity. It is your significance in creation, your crowning glory. The angels are curious. You are made for God.

To delight in our dependency is to have come to faith. Once there, we will have learned to trust God's love, believing that nothing can separate us from Him. Not sword, not nakedness, not death. He made us for Himself and He is good for His word. Then, in hard times or good, we will be able to say along with brother Job, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

On this, all life depends.