

Kick the Habit

Lifeguarding at the Pity Pool

Doubtless, a lot of us are susceptible to the alluring and addicting drug of self-pity. It's the heroin of the emotions. It's the "angel dust" of the spirit. We may get turned on to it first during a period of adversity coupled with kind friends. The adversity may be sickness – perhaps cancer, a cold, or a broken leg. We may first take the drug to find comfort during a crisis: death, bankruptcy, or divorce. Whatever the cause, the treatment is often the same: Well-meaning friends

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treat us with pity. They hurt with us. They help us. They weep with us.

And most of the time, this treatment has its intended result. Friends cheer us on. Healing occurs, and we pick ourselves up and continue with life.

Sometimes, however, the sudden flow of love and warmth and kindness feels so good that we keep coming back to the well. And gradually, with time, we become "pity junkies." Our helpers become enablers. We thrive on the compassion and attention of others. We yearn for someone to notice our plight or ask about our pain. At best our life is reduced to one objective: hunting for comfort and delegating our recovery to others; at worst, we cop out of responsibility and blame someone else for our problems.

What do you suppose Jesus would say to people who live that way? Here are four principles Jesus implemented when dealing with people imprisoned by self-pity.

Be where people are – be available. Who wants an earful of someone else's aches and pains? Who wants another draining dependent? Who wants to go to a person who chronically feels sorry for herself or himself? Jesus does. That's who.

Be sensitive to people.

Be helpful to all people.

Be creative – each person is unique and valuable and matters immensely to God!

If you sit by yourself for four hours on a hard bench, alone, in a cold, windy park, with nothing to eat or drink and nothing to read, soon all you can think about is how hungry and thirsty I am, and how cold I am, how uncomfortable this bench is to me. How slowly the hours pass for me. How miserable I am.

But add one ingredient to this scenario and everything feels different. Sit on that park bench with that fabulously beautiful person who is the one love of your life. The hours speed by with no thought of food, drink, hard benches, or chilly



weather. What changed? The presence of a greater passion pulled you from your pitiful obsession with self.

We "lose our lives" by giving our hearts to something – to someone – bigger than ourselves. This shifts attention from self to another about whom we are more passionate than we are about ourselves. Jesus said, "If you lose your life for my sake, you will find it." For Jesus' sake! He can bring us out of ourselves, to find life – full, giving, loving, and abundant life – in Him. He may be tapping you on your shoulder at this moment, bending down to whisper, "Get up and leave this miserable pity party. Come on over to my banquet table and join the celebration of life!"

Action Step:

What steps can you take to break out if you are sliding toward your own "pity party?"

What specific, gentle steps can you take to help someone you know break out of his or her self-pity? When will you do this?

Anderson, Lynn, *The Jesus Touch*, West Monroe, LA, Howard Publishing Co., Inc., 2002. Used by Special Permission of Howard Publishing Co., Inc. For further information: www.PastorsLine.com