

Three
--Looking Outward--
Discovering "Us"

You grew up in the land of Goshen on the outskirts of Egypt, far enough away so Pharaoh couldn't smell your disgusting goats. It's been a hardscrabble existence: mouths to feed, flocks to tend, water to haul, food to grow, etc. And this is all in addition to being owned by a king who tells you you're nothing but a brick producer—a mindless cog in his machine.

Then God swoops in with his guy Moses; river turned red, lights out, hail storms, legions of bugs and frogs. Under cover of night, you make your escape. You wake up out in the desert faced with an unexpected reality. Look around. No more machine. Who are you now?

As dreadful as it was, it's hard to know who you are—minus that machine. You hated it, but at least it gave you some semblance of purpose. Who knew you could feel so free and so lost at the same time?

Our word here is codependency. On my own, I don't know who I am. I rely on someone or something else to define me. Who am I without my job, my kids, my volunteer work? I find my identity so many ways: addictions, hobbies, wealth, popularity, performance, academic achievement, political/religious affiliation. Whatever the option or combination of options, it always involves an unhealthy version of “us” because codependency always comes down to some form of me using you and/or you using me. It may be our normal. But it is not healthy.

Of late, this unhealthy “us” has fallen on hard times. At first it was a virtual “us,” at times, almost no “us” at all. Working at home, how can I prove I'm irreplaceable? If I'm not helping people, I'm worth nothing. I've made a name for myself with my productivity, humor, and likableness. Now what? How do I get credit for cooking more often than normal, homeschooling, and thankless hours in front of a computer? “Out of sight, means out of mind” is no longer a cliché.

Life will never be a healthy “us” as long as I'm using people or trying to tweak their impression of me to meet my needs. All this is so insidious it even drives the good stuff—like me trying to be helpful, generous, steady, and smart.

Codependency is one of the hardest issues to discover and unravel in yourself. It disguises itself as goodwill and selfless intentions. Asking questions is a healthy place to start. Do I know who I am, if nobody tells me? Do I tend to use people as stepping stones, or do I invest in their walk? Am I kind to you in order

to brighten your day or so I'll feel like I'm a good person? Am I curating my image in an attempt to control the response of others?

In a session about “us” we start with “me” questions because you and I will never find a healthy “us” until each of us finds our healthy “me.” Just knowing I am codependent is a significant step here.

The first step in cultivating a healthy “us” is recognizing my codependency. The second step starts with me hearing your story minus any personal agenda.

Things to consider:

1. Think of ways you've used/utilized others to feel better about yourself.

2. How have you found your worth during our current crisis.