

Help with My Daughter

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | July 24, 2009



My 40 year old daughter, first born of three daughters, was told by a pastor she and her husband were seeing for marriage counseling, that she has a “Supine” personality...

She is intelligent, and a very caring and giving person, but also seems to expect the “princess” treatment; having others wait on her or do things so she can do what she wants to do or not do what she doesn’t want to do. For example, while she, her husband and family were staying with us for two months, while on furlough from mission service, she was going through some books she planned to use to home school her children. I stopped by the room she was using and she mentioned she was sore from sitting so long. I suggested that she might like to take a break and take her four children to the park, which is adjacent to our house. She said that she didn’t like going to the park because wasn’t fun for her so didn’t and seemed somewhat peeved that I would make the suggestion. I fixed nearly all of the meals while they were with us, her husband made sure the children were up and fed, helped clean up after meals, got the children bathed at night, story read and put to bed—their 11-year old daughter did all the laundry for the family of six (washed, dried, folded). She has great potential and ideas, but has a hard time following through, or getting from idea to completion—lots of projects started, few finished.

*Question: How do I deal with and help a person like this? (I sent her a copy of your book, **Could***

*It Be This Simple?) Thank you for your response. I listen to your program **Simple Solutions** on LifeTalk Radio.*

Thanks for your question and for listening to our radio program.

Regarding your daughter there are a couple of possibilities that need to be considered. The first issue to explore is the possibility your daughter may suffer from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - Inattentive Type (ADHD). This type of ADHD does not have hyperactivity, fidgetiness and impulsivity as a primary problem. Instead, the inattentive type has procrastination, disorganization, starting multiple projects, but inability to complete them, easy distractibility, moodiness and irritability, poor planning, easily bored, and little interest in others. The primary dysfunction is biological impairment of prefrontal cortex function. This is the part of the brain right behind the forehead. For more information on ADHD [\[click here\]](#) to read my blog on ADHD.

Your daughter could benefit from a professional evaluation and if she does have ADHD, then the only intervention that shows improvement in the core symptoms is pharmacological intervention. If she does have ADHD and she gets on the right meds she may discover marked improvement in her ability to function (complete tasks, stable mood, better organization, planning, initiative, etc). So one way you could help your daughter would be to provide her information on ADHD and suggest she might want to get an evaluation. But remember, you cannot enforce a healthy outcome (if you would like a list of symptoms of ADHD see the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) website on ADHD).

If your daughter does not have ADHD or any other psychiatric disorder, then the possibility exists she has developed poor habits of self-governance and has learned how to manipulate those around her to take over her responsibilities. If this is the case, then you must remember where you have authority and where you do not. You have authority only over yourself and the resources you own. You do not have authority to impose any change on your daughter, only she, through God's grace and power, can change herself.

With this in mind, Paul's advice to the Thessalonians highlights an important principle: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." (2Thes 3:10). Paul is speaking about those who are clearly capable of providing for themselves, those who are not handicapped, those who have the means and capacity to shoulder their own responsibilities of life, but who choose not to. He is speaking of people who seek to exploit others, take advantage of others, burden others with their care when they are capable of providing for themselves. In such circumstances, rather than a lecture, simply let natural consequences take their toll - let them reap what they sow. If they don't work, they don't eat, and a powerful lesson is learned - behavior has consequences!

This principle can be utilized with those in our lives who do not suffer with a disorder or disability which impairs their ability to provide for self yet who seek to shift the burdens of life off onto others. This principle can also be employed with those who do have disabilities, but magnify the extent to which the disability impairs their function and therefore they don't do all they are actually capable of doing for themselves.

In such circumstances, we must remember that our primary concern is not that we are being taken advantage of, but the person we love (your daughter) is ruining her own character by avoiding her

duties in life. If loving counsel has not rectified the problem, then, in love, we set boundaries in which the individual experiences the consequence of their own negligence without rescue from others in their environment. In other words, let her go hungry.

In this case the husband needs to take action to help set healthy boundaries within the home to prevent the children from being unduly exploited by a self-centered mother (again assuming there is no ADHD or other illness preventing healthy function). If this is truly due to unremedied selfishness, then, when the husband attempts to set healthy boundaries, he is likely to experience an onslaught of emotional hail (criticism, crying, pouting, yelling, name-calling, guilt inducing statements, anger, threats of divorce and never seeing the children again, etc.) all designed to drive him off his healthy stance and get him to acquiesce to her unhealthy demands.

If this occurs, then his only healthy course is to say to his wife, "If you need to (pout, yell, be angry or whatever she does) right now, you are certainly free to do so, but it will not change the decision I have made, so take all the time you need, but once you are done we are still going forward as I have outlined. If you believe there is some reason why this course is unhealthy, then I am eager to hear any healthy discussion of this issue." And then he lets her rant without in any way attempting to sooth, calm or fix her.

Finally, continue to pray that God's agencies will intervene in your daughter's life to bring opportunities for her continued growth in His grace.