

ADVENTIST Review

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Cutting Edge



Something Has to Change
For some, the word "church" is just a building.

Loving the Energy Vamp

Even when that someone is you!



BY JENNIFER JILL SCHWIRZER

I KNOW HOW to deal with energy vampires, because I have been one at times. Like a criminal who confesses to a forensic psychologist, I can tell you how my mind works so that you can pre-

vent being exploited by people like me. And guess what? Even *you* are probably an energy vampire at times—needy, tedious, burdened, and burdening others. So let's not be “us and them” about this. We have seen the devitalizer—and he is us!

What Motivates EVs?

Now that we have that out of the way, let's go on to ask ourselves what causes a person to drain others? How can we prevent being a drain? How can we discover the golden key to actually enjoying a person who tends to make everyone else run the other way?

Listening takes more energy than talking, which is why EVs are so tiresome. They are typically so talkative that no one else

ires in Your Life

can get a word in edgewise. They leap from thought to thought, leaving no space for response. By the time one's vocal cords meet and the lips form the first word of response, EVs are a half mile down the road with their next runaway idea. They seem to have no capacity for two-way conversation. They feel comfortable with monologue, even if the person across from them is nervously glancing at their watch, clearing their throat, sighing, and giving every other signal that they want to be liberated. To let the other have input in the conversation would be an intolerable threat to their prized possession—which is airwave dominance.

In their latch-on compulsion, I believe that EVs are saying two things. The first is that they want you to think highly of them, which is predicated on the second, which is that they think highly of you. This is their subconscious language: "I admire and respect you, even though I am not allowing you to speak. There is nothing I would love more than to be admired and respected by you, and I will achieve that if I have to keep you here all night!" Chances are that EVs grew up in a home where communication was approached competitively. Think of a dinner table full of people—the television is blaring, all are talking at once, and no one is listening. And those were the meaningful moments! EVs are classic cases of unfinished childhood, carrying their unmet needs for nurture and connection into a world of adults who have no desire to accommodate them.

But that's where you come in. As a Christian, you want to exercise unselfish love and patience without feeding a dominance addiction. You want to bless them, but you don't want them to use you. You must kindly take

control of the situation through God's proactive, healing love. A wonderful passage in Galatians shows us what love does when we are dealing with those who try our patience. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1, 2, NIV).

It is our natural impulse to avoid someone who threatens to suffocate us.

Carrying Each Other's Burdens

I believe that this passage in Galatians tells us the following about how to treat EVs:

Accept them as people. Notice that we are told to "restore" rather than "repel." We are to go toward, rather than away from, needy souls. It is our natural impulse to avoid someone who threatens to suffocate us. They dread this, and so will often latch on out of fear of abandonment. If you can help them feel accepted, their grip will loosen.

Identify with them. "Watch yourself, or you also may be" a drain. Realize that given their background and hardships, you might be just like them. Or then, maybe you *are* and just don't know it.

Get the facts about them. We can't bear someone's burdens unless we

know what they are. Gently attempt to win the trust of the person, and persuade them to honestly share their past hurts and present insecurities.

Give definite boundaries. "Carry each other's burdens" applies to the EVs, too. The ultimate aim of your kindness is to teach them to exercise the same toward others. Begin the training with yourself by persuading them to treat you as they would like to be treated. They would be horrified to have to listen to an endless monologue! Tactfully let them know that you must limit their talking to a reasonable length of time, and then solicit their cooperation. Try saying something like, "Tom, I can see that you really want to communicate with me. I am willing to listen, but I will have to ask you to keep your thoughts to 10 minutes, because I have a lot to do. Is that reasonable?"

Encourage them in Christ.

"There is many a brave soul sorely pressed by temptation, almost ready to faint in the conflict with self and with the powers of evil. Do not discourage such a one in his hard struggle. Cheer him with brave, hopeful words that shall urge him on his way. Thus the light of Christ may shine from you" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 120).

The Final Destination

Two-way conversation is nearly a lost art these days. Because of the plethora of entertainment options, people are not motivated by boredom to communicate. In addition, love, which is the spring from which good communication flows, is growing cold (Matt. 24:12). Under a repelling exterior many long for love and friendship. May God ease us into their shoes as we try to love them and lead them to a well that can never be drained dry.

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