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Dependency

An aging parent firmly - but with appreciation - rejects her adult child's invitation to come live with their family, saying "I don't want to be a burden on anyone," and continues to live independently and alone. A local pastor confesses to feeling "low" - and apologizes, since pastors shouldn't feel down or be in need of support, should they? National and Area Church leaders are challenged by concerns about the future sustainability of shared ministry programs. And our congregations are asking themselves, whether anything beyond their local church - be it another congregation in their province or a wider church structure - is needed to help them fulfill their mission.

Independence, privacy, sustainability, viability, and "do-it-yourself" capacity are all values we hold high. At the recent Toronto Theological Centre Graduate Student Conference, Jason Greig, a recent AMBS graduate, confirmed this in his presentation by saying "Few things appear as self-evident and unquestionable for the moral life in western late modernity than the absolute good of independence and autonomy." And it appears our hyper individualism is aided and abetted by numerous supports, whether it is our dual income comforts, a country with a multitude of freedoms plus accessible health care, the cushion of investments and pensions when needed, do it yourself books and websites, and of course "an app" for everything else.

Our perceived independence really belies the fact that we humans are remarkably dependent beings. One only has to be asked personal questions about our transportation habits, internet usage, or personal spending practices to begin to appreciate our level of dependency. Then there are those dependencies that we struggle to recognize: racial or class privilege, a natural environment that provides healthy food, safe water and clean air, treaties and trade arrangements that unfortunately benefit us at the significant expense of others.

We are dependent persons and, as every funeral reminds us, finite beings too. Greig continues in his paper to say that our understanding of faithfulness to Christ "centers human identity in dependence, primarily on God, and secondarily on others and the natural world." How do we as

Christians choose our dependencies? Do the challenges of unprecedented societal, environmental and global change tempt us towards embracing supports that are inconsistent with our faith? To what extent do our practices of dependency reflect the One who created us, the earth we live in, and the families and communities that nurture us?

It is instructive that in Scripture, the wilderness, exile, and life in the diaspora are important theatres for training God's servants and God's people in faithfulness. Often stripped of comforts, entitlements, physical security, food preferences, and even community, these future leaders - including Jesus - were tested and tempted in how they met their needs and dependencies. The early church was similarly challenged with food distribution, insider/outsider language, divisions and persecution.

Greig suggests that an important place for the believing community to respond is to repeatedly emphasize the priority of God's initiative in our congregational practices. We are not choosers or makers, but receivers of God's grace, whether that be through conversion, baptism or footwashing. Further, the church community reminds us that we comprise the Body of Christ, not as a group of individuals with intellects, but persons with soul, mind, body and spirit in communion with one another. In this dependent community, prayer and fasting can give voice and vehicle to remind God of our needs - and our thanks. Mutual submission to one another, especially the weak, serves to remind us of who we are: the family "village" in which we are raised. Embracing our own individual and collective weakness allows us to reclaim the power of the cross and activity of God's Spirit among us. And being obedient to God allows us to worship God daily by not only transforming our minds but also making our bodies into living sacrifices. God's story is ultimately made of those who are dependent on God.

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