

What You Can Do If You Are In A Unhealthy or Co-dependent Relationship With A Church for Religious Institution

Here are some steps you can take if you think you are in an unhealthy or co-dependent relationship with a church or religious institution:

1. Practice expressing your feelings or perceptions of the institution or people in the institution privately to yourself. If it is helpful, write these feelings or perceptions down. Discuss these perceptions with someone you trust (a good friend, a spiritual guide, a mentor, counselor or small group); ask for honest feedback about your feelings or perceptions.
2. Stop agreeing with other people's feelings or perceptions if they are not what you feel. You can acknowledge what other people say without agreeing with them. If necessary, say nothing.
3. Stop making excuses for what the institution thinks, says, does or believes. You can participate in a church or religious institution without agreeing with everything it thinks, says, does or believes. You do not have to defend it to other people. Again, you can acknowledge what others say without making excuses or trying to defend behavior you think is indefensible.
4. Clarify for yourself exactly what things you are expected to think, say, do or believe that do not make sense to you. Identify, if you can, why they don't make sense to you. Is it the idea itself, how it is explained, or what consequences it has? Is there a deeper value behind the idea that you may agree with? If it is helpful, write these things down. Discuss these disagreements with someone you trust (a good friend, a spiritual guide, a mentor, counselor or small group).
5. Realize that a person's faith grows and develops through stages. How the truths or underlying values of the faith are understood, explained or applied may differ from one stage to another. (Learn more about stages of faith here: <http://bit.do/faith-stages>) Consider the possibility that you and the majority of the people in the church, or the institution itself, are at different stages in faith development. This discovery is much like friends or married partners who suddenly realize that they simply see or understand the world differently.
6. Examine the differences you have with what the church or religious institution thinks, says, does or believes. Are these major or minor issues? Are they outweighed by more important values? Are they worth the time, worry and psychic energy they are consuming? Are they worth ending your relationship over?
7. Identify the way(s) in which you think the church or institution is lying to you. Is it deliberately trying to deceive you, or is it deceiving itself? How important are these issues? Is a certain degree of deception outweighed by other values in your relationship or not? When you hear such deception, remind yourself: "I don't think that's true." At some point you have to decide how much deception you can live with without beginning to doubt the truth yourself.
8. Remember that it is possible to live with -- even love -- a person or institution with whom you have differences and who may be seriously flawed, but not at the expense of denying, condoning, or enabling hurtful, harmful or dishonest behavior; never at the cost of living in fear or being intimidated or threatened; and never at the cost of endangering your personal, moral or spiritual health.
9. At some point you may feel that it is no longer possible to continue living with a church or religious institution you love. You should make that decision carefully and prayerfully, in consultation with people you trust, and only after considering if there are other, more healthy options you might choose.