

# *Sleeping with the Devil: The Subtle Impact of Emotional Abuse Victimization*

## **Who is the Devil?**

**Biblical definition:** In Christian theology, the Devil may be referred to as an evil spirit or being; as an angel who fell from heaven and rebelled against God; or as an enemy, a tempter, or a wicked person, one who seduces another into falsehood or worshipping an idol or a false god. The last definition makes sense because it epitomizes the negative personality traits in people. Nonetheless, this description may seem cruel, especially if we are referring to a human being as a devil. However, if we analyze each meaning in the definition, we can create an understanding of how these traits may manifest in a human being.

Can an evil spirit or being be a person? The word “spirit” can be understood as the energy of a person. What makes a person evil? The person may be intentionally hurtful and then fail to show any remorse. One may wonder why the person is like this. We see such behavior all the time. People who have been hurt but who have not recovered fully may perpetuate the same hurt that they endured in a cycle of abuse. We see this evil in many people with a history of abuse and neglect when they have not sought treatment or healing for themselves.

Another interesting definition of the Devil from a Christian religion perspective is: a fallen angel or former messenger of God (one who believes in God). Some religious leaders may define a devil as a person who rebels against God. When disappointments occur in life, it’s easy to blame God or a Higher Power of one’s understanding. Many people view “God” as a genie who can make something happen (upon request!) or magically prevent something from happening; perhaps they view God the way very young children tend to view Santa Claus. If bad experiences occur, it is easy to “fall”—to lose one’s faith or belief in God or a Higher Power of one’s understanding.

A devil can also be defined as an enemy or as someone who displays hostility towards others, whether this hostility is conveyed subtly or is displayed overtly. The word “enemy” implies that when around this person, we must be guarded, maintaining a defensive stance to protect ourselves. An enemy is someone that we cannot trust or should not trust.

In addition to being perceived as an enemy, a devil may be also be considered as a tempter—someone who tries to influence us or seduce in an area of personal weakness, often with a self-serving goal in mind. For example, if we are trying to get rid of a bad habit, a “devil” may minimize the harm of this habit or addiction because if we give into it, this person may somehow benefit from our giving in (for example, a drug dealer who stands to profit from our purchase of illicit drugs). In fact, this tempter may often justify our own continued bad behavior— by telling us it’s OK to give into this habit, addiction, or pleasure because we deserve to reward ourselves with pleasure or even my telling us that we are being too hard on ourselves by not giving into something that feels good, although it’s bad for us. And if we give in, this “devil” has been successful in pulling us back into a cycle of destruction, a relapse into unhealthy behaviors. But we still have culpability for giving in (if we choose to do so).

Besides being a tempter, the Devil may be described as wicked. When we think of wickedness, we may think of one who manipulates us or deceives us. This manipulation may cause us to abandon our own morals or violate our own previously set boundaries. This is easy for a devil, who may not have any clearly defined boundaries either. Driven by the principle of pursuing pleasure, even if the pleasure in

question results in negative consequences, a devil may justify it and tell us that it's OK, perhaps because of not having any personal sense of morality himself.

All of these definitions of "devil" make it easy to understand why using this word might be appropriate. But maybe it still doesn't explain how we ended up in bed with the Devil. To a devil, we are simply an object that can be exploited to fulfil selfish desires without regard to the long-term impact on our soul. The Devil sees our seduction as winning a prize or trophy that the Devil deserves: us.

The cardinal sin of the Devil is pride or arrogance. The Devil perceives himself as better than other humans. In fact, he may believe that he is treating us (or has treated us) better than anyone else has or would. This self-idolization makes it difficult for the Devil to consider the possibility that we would one day leave him. The Devil may promote false gods: money, status, or even his own reputation.

The Devil has real-world **characteristics**:

- He is *charming, pleasant, and filled with compliments for us*. He makes us smile with his words and actions, but we may be unaware of the fact that these charming words and actions are self-serving: the Devil's got a goal in mind—something that he wants from us.
- The Devil is *predatory*. He has observed us from afar and up close. As we share our life experiences—our goals, fears, and frustrations—he's an *attentive, helpful listener*. In fact, he knows just what to say to support and encourage us. And that feels good to us because we may not have had that type of support for a while. As a result, we build trust in him.
- The Devil is *attractive*. He's aesthetically pleasing. We like how he looks, how he dresses, and the way he walks into a room. There's a strong chemistry between him and us. He's got some physical features that we are drawn to. Maybe it's sexual chemistry. Maybe it's emotional chemistry as well.
- The Devil can be *influential* with others, but he is especially influential with us. He can convince us to do something we are undecided on. Why? We trust him because he has given us good advice in the past, and we are convinced that he cares about us.
- The Devil's actions are *self-serving*, although this is not always obvious. He is so into us because he wants something from us. What he wants is not a commitment. A commitment requires an authentic investment, which he will never give to us. We may want a commitment, but he does not.
- When we ask him about commitment, his responses are vague or off-topic, which reflects his deceptive nature. He does not want commitment from us; he wants to CONTROL us. He wants us to be ready and available for what he needs and wants without failing.

This *arrogance* and *pridefulness* make it hard for the Devil to take any responsibility for his past or present hurtful behaviors to us or others. He finds it easy to find faults in others but rarely spots them in himself. He identifies as a victim when he describes problems in his past relationships or encounters. The demise of the past relationships was someone else's fault. Unfortunately, we believed that lie at first.

However, now that we recognize some of the same issues that he described that he experienced in previous relationships, we want to discuss these in the hope that we can prevent history from repeating itself. When we attempt to address our concerns with him because we feel unhappy about them, he gaslights us. He tells us that we are wrong and then emerges as the victim we just attacked. As the victim, he shuts down, gives us the silent treatment, or guilt-trips us to the point that we regret even bringing up the concern.

Lastly, we soon determine that these behaviors are consistent with a *narcissistic personality*. A narcissistic person may believe that the world revolves around him, making him appear egocentric or self-centered. He has a hard time putting himself in the shoes of others or has a hard time understanding how his actions affect others.

We have fallen for him. Perhaps we have a strong need to understand how the hell he got this way. More importantly, we wonder: How did we miss the signs? Now we are in a sexual soul tie with him. What now?

### **Understanding the Sexual Soul Tie**

What is a sexual soul tie? It's an emotional, spiritual, and physical attachment to another person that creates a physiological hunger for that person, and it may feel like an addiction. The "tie" or attachment starts with the emotional connection. He provided some type of emotional validation and showed up for us in a way that we may not have felt in a long time. In doing thus, he addressed some of our unmet needs. It felt like he fulfilled those needs; he filled a void.

These needs fulfilled can be understood in the context of Maslow's humanistic theory of the hierarchy of needs, which focuses on the primary needs of human beings. The needs model explains the motivation for every choice that we make. It explains the function of behavior: what motivates us to do what we do, even when it's not good for us.

Some of us find ourselves in a sexual soul tie because it helps us feel physically good, happy, or physiologically alive. Sometimes we find ourselves in this entanglement because he makes us feel safe, secure, or protected. Maybe we feel emotionally and physically connected to him in a way that we haven't felt with anybody else. Because of the safety and security he's provided and the happiness he's brought to our life, it becomes difficult to stay away from him. Maybe we struggle with our self-esteem as well. He praises us and makes us feel beautiful, important, or valued. He might encourage us to go after our dreams and goals. He conveys to us that he really wants to see us be successful. This all sounds OK, but if the relationship starts to consume us or change us in a way that harms us, then it's time for us to go. If not, we will pay a price for staying.

We may struggle to let go and disentangle ourselves because the needs he's fulfilling may be the same ones reported by someone else who has a healthy love interest or partner. There is a cost for partnering with the Devil: He wants to possess us, body, soul, and mind.

Seeking to fulfil these needs led us to the sexual entanglement in which we find ourselves. The sexual experiences may be overwhelming passionate, as they are fueled by the intense emotional attachment we have to him based on the needs he fulfills for us. The sexual relationship that has ensued (e.g. vaginal, anal penetration) has rendered us powerless—and we feel this when we allow ourselves to surrender to the erotic bliss exploding inside us. The exchange of spiritual and emotional energy happens more intensely each time he enters our body. We become weaker, and we know it. Eventually, we find ourselves suffocating in this mess—the mess that we have created—but the most frustrating part about this is that we watched ourselves fall into this mess but did not stop it because it felt so good. It felt good to feel good—physically and free emotionally—even if it was only for a moment.

In addition to the intense sexual experience, the time we spent with him resulted in positive memory imprints that are now burned into our brain. As we try to break away, a smell, sound, word, or place can send us straight back to the bed of the Devil. We hope that maybe things will work out this time. Maybe he will change on his own—or maybe we can change him—or—this is a good one—maybe God will change him just for us.

The delusion of God changing him is the one that we may give the most focus to. We really hope this one happens because we don't know how we will let go of him otherwise. And if we are totally honest with ourselves, part of us doesn't want to let him go.

Our Soul (emotional/spiritual energy) is connected now—and it is so strong that we question whether something tragic needs to happen for us to just stay away from this devil. Even if the damage he caused is subtle, it's there.

Emotional abuse is generally defined as behaviors or actions perpetrated by someone that evoke a negative emotional response that serves to maintain power and control. These behaviors may be subtle because it's easy to attribute these behaviors of this person to “the way they are” or to masculine energy, reinforced by gender-rigid statements (“That’s the way men are.”). Or we may rationalize the existence of these controlling characteristics as quirks of personality. When we blow these behaviors off, we may be guilty of ignoring our sixth sense or making excuses for his behaviors. We may normalize his behaviors because doing so allows us to remain in this entanglement—because it just feels good or comfortable to us.

In the *bold italics*, we can acknowledge the subtle signs of *emotional abuse*.

He may begin *isolating* us from family, friends, and acquaintances in such a subtle way that we don't realize it's happening until the relationship is coming to an end or has ended. It is then that we realize that we were so consumed with this relationship that we spent far less time we spent with other friends and family. We stopped calling, texting, and visiting because the Devil consumed most of our time. When we did want to spend time with others, he either somehow discouraged this or invited himself to come along.

He may have *demeaned, shamed, or humiliated* us in a way that may have seemed like a joke or sarcasm, but it was offensive to us, even if we did not say a word about this until the stress reached a breaking point. And if we confront him on it, *he may accuse us of being “too sensitive”* or may *dismiss our feelings* completely. He may gaslight us by delivering subtle critical statements about some aspect of us. But we don't say anything and decide instead to develop thicker skin.

He may have triggered *shameful feelings* in us in regards to something personal we shared with him in confidence. In an attempt to be truthful and transparent, we disclosed a mistake we made in the past, with the goal of demonstrating emotional and mental growth from a specific relational experience, but he used this information against us to make a point or to justify why he did or did not do something.

In addition to his blatant dismissal of our feelings, he may *display jealousy* when we attempt to engage in meaningful relationships with other people, particularly men. He may make *accusatory statements* if we spend extended times away from him or don't answer his calls or texts when we are away from him.

His *paranoia* regarding losing control of us or fear of not being able to control our actions may get the best of him. He may show up unexpectedly to ease his suspicions regarding what we may be doing when we are not with him. He wants to spend a lot of time with us, seeming obsessed with us, often invading our personal time and space by constantly texting, calling, or wanting to come over.

His meeting our needs and wants starts to come at another cost: We may feel as if we must abandon our own truth in an attempt to compromise. This can unexpectedly instill self-doubt in us and create a negative change in our self-perception. We need to fix this situation, but first we must gain some understanding of how we got here.

### **Stephanie's Disclosure**

“I'm angry. Why? Because I allowed myself to be objectified once again. I've been there for so many years. I felt isolated and alone. I felt like I was running out of time to love or to be loved, so I allowed myself to ignore the signs and be used again. I allowed myself to pretend that the relationship was

something that it never was. He showed me who he was a long time ago, but I chose to overlook what made me feel uncomfortable because it felt good to have somebody to talk to every night until I could fall asleep. It felt good to have somebody whose house I could go over to. We could stay up late, watch movies, and snuggle. It felt good to have someone who I could go to the movies with, try new restaurants with, and travel with.

“But there were costs to staying in that relationship: time, self-respect, and peace. But most importantly, staying with him cost me damage to my relationship with God. And the crazy thing was that I saw this, and I knew it was happening, but I did nothing about it. I could feel God’s presence but also God’s silence while I was acting out the selfish behavior as if it would turn into something that God would eventually honor. Despite my selfishness and disrespect of God, God continued to show me in obvious ways that this man was not going to be in my future—not as a husband, a boyfriend, or anything else. God also showed me how this man was bad for me, how he had made himself a blatant barrier between me and God himself, as well as being a barrier to my spiritual growth. Shame on me. I knew better, so why didn’t I do anything about it? Comfort. Familiarity. Laziness. The man that I had put before God continued to disrespect me in many ways and isolated me from any other people who could be good for me by always finding something wrong with them, but the real issue was that a lot was wrong with him. What he criticized in other people was a reflection of his own flaws and defects of character that he refused to admit.

“What was wrong with me? I continued to show up for this man. I gave him my full attention. I made an all-out effort to make the relationship with him work, but got less than 20% in return. Why did I find myself back in this place, a place that I thought I had overcome? I don’t know. I wish I knew the answer. Maybe I do know the answer. In the very beginning, he showed up for me in a way that nobody else was showing up for me. The problem was that he had an ulterior motive. My issues with sex made it easy for him to manipulate me. They made me an easy target. Who am I? Who is this woman that I see staring back at me in the mirror? I definitely wasn’t the woman who I had been before I met him.”

“I believe the reason I found myself with him was that he was the only person I knew when I moved to California. I had no one. I had no friends and no support system. So I went online to seek connection. When I met him, the relationship moved so fast that I did not realize that I had started to neglect myself and my own needs. I was putting his needs before mine, neglecting myself and my environment. I was being a good person. I showed up for him the way I wanted him to show up for me. I wanted to be someone he would value and want in his life. He wanted me around him all the time. I felt like I was suffocating. When I started making friends, he would discourage this by always finding something wrong with whoever I met. I realized that he wanted to isolate me from everybody that he perceived was important to me. When I tried to take space, he would make me feel guilty for not wanting to be around him. He would get mad at me if I wanted to exercise any independence from him.

“I did get something out of my relationship with him. When I was with him, he did make me feel loved. He did not objectify me the way other men did. In fact, he never pressured me to have sex, which made me want to give him my body to him even more. It was as if I subconsciously felt that I needed to pay him or reward him for respecting me. I thought that this was love. In the past, when somebody was nice to me, I felt like I owed them. I supposed that was something that was programmed in my brain due to my past sexual trauma—that I had to pay them for respecting me. What I got from him was happiness, good sex, and support. He cared for my cat when I had to go out of town. He supported my goal to become a nurse and even offered to help me study. He wanted the best for me. So I got attached. The problem was that I was a possession. I was an object that he needed to control. If I tried to break free, I would be punished.

“When I was able to step away from this devil, I realized that I was being manipulated. The scary thing was that we had significant negative things in common: We were both abandoned in our younger years, and we were both addicts. The abandonment issue was what drove his desire to control me. I left him. He did eventually punish me for leaving him.”

This story can help us understand how subtle emotional abuse can be. It is vital to take time to get to know potential mates before letting sex happen. Once sex happens, things change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. In addition to taking time before adding sex to the equation, both individuals should be continuously working on their own healing and personal growth.

### **Factors that Make us Prone to Sleeping with a Devil**

Some factors make us more prone to getting into a sexual soul tie with a devil:

- Unresolved past abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional trauma)
- Difficulty being alone (abandonment history)
- Sex addiction and love addiction
- Codependency
- Low self-esteem
- History of rejection
- Fear
- Mental illness with an impulsive component (e.g., bipolar disorder, ADHD, substance abuse disorders, etc.)

Many religious leaders don't know how to address the issue of sexual soul ties and may use biblical scripture to shame or guilt-trip the person who is in a sexual soul tie. This approach often causes more damage, even though this is not intentional. Lack of knowledge regarding the psychosocial impact of such an attachment makes many religious leaders unqualified to address the issue.

A woman who believes in God may condemn herself for her sexual soul tie with a devil. This may manifest as negative self-talk about not being strong enough to resist or statements to herself about unworthiness. Our relationship with God may start to weaken because we are no longer praying or attending religious services. We may avoid seeking wisdom and guidance because this may feel too embarrassing. We may feel as if we are in quicksand. We may try to fix the problem on our own, but this struggle could lead us to our downfall. We are in too deep. If we don't seek another healthy rational perspective, we are likely to stay in this unhealthy entanglement.

We may find ourselves spiritually convicted by the entanglement, so how does healing really happen? We must treat our attraction to this person as if it were the temptation to take a bad drug. It may feel good in the moment to take the drug, but the long-term effects can be damaging. We seek to understand how we got to this point. Knowledge could help us heal and decrease the chance that we will end up with another devil. The goal now is for us to solicit support for healing and recovery in that area. If we are angry at ourselves, we need to give ourselves the grace to forgive ourselves as we move forward.