

LINDELL RECOVERY NETWORK

CODEPENDENCY

The Need to Be Needed

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THE LINDELL KEYS FOR RECOVERY HANDBOOK

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- Codependency
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- God: Who is He?
- Jesus: Is He God?

The Addiction and Recovery Series

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Personal Note 1

Introduction 3

Definitions

What Is Codependency?..... 10

What Is Dependency? 12

What Are Common Codependent Relationships? 15

What Is Biblical Dependency? 17

What Is God’s Heart on Codependency? 20

Characteristics

What Is the Codependent Person Profile? 30

What Is a Codependent Relationship?..... 32

Causes

What Causes Codependency to Develop in Children? 39

What Causes Repeated Cycles of Codependency?..... 45

What Is the Root Cause of Codependency?..... 50

What Is the Most Dangerous Dependency? 53

Steps to Solution

Key Verse to Memorize 63

Key Passage to Read 65

How to Have a Transformed Life68
How to Regain Balance: Recovery Step #1 74
How to Regain Balance: Recovery Step #278
How to Regain Balance: Recovery Step #3.....83
How to Keep from Slipping Back into Codependency89

Scriptures to Memorize.....91

Endnotes & Bibliography 97

A PERSONAL NOTE

from Mike Lindell

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!



Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network

INTRODUCTION

I hate to admit it. I wish it weren't true. But I know what it's like to have been a "closet codependent." (Actually, those closest to me knew it, even if they didn't know the word *codependent*.)

In my heart of hearts, I know what it's like to compromise my conscience in order to comply, to be a *peace-at-any-price* person in order to appease, to put up with chaos in order to avoid conflict. Although I myself had not heard of *codependency*, I found myself in an exhilarating, yet fearful relationship, full of highs and lows—in a roller-coaster relationship with continual ups and downs, but I did not know how to get off the ride!

In truth, even though I knew something in the relationship was wrong and needed to change, I was desperately needy for connection and deathly fearful of rejection. When my "friend" would threaten to leave, I would beg, plead, and promise whatever was necessary in a desperate attempt to stay connected. My immense fear of being abandoned led me into a long season of insecurity. At that time, I viewed my loyalty as noble. Today, I see my loyalty as excessive.

Sadly, I didn't know that these high/low swings were not normal. After all, that destructive dynamic was part of my normal—the normal, volatile relationship I witnessed between my parents growing up. Dysfunction in the home is often the breeding ground for codependency.

Later, when I became an adult, I found myself having excessive loyalty—excessive because my highest loyalty was to a person, not to the Lord. I was controlled more by my fear in a friendship than by my faith in Christ. Without even knowing it, I had let a person take the place that the Lord alone should have had.

To move away from that codependent dynamic was more difficult than I ever imagined, and it took longer than I ever dreamed, but it was worth the effort—and the pain. What indescribable peace when we learn that our security is in the Lord and when our own relationships are right in God's sight! I know, because today I am truly free.

If you've ever struggled with loving a person more than God, there

is hope. The key to overcoming codependency is Christ's power in you. Jesus said, *"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5). If you want to conquer codependency, commit yourself to complete dependence on Christ. Say to yourself . . .

Because Christ was not a people-pleaser,
I will not be a people-pleaser.

Because Christ refused to compromise,
I will not yield to compromise.

Because Christ kept healthy boundaries,
I will keep healthy boundaries.

Because Christ stood up to pressure,
I will not cave in to pressure.

Because Jesus lives in me,
I will conquer codependency!

Realize, you can get out from underneath the trapped feeling that has plagued you for so long. You can learn never to settle for what *looks* good, but always to choose what *is* best. And as you go, you will have my sincere prayer that the Lord will create in you an undivided heart with complete dependence on Him. The Bible says, *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). The Lord can give you a new heart to set you free to live without fear—a pure heart for you to become the person He created you to be.

June Hunt
Founder, Hope For The Heart

CODEPENDENCY

The Need to Be Needed

When God gave us His Ten Commandments, He began with these words: “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). He knew that if we would make our relationship with Him our top priority, He would bless our lives, and—through our other relationships—we would be a blessing to others.

The primary problem with codependency is that it violates the heart of God’s first commandment. In a codependent relationship, you allow someone else to take the place that God alone should have in your heart. You allow another person to be your “god.” If you have a *misplaced dependency*, you will have neither *peace with God* nor the *peace of God*. But if you put the Lord first, living each day *dependent on Him*, you will have God’s peace, even when others are not peaceful toward you. This is one reason God says to us . . .

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your strength and with all your mind . . .”*

(LUKE 10:27)

And Scripture reveals to us the scope of God’s love:

*“This is how we know what love is:
Jesus Christ laid down his life for us . . .
For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.”*

(1 JOHN 3:16; JOHN 3:16)

DEFINITIONS



*“God created us to
be dependent—
not on another person
or on another of
His creations,
but on Him alone.”*



Imagine that you have been handpicked by God to impact all the people around you. You've been *chosen* to be the liberator throughout the land, *chosen* to have the respect of all the people, *chosen* as the highest judge over the entire nation. God has even spelled out the specifics you must follow to protect your power and safeguard your strength. Soon, the awesome stories of your success spread like wildfire. . . . Then, in walks Delilah!

You know you are not to reveal the secret of your strength, because God has said, "Don't tell." Yet you feel torn. You want to please God, but you also want to please Delilah, who has asked you to disclose the source of your strength. You try to resist, but the more you do, the more she cries, begs, prods, and pleads. Now you find yourself in the *Delilah Dilemma*. As you try to take care of her feelings, you cave in to her manipulation.

Finally, you confide that your strength is in your obedience to God in never, ever cutting your hair. Big mistake—one that leads to unimagined misery! Delilah shares your secret with the enemy Philistines . . . and they cut your hair and take you captive. However, your biggest mistake isn't what you *said*, but in what you *did*—you made an idol of Delilah instead of letting God be your God. (See Judges 13–16.)

Life is a series of choices. We choose to believe God loves us and operates in our best interest, or we choose to believe the lie that He is against us—the same lie Adam and Eve believed. We can choose to love and obey Him, or we can choose to rebel against Him. We can choose to seek Him to meet our needs or we can choose to look somewhere else or seek someone else to get our needs met.

Scripture makes it clear that these choices are ours because God gives us those options. In creating us as free-willed individuals, He grants us the choice of acknowledging Him as God, accepting Him as the lover of our souls, and loving Him in return . . . or the choice of rejecting Him.

Scripture gives guidance concerning our choices . . .

*“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.”*

(MICAH 6:8)

What Is Codependency?¹

Had Samson not been so dependent on pleasing Delilah—had he not been a “codependent people-pleaser”—he would not have lost his strength, his status, or his sight . . . nor would he have lost his spiritual insight. Unfortunately, his *dependency* led to his *disobedience*, which in turn led to his *downfall*.

In our quest of the true God or a fabricated false god, we encounter many candidates along the way. We find a myriad of possibilities for us to choose from—all the way from the hosts of heaven to the inhabitants of the earth and anywhere in between. Once we lose our grip on God and our trust in Him, we are at the mercy of the wind and likely to be blown from one philosophy to another, or from one person to another. The Bible puts it this way:

*“The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea,
blown and tossed by the wind.
That person should not expect
to receive anything from the Lord.
Such a person is double-minded
and unstable in all they do.”*

(JAMES 1:6–8)

Many people have heard others use the word *codependent*, but they can't really define it. So let's take a look at the background of this word.

Codependent—the word was first used in the 1970s to describe a family member living with someone dependent on alcohol. The prefix *co-* means “with” or “one associated with the action of another.”

Codependent people are dependent on another person to the point of being controlled or manipulated by that person.

Codependency describes the dysfunctional behavior of family members seeking to adapt to the destructive behavior of the alcoholic.

Codependency is a relationship addiction. Just as the alcoholic is dependent on alcohol, the codependent is dependent on *being needed* by the alcoholic or someone who is problematic.

Codependent “enablers” enable addicts or dysfunctional people in their lives to continue with their addictions without marking and maintaining boundaries. Codependency involves being too dependent on someone or something that cannot meet your needs. Codependency can be compared to the sin of depending on false gods that are powerless to help or depending on a broken well that won’t hold water. It simply won’t work!

We learn in Jeremiah . . .

*“My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me, the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”*

(JEREMIAH 2:13)

Enablers

Question: “How can I know whether I’m an enabler?”

Answer: You are an *enabler* if you perpetuate another’s destructive behavior by protecting that person from painful consequences that could actually serve as a motivation for change.

The *enabling parent* allows the teenager's drug habit to continue with no repercussions, even to the detriment of other family members.

The *enabling wife* calls her husband's boss to say he has the flu when in fact he has a hangover.

Ask yourself, *How many lies have I told to protect the reputation of someone with a destructive habit?* The Bible has strong words to say about those who protect the guilty:

*"Whoever says to the guilty, 'You are innocent,'
will be cursed by peoples and denounced by nations."*

(PROVERBS 24:24)

What Is Dependency?

From conception to death, God created us to be dependent—not on another person or on another of His creations, but on Him alone. We need Him in every area of our lives—physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and relational. He alone knows the number of hairs on our heads, our thoughts before we think them, our words before we speak them, and our needs before we voice them. His knowledge of us is thorough, and our need of Him is total.

Our problem is that we refuse to accept the truth of our dependence on Him and our subsequent great need of Him, and we then try to replace Him with another created being . . . like ourselves. We reject the truth and we believe the lie that we can take care of ourselves and one another, that we can be "god" in our own lives and in the lives of others, or that we can even make a god of our own liking.

Scripture elaborates:

*“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—
his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen,
being understood from what has been made,
so that people are without excuse.
For although they knew God, they neither glorified him
as God nor gave thanks to him, . . .
they became fools and exchanged
the glory of the immortal God
for images made to look like a mortal human being
and birds and animals and reptiles.”*
(ROMANS 1:20, 23)

Dependency is a reliance on something or someone else for support or existence.

—“I have to have this to live.”

Dependency can be either negative or positive, such as being dependent on cocaine versus being dependent on Christ.

—“This is necessary for my life.”

Dependency can be an addiction to any object, behavior, or person that represents an underlying attempt to get emotional needs met.²

—“I must do this to meet my needs, to make me happy, to make me significant.”

You Can Be Dependent on . . .

Objects

- A chemical addiction to drugs (alcohol, tobacco, cocaine)
- A sexual addiction to erotic items (pornographic magazines, videos, and sex toys)

Behaviors

- An addiction to behaviors generally considered to be corrupt, those that are not widely socially acceptable and can be harmful (premarital and extramarital sex, gambling, excessive spending, compulsive eating)

- An addiction to behaviors generally considered to be good, those that are widely socially acceptable but may be equally harmful (perfectionism, workaholism, caregiving, extreme weight loss to the extent of anorexia or bulimia)

People

- A “love” addiction in which you feel your identity is in another person (A weak “love addict” is emotionally dependent on someone considered strong.)
- A “savior addiction” in which you feel your identity is in your ability to meet the needs of another person (A strong “savior” needs to be needed by someone considered weak.)

Because addictions can provide a momentary high, good feelings are associated with them. However, the book of Proverbs gives this poignant warning:

*“There is a way that appears to be right,
but in the end it leads to death.”*
(PROVERBS 14:12)

Interdependence

Question: “What is wrong with people depending on people?”

Answer: We should have a healthy *interdependence* on others in the sense that we value and enjoy each other and love and learn from each other, but we should not be totally dependent on each other. Essentially, an interdependent relationship involves a healthy, mutual give-and-take where neither person looks to the other to meet each and every need.

Many people, however, have a *misplaced dependence* on others. These relationships are not healthy, for God intends for us to live in total dependence on Him. Over and over, the Bible portrays how godly people learn to have a *strong dependence* on the Lord rather than a *weak dependence* on each other. The apostle Paul said we should . . .

“not rely on ourselves but on God.”

(2 CORINTHIANS 1:9)

What Are Common Codependent Relationships?

In a codependent relationship, one person is seen as weak and the other as strong. The weak one feels totally dependent on the strong one. But the one who appears strong is actually weak because of the excessive *need to be needed* by the weak one. In fact, the strong one needs the weak one to *stay weak*. This, in turn, keeps the strong one feeling strong.

The ultimate solution—God’s solution—for both people is not to draw their strength in a dysfunctional way from each other, but rather to draw their strength from God. The Bible says,

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

(ISAIAH 40:29)

Common Codependent Relationships

In the examples below, the first person is dependent on the second person and the second person is actually the codependent one in the relationship, or the one needing to be needed.

A **wife** is excessively helpless around her **husband** . . . and the husband needs his wife to stay helpless.

A **husband** is excessively needy in the way he relates to his **wife** . . . and the wife needs him to stay needy.

A **student** is excessively tied to a **teacher** . . . and the teacher needs the student to stay tied to him/her.

A **child** is excessively pampered by the **parent** . . . and the parent needs the child to stay in need of pampering.

A **parent** is excessively protected by the **child** . . . and the child needs the parent to stay in need of protection.

An **employee** is excessively entangled with an **employer** . . . and the employer needs the employee to stay entangled.

A **friend** is excessively fixated on another **friend** . . . and that person needs the friend to stay fixated.

A **counselee** is excessively clinging to a **counselor** . . . and the counselor needs the counselee to continue clinging.

A **disciple** is excessively dependent on a **discipler** . . . and the discipler needs the disciple to stay dependent.

A **victim** is excessively vulnerable to a **victimizer** . . . and the victimizer needs the victim to stay vulnerable.

A **spiritual seeker** is excessively leaning on a **spiritual leader** . . . and the leader needs the seeker to continue leaning.

When we have a *misplaced dependency*, we have a misplaced trust. We are excessively trusting in the relationship to provide more than God intended. The book of Psalms makes this statement about misplaced trust:

*“Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”*

(PSALM 20:7)

Changing Dynamics

Question: “When I was a struggling addict, my wife held our home together. Now that I have truly changed, why is she continually upset and threatening divorce?”

Answer: You changed the dynamic! It is common knowledge, for example, that after an alcoholic becomes healthy and whole, the *strong* codependent mate is no longer needed in the same way. The new dynamic changes the balance in the relationship. The *strong one*, who no longer feels needed in the same way, could choose to divorce and remarry another needy mate in order to feel needed again. Obviously, divorce is *not* God’s solution. Both of you becoming emotionally balanced and spiritually healthy *is* God’s solution. Just as every alcoholic needs to overcome alcoholism, every codependent needs to overcome codependency. The Bible says,

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

(ROMANS 12:2)

What Is Biblical Dependency?

David, an Israeli shepherd boy, knows the “giants” in his life are no match for his God. Time and time again he expresses complete dependence upon the Lord for his provision and protection, no matter how daunting the tasks or how enormous the enemy. One such formidable foe is a giant of a man who stands more than nine feet tall. The Philistine warrior flaunts his strength and taunts the army of Israel, daring just one man to fight him. Without hesitation, David rises to the call—unmoved by popular opinion that he is destined for destruction!

David's muscles are no match for the so-called strong man, but his spiritual might will deliver the final blow. *"What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"* (1 Samuel 17:26). While the Israeli army cowers in fear, David conquers the blustering behemoth by faith.

With just a sling and five smooth stones, David approaches Goliath and declares the giant's doom. *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head"* (1 Samuel 17:45–46).

With that, David slings a stone and strikes Goliath, who instantly drops to the ground. David kills the enormous enemy and cuts off Goliath's head with his own sword. Afterward, David is brought before Israel's King Saul to herald Goliath's death. David holds the giant's head in his hand, proclaiming his total dependence upon God.

In David's own words . . .

*"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."*
(PSALM 18:2)

Biblical Dependency— God Wants You to Depend on Him

To totally rely on Him, not on people or things or self-effort.

"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (PSALM 73:26).

To believe He will meet all of your needs. You can safely reveal your hurts, your fears, and your needs to God. He will be your Need-Meeter.

"The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail" (ISAIAH 58:11).

To trust Him to take care of your loved ones.

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (PSALM 62:8).

To rely on Christ, whose life in you will enable you to overcome any destructive dependency.

“The one [Christ] who is in you is greater than the one [Satan] who is in the world” (1 JOHN 4:4).

Unhealthy vs. Healthy Marriage

Question: “What is the difference between a codependent marriage and a healthy marriage?”⁵

Answer: All healthy relationships are made up of people who are personally healthy. When healthy people come together to form an intimate relationship such as a marriage, they bring with them a healthy perspective of the marriage relationship. The converse is true of those who are codependent. A marriage relationship reflects the two people making up that relationship. If they are codependent, they will have a codependent marriage. If they are healthy, they will have a healthy marriage.

An Unhealthy, Codependent Marriage

- The *weak* spouse has a deep-seated need for security and continually looks to the *strong* spouse to meet all their needs. This means the weak one stays weak.
- The supposedly *strong* spouse has a deep-seated need for significance and tries to meet all the needs of the *weaker* partner in order to keep that mate dependent on the relationship.
- The dependency is so strong between the two spouses that if one were to suddenly leave the relationship, the other would not only be deeply hurt and grieved, but also feel destroyed.

A Healthy, Interdependent Marriage

- Each emphasizes the other’s strengths and encourages the other partner to overcome personal weaknesses.
- Each encourages the other to be dependent on the Lord while being responsive to the legitimate needs of the other.
- Each is dependent on the other but both are primarily dependent on the Lord, so if one were to be removed from the relationship, the other would be deeply hurt and grieved, but not destroyed.

*“Let each of you look not only to his own interests,
but also to the interests of others.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 2:4 ESV)

What Is God’s Heart on Codependency?

If you live your life with a *misplaced dependency* on others, you will miss the extraordinary relationship God planned for you to have with Him.

To break a pattern of codependent relationships, you need to recognize the lies you believe that perpetuate the pattern and replace them with God’s truth so you can live your life in dependence on Him.

In King David’s own words:

*“My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.”*

(PSALM 62:7)

God's Heart on Codependency

Lie: I need people I can trust and depend on to feel good about myself.

Truth: I need to put my trust and confidence completely in the Lord.

"This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him'" (JEREMIAH 17:5, 7).

Lie: I need the approval of others to feel good about myself.

Truth: I am to desire the approval of God not men.

"For they loved human praise more than praise from God" (JOHN 12:43).

Lie: I need to change who I am.

Truth: I am a new person in Christ, and He is changing me from the inside out and is making me into the person He created me to be.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17).

Lie: I can expect people to meet all my needs.

Truth: I am to look to God alone to meet my needs.

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (PHILIPPIANS 4:19).

Lie: My thinking does not need to change.

Truth: I am to use God's Word to transform my thinking.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

Lie: I need someone to lead me.

Truth: I must rely on the Lord to lead me.

"He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake" (PSALM 23:3).

Lie: Everything I need for life and happiness can be found in a relationship with a significant person.

Truth: I have everything I need to live a godly life through my relationship with God alone.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 PETER 1:3–4).

Lie: My security and safety come from my relationships with others.

Truth: I must depend on God for my security and safety.

“You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance” (PSALM 32:7).

Who Am I Trying to Please? The Story of Patricia⁴

Taken from: HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS
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NOTE: The first person voice (“I, me, my”) in this story refers to June Hunt, founder of Hope For The Heart.

After 11 years of conflict, turmoil, and tears, Patricia finally finds the courage to end an on-again, off-again relationship with her chemically-addicted boyfriend. Yet instead of feeling relieved, she is overwhelmed with sadness and confused by thoughts of taking him back. Desperate for direction, she calls *Hope in the Night*⁵ . . . to share her heart:

“I know I did the right thing by walking away, but all I can feel is sorrow,” she says. “Why can’t I feel angry for how he treated me? Why can’t I just say, ‘Thank You, God—he’s finally gone!’?”

When I ask Patricia to tell me more about the relationship, she describes an enmeshed bond with a man whose substance abuse causes chronic conflict and chaos. Early in their relationship, Patricia began regretting their choice to live together and asked him to move out. He moved alright—straight into another woman’s apartment. But four months later, he was back on Patricia’s doorstep.

“He vowed he’d always love me, so I allowed him back into my life,” she says. “But he still smokes marijuana and abuses pills. Now I’ve told him I can’t do this anymore.”

Clearly, Patricia is yearning for God’s strength as she tries to make a fresh start, but her emotions have overtaken her reasoning, erasing memories of all the pain he caused her.

“In my head, I know breaking up is right, but I can’t get my heart to follow. I still love him. How can I get to the point where my heart follows my head?”

“True love—in its highest form—seeks the very best for another person,” I remind Patricia. “As long as you support this man in his destructive lifestyle, you are *not* loving him. To make matters worse, he will drag you down with him.”

Like so many codependent relationships, this one is founded on control and manipulation. Over time, Patricia’s unhealthy attachment has become obsessive as she compulsively slaves to help, please, and rescue her boyfriend. A childhood history of being controlled and abandoned serves as the perfect setup for her dysfunctional relationships.

I remind Patricia of the Scripture so meaningful to me that I had it etched on a window inside my office door: “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). To expand on this, I add:

“The message is clear. We mustn’t allow any person to become our ‘god’—to take the place that He alone must occupy in our heart. A life of being *controlled* by another person’s needs, desires, and well-being causes a misplaced dependency. A codependent relationship always leads to a destructive cycle of control and manipulation. And it keeps you from being all God created you to be.”

“But June, I’m so afraid of the pain I’ll feel if I let him go,” Patricia confides, her voice soft and unsteady.

“The truth is: You’re going to experience pain either way. If you continue in this codependent relationship, there will be pain. If you break it off, there will be pain. But by doing the

hard thing—the right thing—now, you’ll position yourself to experience lasting peace *without* the pain. And that, my friend, is priceless.”

I then ask Patricia to imagine a key and lock, explaining that a twisted key will only fit into a similarly twisted lock. But when you repair the lock, the twisted key will no longer fit. “It’s that way with codependent relationships. When you become healthy, no matter how many broken men approach you wanting to be in a relationship, they will no longer fit with the new you!”

To experience the fullness of God’s peace, Patricia will first need to place her total trust in the Lord alone. With relief in her voice, she says she understands and wants to make a fresh start. She tells me she already has trusted Jesus as her Savior. And now, in her desire to surrender to Him, she wants to allow the Lord to truly *be Lord* of her life.

Colossians 1:27 speaks of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” I say, “Count on this Scripture to counter your fear of abandonment. Realize that you will never be abandoned. With Christ in you, you are never alone, never overlooked, never forgotten.”

By the end of our conversation, Patricia confirms her desire to begin a new life without her destructive, unfaithful boyfriend, and give full control of her life to the Lord. She affirms that whenever she starts to feel controlled by emotion or to be drawn back into codependency, she will immediately say out loud, “I reject that feeling,” and then she will fill her mind with truths from God’s Word.

She also makes a commitment to join a codependency support group at her church and to seek out godly women in her life who can support her in her journey. Together we pray, thanking God for His promise: “*The LORD himself goes before*

you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Patricia is well on her way to understanding that freedom from codependency represents the highest and best thing we can do for ourselves . . . and for those we love. And though the road to recovery from codependency—like any addiction—is often walked with two steps forward and one step back, still, those who undertake this journey can be “confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6).



CHARACTERISTICS



*“Codependent people
may appear capable
and self-sufficient,
but in reality they are
insecure, self-doubting,
and in need of approval.”*



Can children be *conditioned to be codependent*? Clearly, yes. In the Bible, Rebekah shows a blatant bias toward her second-born son, Jacob, because he stays close to hearth and home. On the other hand, her husband Isaac favors his firstborn son, Esau, because he is an outdoorsman with a prowess for hunting.

Since no two children have identical skills, all children should be recognized for their differences and respected for their distinctiveness. Oh, but Rebekah does not love in this way! She becomes obsessed. Thus the conniving begins. Rebekah wants Jacob to receive “the birthright of the firstborn,” (which unquestionably belongs to Esau). She becomes determined to deceive her husband so that he will give it to Jacob. Because of the *enmeshed relationship* between Rebekah and Jacob, she finds it easy to persuade her son to defraud his father. She plots. She schemes. She secretly plans.

Since the older brother is described as “*hairy*” (Genesis 27:11), Rebekah covers Jacob’s hands and part of his neck with the skin of a young goat so when Isaac reaches for his firstborn, Jacob’s skin will feel like Esau’s. Rebekah even dresses Jacob in Esau’s best clothes. Because of old age and weak eyes, Isaac is fooled.

Although the scheme is a success, Jacob is found out and forced to flee for his life. Even so, Jacob does not escape his *passive dependency*. All too soon he once again becomes manipulated by others. His father-in-law tricks Jacob into marrying his older daughter rather than the younger one whom Jacob deeply loves. Jacob now experiences the classic truism, “what goes around comes around.” He feels conned and controlled. Such is the misery in adulthood when one is enmeshed in childhood. (See Genesis chapters 27–30.)

Scripture addresses the sure consequences of sin:

*“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.
A man reaps what he sows.”*
(GALATIANS 6:7)

What Is the Codependent Person Profile?

Codependent people may appear capable and self-sufficient, but in reality they are insecure, self-doubting, and in need of approval. This need for approval often results in an excessive sense of responsibility and a dependence on people-pleasing performances. The Bible, however, says our primary focus should not be on pleasing people, but rather on pleasing God.

*“We instructed you how to live in order to please God,
as in fact you are living.*

*Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus
to do this more and more.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 4:1)

The Codependent Person Profile⁶

Consider whether or not any of these statements are reflections of you. Check (✓) everything that applies to you.

- I feel responsible for the feelings, needs, and actions of another person close to me.
- I try to fix the problems of this person even to the detriment of my own well-being.
- I can discern the thoughts, feelings, and needs of this person but cannot identify my own.
- I do things for others that they are capable of doing for themselves.
- I feel angry when my help is not wanted.
- I tend to be rigid and judgmental in the eyes of others.
- I judge myself more harshly than I judge others.
- I deny my own feelings and needs—so I’ve been told.
- I feel guilty when I stand up for myself.

- I feel good about giving but have difficulty receiving.
- I try to be perfect to avoid anger or criticism.
- I look for my worth in the approval of others.
- I find that I am attracted to needy people and needy people are attracted to me.
- I struggle with feeling unloved and look for ways to be needed.
- I throw all my energy into helping someone else.
- I say *No* when I should say *Yes*, and say *Yes* when I should say *No*.
- I feel compelled to take charge of other people's crises.
- I have difficulty setting boundaries with others.
- I rely on the other person in a relationship to make most of the decisions.
- I feel lonely, sad, and empty when I am alone.
- I feel threatened when the person closest to me spends time with someone else.
- I think other people's opinions are more important than my own.
- I refrain from speaking in order to keep peace.
- I fear conflict because the other person could abandon me.
- I become defensive about my relationship with another person.
- I feel "stuck" in a relationship.
- I feel that I have lost my personal identity in order to "fit" into another person's world.
- I feel controlled and manipulated by someone.
- I feel used and taken advantage of by a person close to me.
- I plan my life around another person.
- I prioritize my relationship with another person over my relationship with the Lord.

If you checked five or more of these statements, you may be involved in a codependent relationship!

When we find ourselves in unhealthy patterns of relating, we need to change our focus, change our goals, and change what is hindering us from running the race God has planned for us. Our primary focus should be not on another person but on Jesus.

*“Let us throw off everything that hinders
and the sin that so easily entangles.
And let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us.”*

(HEBREWS 12:1)

What Is a Codependent Relationship?

They share a strong spiritual connection, a covenant oath of friendship. And it all begins the day David kills Goliath.

The king’s son, Jonathan, “*became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself*” (1 Samuel 18:1). Jonathan protects David from his jealous, murderous father. And though he is the rightful heir to the throne, he commits to help David become the next king because he recognizes him as God’s anointed. Their relationship is characterized by strength, sacrifice, and support without even a hint of codependency.

Jonathan and David model a healthy relationship. By contrast, in a codependent relationship, both people are insecure and become entangled in a web of emotional bondage. The two combine to produce a destructive cycle of manipulation and control, draining joy and happiness out of life. Because this destructive dynamic is often subconscious, both parties can feel innocent of any wrongdoing. Yet God knows legitimate emotional needs are being temporarily met in illegitimate ways.

Scripture discloses the keen discernment of God:

*“All a person’s ways seem pure to them,
but motives are weighed by the LORD.”*

(PROVERBS 16:2)

The Codependent Relationship Profile⁷

Both . . .

- Are in denial
- Have difficulty establishing healthy, intimate relationships
- Have difficulty setting boundaries
- Have one other addiction other than the relationship
- Have a false sense of security
- Become jealous and possessive
- Control and manipulate
- Struggle with low self-worth
- Violate their consciences
- Experience extreme ups and downs
- Fear abandonment
- Feel a loss of personal identity
- Feel trapped in the relationship

*“I find more bitter than death
the [person] who is a snare,
whose heart is a trap and whose
hands are chains.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 7:26)

Unhealthy vs. Healthy Friendships

Question: “Is a friendship codependent when two friends depend on one another?”

Answer: No, if the friendship is interdependent (reciprocal with balanced sharing), then it is healthy. If the friendship is codependent (out of balance), then it is unhealthy.

*“As iron sharpens iron,
so one person sharpens another.”*

(PROVERBS 27:17)

An Unhealthy, Codependent Friendship

- One friend is *weak* and troubled; the other friend is *strong* and competent. (There is an imbalance of power and of give-and-take.)
- The weak friend desires freedom to enjoy other significant relationships but is fearful of doing so. The strong friend desires exclusivity and becomes easily jealous or threatened.
- Both may put the other friend in the place of Christ, and neither is bettered by the friendship.

A Healthy, Interdependent Friendship

- Both come together as equals with a balance of power and of give-and-take.
- Both pursue and enjoy other significant relationships and avoid exclusivity.
- Both friends are better because of each other. Each strengthens the other spiritually.

Biblical Illustration: During a difficult time in his life, David did not try to draw Jonathan to himself, nor did Jonathan try to draw David to himself. Instead, the Bible says, “*Jonathan . . . helped him [David] find strength in God*” (1 Samuel 23:16).

Codependency and the Workplace

Question: “As an employee, how can I keep codependency out of my workplace?”

Answer:

- **Don’t** be afraid to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries.
- **Don’t** try to be your employer’s “all-in-all”—the one who will always do everything.
- **Don’t** be controlled by manipulation and fear.
- **Don’t** let working late be a detriment to your God-given, personal priorities.
- **Don’t** fail to speak up if the workload is too great to accomplish what you have been hired to do in the time allowed. You can express an accurate picture to your employer in this way:
“(Employer’s name), thank you for the opportunity to work on this assignment. We seem to have run into a problem. You have employed me to be here 40 hours a week; and yet there are at least 100 hours of work to be done. How do you want me to prioritize my tasks and utilize my 40 hours this week?”
- **Don’t** be afraid to say *No* when it’s appropriate to say *No*.

*“All you need to say is
simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”*
(MATTHEW 5:37)

Criteria for Dating

Question: “I know I should be drawn to date a woman who is secure, confident, and competent, but what about someone insecure from a difficult background who I know really needs someone like me?”

Answer: You can be a knight in shining armor and rescue a damsel in distress. But if you make a habit of rescuing her, she will not value you as a person—only as a rescuer. You need to be wanted and loved for who you are, not for having rescued an emotionally unhealthy female who is unable to extend unconditional love to you in return.

Someone who is emotionally healthy can love you out of strength and will be able to accept you unconditionally and offer you security in a relationship.

Someone who is emotionally needy is typically self-focused and limited in the ability to be sensitive to the needs of others. Emotionally needy people are more often “takers” than “givers” in relationships and tend to “use people up” emotionally. Needy people truly need healing for themselves rather than a rescuer.

Seek someone with emotional maturity and spiritual wisdom—someone who can help you to grow more and more in your relationship with the Lord.

“Walk with the wise and become wise.”

(PROVERBS 13:20)



CAUSES



*“By God’s design,
you can change and
grow in maturity
in every area
of your life.”*



What draws people into destructive, codependent relationships? The answer is most often found in childhood pain—a past pain that impacts today’s choices. In reality, codependent people are adult children who have never grown up emotionally.

The Bible refers to immature grown-ups by using the analogy of infants feeding on milk instead of solid food:

*“Though by this time you ought to be teachers,
you need someone to teach you the elementary
truths of God’s word all over again.*

You need milk, not solid food!

*Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant,
is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.”*

(HEBREWS 5:12–13)

What Causes Codependency to Develop in Children?⁸

All children progress through five developmental stages on their way to maturity and adulthood. God designed the family to provide the necessary structure for the healthy completion of each of these stages. If we fail to progress successfully from one stage to another in childhood, our development will be stunted and we will grow up to be emotionally and spiritually immature adults.

We will develop adult bodies but—like children—we will be underdeveloped emotionally. As a result, we will be inclined to be drawn into codependent, needy relationships. Out of tender concern for the protection of children, Jesus gave this strong warning to adults:

*“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who
believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them
to have a large millstone hung around their neck
and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*

(MATTHEW 18:6)

Five Stages of Childhood Development

God bestows on parents the major responsibility of nurturing their children so that they will not be *love-starved*—an emotional state that sets them up to look for love in all the wrong places.

1. The Helpless Stage

Babies need to bond with their parents because they are helpless and totally dependent for all of their basic needs (including the three inner needs for love, significance, and security).⁹ If your parents did not meet your needs, you may have grown into a needy adult who *feels empty inside*—as if there is a hole in your heart.

2. The Pushing Away Stage

Toddlers need to begin to push away from their parents as a way of exploring their environment and testing boundaries. If your parents did not allow separation, you may have grown into an adult who *manipulates others* in order to gain some sense of control.

3. The Conflict Stage

Young children need to learn proper ways of resolving conflict as they begin to test their parents' rules. If you did not learn healthy conflict resolution skills, you may have grown into an adult who *lacks problem-solving skills* in your adult relationships.

4. The Independent Stage

Preadolescent children need to grow in independence, but they still need direction and support from their parents. If your parents stifled your assertiveness, you may have grown into a *needy, unassertive* adult who is dependent on others to validate you.

5. The Sharing Stage

Adolescents need to learn mutual give-and-take and even sacrificial sharing from their parents as they begin to pursue involvement within their own groups. If you did not see a healthy give-and-take between your parents or see ways of sacrificially helping others, you may have grown into a *self-focused* adult who *forms unequal relationships* in order to feel some sense of significance.

Children who grow up being emotionally needy and who are not allowed to learn the skills necessary for forming healthy, adult relationships, experience great challenges in learning healthy independence. They have difficulty speaking the truth, asking for what they want, and setting boundaries.

They become codependent adults who are *addicted to unhealthy relationships* because they never learned to think as healthy adults. Ultimately, they are desperately trying to finish what they started in infancy—to grow up!

*“Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children.
 . . . but in your thinking be adults.”*
 (1 CORINTHIANS 14:20)

Parenting Healthy Children

Question: “As a parent, how can I keep my children from having an unhealthy dependence on me?”

Answer:

- *Begin* early to model good decision-making principles for your children.
- *Teach* your children to pray about their decisions and to depend on God to guide them.
- *Allow* your children (early on) to choose between two or three options regarding the clothing they would like to wear or tasks they would like to perform.
- *Praise* your children for making good decisions. They will want to repeat actions that are praiseworthy.

- *Allow* your children to experience the repercussions of making poor decisions. (Rather than finding a way to rescue them, maintain boundaries. Some of the most memorable lessons are learned the hard way.)
- *Teach* your children the practical principles of decision making in regard to age-appropriate topics, such as boundaries, chores, friends, curfews, money, dating, and goals.
- *Encourage* your children to develop friendships with other children and to learn to give and take in relationships.
- *Teach* your children to take care of their possessions, to perform routine household chores, and to prepare meals.
- *Show* your children how to budget their money and how to establish spending priorities.
- *Enroll* your children in group activities or clubs that will expose them to new experiences, enhance their life skills, and develop their self-confidence.
- *Identify* your child's strengths and find avenues in which your child can succeed in developing those strengths.

*“Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”*

(PROVERBS 22:6)

God means for you to grow physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. By His design, you can change and grow in maturity in every area of your life.

More specifically, you can have mature relationships. By God's grace and power, what has been ravaged can be restored. What has been ruined can be redeemed.

Ask the Lord to transform your mind with His truth. Realize that the tree rooted in truth will bear much fruit.

*“That person is like a tree planted
by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.”*
(PSALM 1:3)

Bonding vs. Enmeshment

Question: “In the parent-child relationship, what is the difference between bonding and enmeshment?”

Answer: **Healthy bonding** occurs when parents are connected with their children by being God’s instruments to meet their basic physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. With healthy bonding, nurturing flows naturally from parent to child, leaving the child emotionally fulfilled and whole.

Unhealthy enmeshment occurs when parents need an excessive connection with their children in order to get their own emotional needs met. With enmeshment, nurturing flows unnaturally *from child to parent*, leaving the child emotionally drained and empty.

Enmeshed children feel responsibility for their parents’ present and future happiness. The Bible addresses this role:

*“Children should not have to save up
for their parents,
but parents for their children.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 12:14)

What Causes Repeated Cycles of Codependency?

Have you ever wondered why some people go from one bad relationship to another? Your friend escapes one controller only to be attracted to another controller. Why move from one negative relationship to another? Have you yourself been caught in this cycle? If so, you may have spoken these perplexing words of the apostle Paul:

*“I do not do the good I want to do,
but the evil I do not want to do
—this I keep on doing.”*

(ROMANS 7:19)

What Childhood Setups Lead to Adult Love Addiction?

As children, their “love buckets” were empty.

- No one sets out to be emotionally addicted to another person, to constantly crave love from another person. These cravings were created in childhood because there was “no water in the well”—their “love buckets” were and still are empty. They are truly *love-starved*.
- When unloved children receive a rare moment of attention or affection from their unloving parents, the result is both exhilarating and confusing. They feel confused about why they can’t be consistently loved, and they become fixated on how to get that feeling of love again.
- Rejected children live for any moment of acceptance. Any hint of love becomes an emotional high that temporarily relieves their pain.
- These children may become adult *love addicts* because they . . .
 - ♦ Did not receive enough positive affirmation as children
 - ♦ Grew up feeling unloved, insignificant, and insecure
 - ♦ Experienced a traumatic separation or a lack of bonding

- ♦ Felt and continue to feel intense sadness and a profound loss as a result of being abandoned
- ♦ Experienced repeated rejection from their parents
- ♦ Felt and continue to feel extreme fear, helplessness, and emptiness

As adults, they find their “love buckets” have holes in them.

- Children with empty “love buckets” create a fantasy about some “savior” who will remove their fear and finally make them feel whole. But no matter how much love they receive, it’s not enough because they themselves are not whole.
- As adults, they are still emotionally needy “children” who . . .
 - ♦ Believe being loved by someone—anyone—is the solution to their emptiness
 - ♦ Enter relationships believing that they cannot take care of themselves
 - ♦ Assign too much value and power to the other person in a relationship
 - ♦ Have tremendously unrealistic expectations of the other person
 - ♦ Try to “stick like glue” to the other person in order to feel connected
 - ♦ Live in fear that those who truly love them will ultimately leave them
- The plight of love addicts would seem without solution were it not for the Lord, who is the only true Savior who loves unconditionally and eternally. The Lord gives this assurance:

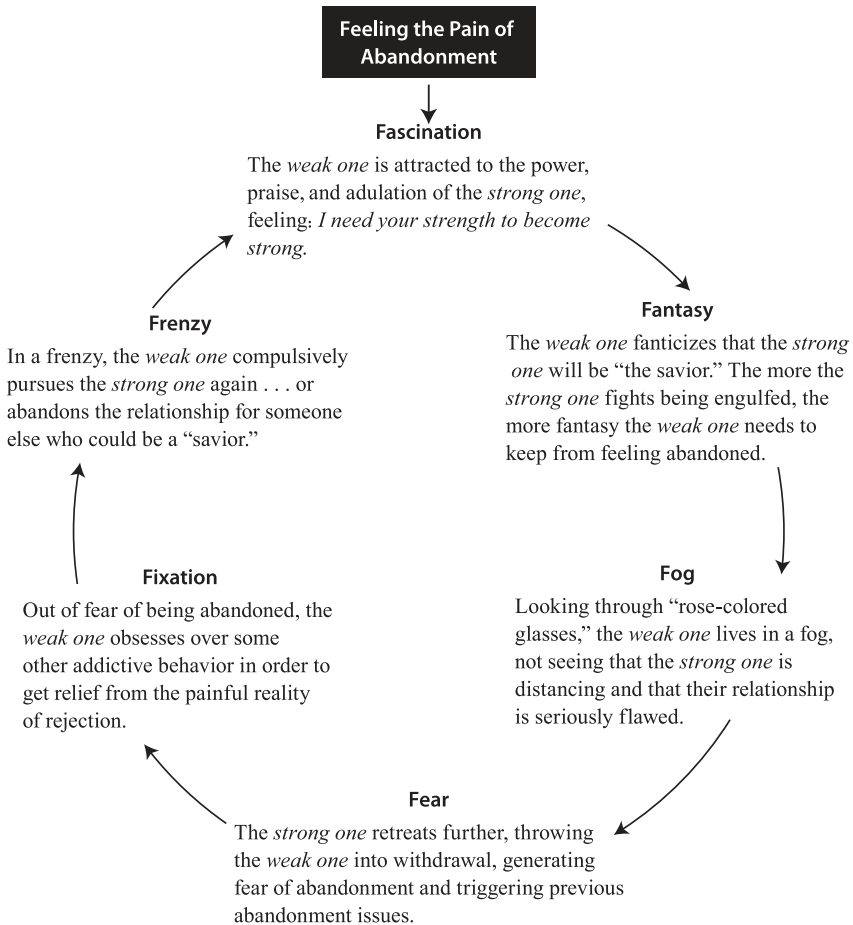
*“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”*

(JEREMIAH 31:3)

The Cycle of the Weak One¹⁰

Scenario #1

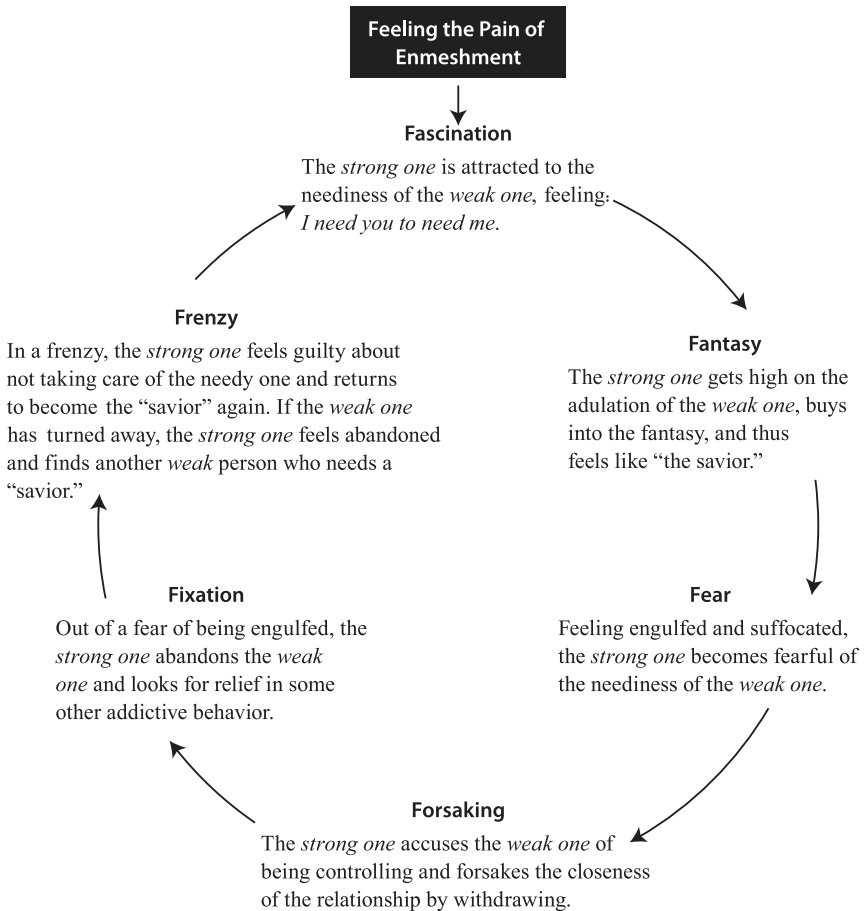
Codependent people appear *weak* because as children their emotional needs were never met. They fantasize about another person as a “rescuer” who will make all their problems disappear. These love addicts constantly yearn for someone to complete them as a person. They are drawn to caregivers, yet, at the same time, terrified at the thought of true intimacy.



The Cycle of the Strong One¹¹

Scenario #2

Codependent people appear *strong* because as children they were in an enmeshed relationship with a parent. They often act as a parent's "caregiver" and surrogate spouse (if one parent is emotionally or physically absent). Now, as adults, they are drawn to people who need to be "taken care of," but are terrified at the thought of being smothered again.



Codependent relationships are formed by two people who are addicted to each other, yet who are in denial about their addiction. Both the weak and strong persons can be either male or female. Both have abandonment issues and enmeshment issues.

They generally flip-flop between being the weak one and the strong one—sometimes even within the same relationship. The intensity of their relationship and the intensity of their pain are immense as they swing from one extreme to the other—from suffocating one another to distancing from one another. They fail to focus on this simple, but wise, counsel:

“Avoid all extremes.”

(ECCLESIASTES 7:18)

Breaking Free

Question: “Why do I keep choosing codependent relationships? I’m now wondering whether it is possible for me ever to break free and stay free?”

Answer: When two people are in a codependent relationship, each has a history of feeling both abandoned and controlled. First, recognize how afraid you are of being abandoned, and then realize how you resent being controlled.

Your relationship is intense and unstable, full of conflict and chaos, with repeated cycles of “come here” and “go away.” Oddly enough, you cannot live peaceably together or apart. You are caught in the destructive ups and downs of codependency and feel that you cannot get off the unrelenting roller coaster.

But this is not true. When you apply the biblical steps to freedom, it is possible to be set free because:

“... with God all things are possible.”

(MATTHEW 19:26)

What Is the Root Cause of Codependency?

If we expect or demand that another person meet all of our needs or if we become dependent on another person to do so, we have a misplaced dependency. The Bible makes it plain that . . .

“God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

(PHILIPPIANS 4:19)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.¹²

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”

(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn’t need God! Our inner needs draw us into a

deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

WRONG BELIEF FOR THE DEPENDENT:

“I need to be connected to a stronger person who will provide me with a sense of love and emotional security.”

RIGHT BELIEF FOR THE DEPENDENT:

“While God often expresses His love through others, He doesn’t want me to live my life depending on another person. I need to live dependently on Jesus, who will meet my needs, give me healthy relationships, and make my life fruitful.” Jesus said . . .

*“I am the vine; you are the branches.
If you remain in me and I in you,
you will bear much fruit;
apart from me
you can do nothing.”*
(JOHN 15:5)

WRONG BELIEF FOR THE CODEPENDENT:

“I am responsible for meeting all the needs of this person whom I love, and that gives me a real sense of significance.”

RIGHT BELIEF FOR THE CODEPENDENT:

“If I try to meet all the needs of another person, I’m taking the role that God alone should have. My need for significance cannot be met by pleasing another person, but it is met by pleasing God and finding my significance in Him.”

“We make it our goal to please him [God]”
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:9)

What Is the Most Dangerous Dependency?

If you live your life with a misplaced dependency on others, you will miss the extraordinary relationship God has planned for you to have with Him. When God created you, He planned for you to enter into a tender, trusting relationship with Him. He is so trustworthy that you can totally depend on Him to meet all of your needs. He designed you to live in *dependence on Him*—not on anyone else—to complete you, to fulfill you.

To avoid developing the most dangerous dependency—trusting in others in place of God and risking never having a personal relationship with Him—heed the following passage:

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.”*

(PROVERBS 3:5–6)

If you have struggled with codependency, God has a solution for you—a solution that can be found in four points.

How to Begin Depending on God Alone

4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*" (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway*" (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, "*Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God*" (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, "*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*" (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

Desperate No More: The Laurie and Lance Story¹³

Taken from: HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS
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NOTE: The first person voice (“I, me, my”) in this story refers to June Hunt, founder of Hope For The Heart.

They appear to be the perfect couple.

Both highly educated, Laurie and Lance attended a renowned seminary and seemingly shared a calling to full-time ministry. Laurie worked several years for a Christian ministry, teaching people how to study the Bible. I had casually known Laurie for more than ten years and saw her as intelligent, competent, and assured. What I did *not* see that both shocked and grieved me was that she was also abused.

Lance is now divorcing Laurie to be with another woman, and they are in the midst of a custody battle over their two young sons. The judge rules that until a decision is made as to which parent will have custodial care, this arrangement is to be followed: The children are to stay in the home, and each parent will rotate in and out every other week. So every other week for about a year and a half, Laurie stayed in my home.

We had many late-night talks. The one that stands out most in my memory is the evening I asked whether she had any pictures to prove to the judge that her husband was violent. Immediately she went to my guest bedroom and returned with pictures of herself—*actual police photos*—depicting her severely bruised head and swollen eyes. I was absolutely stunned.

Lance had enacted the typical pattern of abuse: first inflicting verbal and emotional abuse, which later escalated into physical abuse. Laurie became a victim of repeated domestic

violence, oblivious to the fact that a codependent mind-set is the foundation on which an abusive relationship is built. For too long, she had kept herself in harm's way—her codependency had her trapped in a dangerous situation.

This codependent mind-set resides within anyone who is controlled or manipulated by someone else. They become people-pleasers, looking for worth from the approval of others. They likely felt powerless and insignificant as children. Laurie grew up in a dysfunctional, alcoholic home and therefore became skilled at “doing.” This pattern, which made her feel empowered and significant, continued into adulthood and marriage.

She wants to feel significant, so she becomes overly dependent on Lance, desperately seeking his approval to validate her worth. He, too, desperately seeks significance, feeling empowered by having her under his complete control. Not knowing that each person has intrinsic value given by God allows the abuse to flourish.

Like so many abused wives caught up in codependency, Laurie thinks it is her duty to maintain appearances for the sake of their good name and Christian image. To the outside world, their family looks perfect. While Laurie appears competent and content outside her home, within its walls, Lance controls everything . . . their finances, their schedule, their friends—*everything*.

If others were to know how dysfunctional our so-called “Christian marriage” is, she reasons, they might stumble in their faith. How can she tell anyone?

Codependent women like Laurie become further victimized because they dare not disclose their abuse to others. They fear that well-meaning people could wonder, *What did you do to cause*

it? Many times, those who are abused ask themselves the same question, sadly believing they have caused the inexcusable abuse. Suffering with a full-blown case of false guilt, they tend to blame themselves. After all, he tells her repeatedly, “It’s all your fault!” As with Lance, since he is supposedly *never* wrong, he is also *never* repentant and *never* says “I’m sorry.”

When I gave Laurie our *Biblical Counseling Keys on Wife Abuse* [now *Keys for Living on Domestic Violence*], she quickly identified with Lance’s “Scripture twisting.” This simply means that most batterers are adept at manipulating their wives with the Scripture “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands . . .” (Ephesians 5:22), but they refuse to look at that verse in context. The prior verse states, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The subsequent verses say husbands are to demonstrate sacrificial love to their wives. However, following Lance’s skewed interpretation, Laurie spirals downward from faith-based *submission* to fear-driven *subservience*.

Rather than recognizing her own unhealthy dependence on Lance and rather than realizing how she is enabling his belittling abuse to continue, Laurie justifies this plight as being her cross to bear. She thinks, *If only I could do everything right, he might be pleased*. Though she is sincere, she is sincerely wrong.

For so long she has misplaced her deepest dependence on her husband. Laurie has become entirely dependent on Lance, naively believing that God would intervene because of her faith. She doesn’t realize that God has given her active authority to use her *mind* to know this is wrong and must not continue, and to use her *mouth* to say, “No. If you continue I’ll move out of harm’s way,” and to use her *motivation* (the Bible) to strengthen her resolve: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered” (Proverbs 22:24).

Regrettably, it is not until after Lance divorces her that she finally begins to discover hope and healing from the crippling codependency she had unwittingly been enslaved to throughout her marriage. Looking back, she wishes she had learned to be more assertive much sooner.

But looking forward, she has now learned to place her dependence on God first and foremost—and to depend on Him to help her relate to others. She has allowed God to prove Himself to be her all-sufficient Need-meeter. Today, Laurie is free to be all God created her to be because she not only *knows* the truth and verbally *admits* the truth, but she also *acts* on the truth. Jesus says,

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

(JOHN 8:32)



STEPS TO SOLUTION



“If you feel that the relationship you are in is more of a curse than a blessing—when it brings more death to your soul than life—this is motivation for change.”



In the beginning, everything is perfect.

God creates a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, and He enjoys perfect fellowship with the pair. As Adam and Eve interact with one another in healthy, holy ways, their relationship can be described as nothing other than perfect. God places Adam and Eve in a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, filled with provision and pleasure.

The scenario truly is the picture of perfection—that is, until a crafty serpent empowered by Satan leaves a lasting stain that has sullied the world to this day.

The Bible warns,

*“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
But on the full armor of God, so that you can take
your stand against the devil’s schemes.”*

(EPHESIANS 6:10–11)

Key Verse to Memorize

The wily serpent woos Eve away from her primary relationship with God, causing her to doubt and challenge the truth He has instilled in her life.

Rather than trusting and depending on God to guide her, Eve develops a misplaced dependency on the serpent, choosing to believe his lies over God’s truth. Satan inquires of Eve: *“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”* (Genesis 3:1). It is a question designed to plant doubt about the goodness of God and to test how firmly she is grounded in His truth.

Eve's response is *almost* right. She replies to the serpent that she and Adam can eat from any tree in the garden except for the one in the middle, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and if they eat from it, they will die. *Correct*. But Eve also adds that if she and Adam touch the tree they will die. *Incorrect*.

Satan takes note of the erroneous addition and detects vulnerability and weakness. Eve's focus and dependence aren't fully on God and His Word, on believing Him and pleasing Him, on loving Him. The serpent's cunning response is crafted to create strife between the couple and God. Jesus aptly describes Satan in this way:

*"He was a murderer from the beginning,
not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.
When he lies, he speaks his native language,
for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

(JOHN 8:44)

One of the key scripture verses in the Bible that points to the problem of codependency is Galatians 1:10. It redirects our focus and dependence from the people around us to God, whose approval and pleasure we must seek foremost and whom we must most love.

The apostle Paul is emphatic about our priority relationship and declares his disinterest in pleasing men. Like Paul, we must put first things first, or else our relationships will never have the peace and fulfillment that God desires for us.

*"Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ."*

(GALATIANS 1:10)

Key Passage to Read

“You will not certainly die” (Genesis 3:4). This bold-faced lie, completely contradicts the truth God had spoken. And then Satan tempts Eve to disobey God’s clear command: *“God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:5).

Eve’s misplaced dependency for wisdom and guidance apart from God draws her to the forbidden tree . . . and she takes a fatal bite. The first woman is disobedient to the following scripture regarding God: *“You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed”* (Psalm 119:4).

Notice the two thoughts in the following key passage that seem to be in opposition to one another.

*“If someone is caught in a sin,
you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.
But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.
Carry each other’s burdens,
and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
If anyone thinks they are something when they are not,
they deceive themselves.
Each one should test their own actions.
Then they can take pride in themselves alone,
without comparing themselves to someone else,
for each one should carry their own load.”*
(GALATIANS 6:1–5)

Does Scripture Contradict Itself?

Note that verse 2 says, *“Carry each other’s burdens,”* and verse 5 says, *“Each one should carry their own load.”* At first glance these two clear-cut directives seem contradictory to each other. So which one is true? When you carefully analyze what is being said, there is no contradiction. In actuality, both are true.

Verse 1—Gently encourage another person to change from negative behavior, and at the same time, beware of the possibility that you yourself might be tempted.

Verse 2—In the original Greek text, the word translated “burden” is *baros*, which means “weight,” implying a load or something that is pressing heavily.¹⁴ When you help carry what is too heavy for someone else to bear alone, your caring response fulfills the law of Christ.

Verse 5—The Greek word for “load” is *phortion*, which means “something carried.”¹⁵ Clearly, when you carry what others *should* carry, you are not wise. You are not called by God to relieve others of their rightful responsibilities, nor are you to require others to take on your God-given responsibilities.

Conclusion: Those who are codependent try to get their needs met by carrying loads that others should be carrying. To move out of a codependent relationship, both individuals need to quit trying to be the other person’s “all-in-all” and instead *encourage each other to take responsibility for their own lives and to live dependently on God’s strength.*

Healthy Counseling

Question: “As a counselor, how can I keep my clients from developing an unrealistic dependency on me?”

Answer: There are several ways to discourage your clients from developing of an overly dependent relationship with you. Remember, you are the one who sets the tone for your sessions.

- **Don’t** have a session without first praying for God’s wisdom. Then let your client know that you will be depending on the discernment God will give the two of you.
- **Don’t** allow yourself to be your client’s “savior”—there is only one Savior, and you are not Him!

- **Don't** be available at all times—set boundaries and make it clear you have other responsibilities that are important priorities as well.
- **Don't** strive to impress your client or be a hero, but rather present and model how to have a deep relationship with the Lord.
- **Don't** rely on your own sufficiency based on your education or experiences. Instead, rely on the Lord's sufficiency and encourage your client to do the same.
- **Don't** overlook the benefits of using God's Word in your counseling session. When appropriate, quote scriptures that apply to your counselee's present problem or invite them to read aloud the verse or passage.

*“Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God.”*

(PSALM 146:5)

How to Have a Transformed Life

If Adam's dependency had been solely on God, could he have prevented and not repeated his wife's mistake since he was there with her? Instead, Adam exhibits a misplaced dependency on Eve, allowing her to lead him down the path of rebellion. He, too, partakes of the forbidden fruit, and the initial consequence suggests both shame and vulnerability. Adam and Eve realize they are naked and sew fig leaves together to cover themselves. Their once-perfect relationship is stained by sin, and their nakedness becomes a source of deep embarrassment.

Misplaced dependencies mar Adam and Eve's perfect relationship with God and with each other. The couple undoubtedly has a cry similar to that of the psalmist:

*“Oh, that my ways were steadfast
in obeying your decrees!
Then I would not be put to shame
when I consider all your commands.”*

(PSALM 119:5-6)

Codependency does not flow from an unchangeable personality flaw or some genetic defect. A codependent relationship is rooted in immaturity, a fact that should give great hope to those caught in its addictive cycle. While change is never easy, growing up is always within the reach of anyone who desires to move from immaturity to maturity. The first step is confronting and acknowledging your own codependency.

The key to change is *motivation*. What kind of motivation? When your pain in the relationship is greater than your *fear of abandonment*, the motivation for change is powerful. Moving away from the pain of codependency then becomes a matter of choice and commitment. If you feel that the relationship you are in is more of a curse than a blessing—when it brings more death to your soul than life—this is motivation for change.

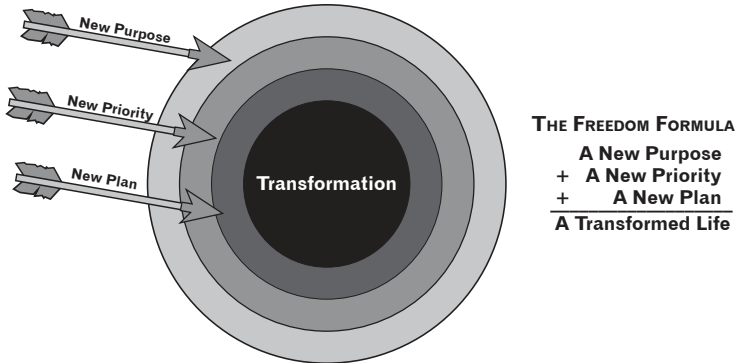
God makes it clear which path He wants us to choose:

*“I have set before you life
and death, blessings and curses.
Now choose life, so that . . .
you may love the LORD your God,
listen to his voice,
and hold fast to him.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 30:19–20)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!

With the motivation to change comes the need to establish three new targets and a systematic strategy for hitting them.



Target #1—A New Purpose

God's purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

My Personalized Plan

Through the strength of Christ, I will confront my own codependency and take the necessary steps to regain balance in my life.

I will confront the fact that I am codependent.¹⁶ I will . . .

- *Admit the truth* to myself. I will be honest with myself about my pattern of being emotionally addicted to another person.
- *Admit the truth* to someone else. I will identify the beliefs and behaviors that have perpetuated my emotional addiction and share them with an objective, trusted friend.
- *Admit the truth* to God. I realize that my emotional addiction is a serious sin in the eyes of God, and I choose now to confess it to Him.
“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”
(JAMES 5:16).

I will confront the consequences of my codependency. I will . . .

- *Accept responsibility* for how my past experiences and reactions have hurt my adult relationships (by becoming manipulative, controlling, possessive, or angry).
- *Accept responsibility* for the pain I have caused myself because of my codependency (by becoming jealous, envious, selfish, or obsessive).
- *Accept responsibility* for the ways my codependency has weakened my relationship with God (by a loss of quality time, quantity of time, and intimacy with the Lord).
“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (PROVERBS 28:13).

I will confront my painful emotions. I will . . .

- *Understand* that I will have pain no matter what I choose. If I leave the codependent relationship, I will hurt, but if I stay, I will hurt later. Clearly, the only hope I have for future healing is to leave the codependent lifestyle forever.
- *Understand* that when the intensity of the relationship diminishes, I will experience emotional withdrawal from the exhilarating highs.
- *Understand* that I will need the support of others to get through the initial pain of withdrawal and to help me avoid anesthetizing my pain with a secondary addiction.
“The pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice”
(PROVERBS 27:9).

I will confront my “secondary addictions.”¹⁷ I will . . .

- *Recognize* that, in an effort to numb the emotional pain of the relationship, codependency often leads to other addictions, such as a chemical dependency, sexual addiction, compulsive eating, excessive spending, social media, or gambling.
- *Recognize* my existing “secondary addictions” and then seek counseling and spiritual support to overcome them.
- *Recognize* that my recovery from a secondary addiction is dependent on recovery from my primary addiction to codependent relationships.

“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out” (PROVERBS 18:15).

I will confront my current codependent relationship.¹⁸ I will . . .

- *Acknowledge* my codependent role in the relationship and stop relating through codependent patterns.
- *Acknowledge* my destructive behaviors (write them down), and replace them with constructive behaviors (write them down).
- *Acknowledge* the natural pain of emotional withdrawal (common to the healing of addictions) and focus on God’s supernatural purpose (conforming me to the character of Christ).

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:20).

I will confront my codependent focus. I will . . .

- *Stop focusing* on what the other person is doing and start focusing on what I need to do in order to become emotionally healthy.
- *Stop focusing* on the other person’s problems and start focusing on solving my own problems (those resulting from my neglect of people and projects in my life).
- *Stop focusing* on trying to change the other person and start focusing on changing myself.

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception” (PROVERBS 14:8).

I will confront my codependent conflicts.¹⁹ I will . . .

- *Not allow* myself to become trapped in heated arguments or to become emotionally hooked by the bad behavior of the other person. Instead, I will say several times, “I will not argue”—and then disengage from the conflict. I will decide ahead of time that when agitation begins, I will distance myself.
- *Not defend* myself when I am unjustly blamed. Instead, I will say only once, “I’m sorry you feel that way. That doesn’t reflect my heart.”
- *Not be afraid* to leave if the conflict continues. I’ll say, “I will be gone for a while,” then calmly walk away.

“Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels” (2 TIMOTHY 2:23).

I will confront my codependent responses.²⁰ I will . . .

- *Remind myself* that problem people are free to choose wrong. I will not react to their problem behavior—they are independent of me.
- *Remind myself* not to return insult for insult. I will refuse to raise my voice.
- *Remind myself* that my Christlike role is to respond with respect, even when others are disrespectful.

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. . . . But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 PETER 3:9, 15–16).

I will confront what I need to *leave* in order to receive.²¹ I will . . .

- *Leave* my childhood and my dependent thinking (“I can’t live without you.”), then enter into healthy adulthood (“I want you in my life, but if something were to happen, I could live without you.”). I’ll face the truth and reality and refuse falsehood and fantasy.
- *Leave* my immature need to be dependent on someone else and embrace my mature need to be dependent on the Lord, who will make me whole within myself.

- *Leave* my fantasy relationships (thinking, *You are my “all-in-all”*) and instead nurture several balanced relationships (ones in which there is healthy give-and-take).

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses”
(PROVERBS 27:6).

I will confront my need to build mature, non-codependent relationships.²² I will . . .

- *Establish* several interdependent relationships—not just one exclusive relationship. I need mature relationships in which my codependency issues can be resolved and my needs can be met in healthy ways through multiple people.
- *Establish* emotionally balanced relationships without being needy of the extreme highs and lows of codependent relationships.
- *Establish* personal boundaries in all of my relationships, saying *No* when I need to say it and holding to my *No*.

“Let us . . . be taken forward to maturity” (HEBREWS 6:1).

How to Regain Balance: Recovery Step #1

Look at Your Past Love Addictions

Adam and Eve need to regain balance, to find restoration in their relationships with one another and with God. The Creator confronts the pair about their sinful actions—and dire consequences follow. The serpent, believed by many to have been a beautiful, upright creature, is cursed to crawl on its belly all of its days. Furthermore, God declares to Satan (who inhabits the serpent), *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel”* (Genesis 3:15).

Known as *protoevangelium*, this is the Bible’s first mention of God making a way—through the death and resurrection of Jesus—to have a restored relationship with mankind. This gospel message foretells God making the move to regain a balanced relationship.

*“For God did not send his Son into the world
to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him.”*
(JOHN 3:17)

One effective way to confront codependent love relationships is by using the written word. Spelling out your thoughts, feelings, and actions will actually distance them from you so that you can look at them. Putting your life on paper is not easy, but until you are ready to take a close look at your past *love addiction*, you cannot expect to change it.

Write down the history of your codependent love relationships. First ask the Spirit of God to bring to mind what you need to know and then to teach you what you need to do. He will give you both understanding and wisdom to discover how to be free from the fetters of addiction and how to live in His glorious freedom.²³

Scripture esteems those who pursue wisdom.

*“The one who gets wisdom loves life;
the one who cherishes understanding
will soon prosper.”*
(PROVERBS 19:8)

Questions to Ask Yourself

Make a list of every person with whom you have had a codependent relationship. Think through your family and friends. Put each name at the top of a separate page and then answer the following questions for each relationship:

1. Write out . . .

- How did you meet and how were you attracted to this person?
- How did you pursue and draw this person to you?
- How did you feel and what did you fantasize about this person?

Conclude by answering . . .

- How do you think God feels about your choices?

Realize that the Lord is ready to meet your deepest emotional needs.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you” (PSALM 32:8).

2. Write out . . .

- How did the relationship progress through various stages (Fascination, Fantasy, Fog, Fear, Forsaking, Fixation, Frenzy)?
- How did you feel in each stage?
- How did you act during each stage?

Conclude by answering . . .

- How did you fail to involve God in your life during each stage?

Realize how ready the Lord is to intervene.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (PSALM 46:1).

3. Write out . . .

- How did you become preoccupied with the relationship?
- How did you start neglecting yourself and start focusing on taking care of the other person?
- How did you come to expect that person to meet all of your needs?

Conclude by answering . . .

- How did you start neglecting God? When did you stop relying on Him?

Realize how ready the Lord is to fulfill His plan for you.

“However, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’—the things God has prepared for those who love him” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:9).

4. Write out . . .

- How has this relationship replicated your painful childhood experiences?
- How were you mistreated in the relationship and how did you react?

- How does the relationship impact you today?

Conclude by answering . . .

- How is God replacing (or wanting to replace) your self-destructive, love-addicted patterns with constructive, healthy, holy patterns?

Realize how ready the Lord is to “re-parent” you in order to meet your deepest needs and heal your deepest hurts.²⁴Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier, *Love is a Choice*, 258.

“Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me”
(PSALM 27:10).

5. Write out . . .

- How have you experienced fear, envy, jealousy, abandonment, and anger in the relationship?
- How did you come to assign a higher priority to this person than to everything else?
- How have you made the person the focus of your thought life?

Conclude by answering . . .

- How can you think like Christ in order to overcome destructive feelings and to live out of your resources in Christ?

Realize how ready the Lord is to align your thinking to His will.

“We have the mind of Christ” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:16).

6. Write out . . .

- How do you feel about the person and the relationship now?
- How has your perspective changed?
- How did things, people, and circumstances become factors in changing your perspective?

Conclude by answering . . .

- How do you think God has been involved in changing your perspective?

Realize how ready the Lord is to complete His perfect plan for your life.

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 1:6).

How to Regain Balance: Recovery Step #2

Develop Healthy Interdependent Relationships

Adam and Eve’s misplaced dependencies result in history’s first recorded eviction—the pair is forever banished from their home, the Garden of Eden. And there are other dire consequences from the hand of God. Eve’s pain in childbearing will greatly increase, and Adam will fight thorns and thistles as he tends the ground.

But the greatest consequence of all is God’s proclamation of physical death: *“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return”* (Genesis 3:19).

We all love to see pictures of babies and then observe their stairstep growth into young adulthood. Built within little, immature children is the ability to grow to maturity. Why should it be any less for immature adults? They too can move from their immaturity and develop mature relationships.

Once we understand the goal of each developmental stage for reestablishing healthy relationships, we can set out to accomplish those goals—without the aid of earthly parents. Many have done this by “taking the hand” of the heavenly Father and allowing Him to “re-parent” them. You too can do this by having a plan and then working your plan with the caring support of others. It is an enormously important journey with enormously gratifying rewards. This is the journey God intended for you to take from the beginning.

This is His goal for you now—to grow from immaturity to maturity, from childhood to adulthood by developing healthy, interdependent relationships.

Scripture provides this sound exhortation:

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I put
the ways of childhood behind me.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:11)

Making Healthy Interdependent Relationships Happen

Make it your goal to develop an intimate relationship with God and to form interdependent relationships with significant people in your life.

- *Commit* to becoming actively involved in a group Bible study and in group prayer.
- *Commit* to reading God’s Word on a daily basis and memorizing Scripture.
- *Commit* to finding an accountability group and a Christian “relationship mentor” who will be available to you, spend time with you on a regular basis, be honest with you, and coach you in your relationships.

“Let us consider . . . not giving up meeting together . . . but encouraging one another” (HEBREWS 10:24-25).

Make a plan to move toward maturity in your relationships.

- *Ask God* to help you discern where you are stuck in the relationship developmental stages.
- *Ask your mentor* or another wise person to help you identify your relationship needs (for example: sharing, problem solving, listening, negotiating).
- *Ask your accountability group* to hold you responsible to establish appropriate goals in order to meet each of your relationship needs.

“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (JAMES 1:4).

Make your relationship with your parents healthy.

- *Choose* to resolve any unhealthy patterns with your parents. Break any unhealthy bond and, if possible, establish mature, adult bonds with each parent.

- Choose not to be emotionally enmeshed, needy, or controlled by your parents. If necessary, separate yourself emotionally until you can respond in a healthy way with no strings attached.
- Choose to identify and process your “family of origin” problems, forgive your offenders, and grieve your losses. Say, “That was then; this is now.”

“Do not say, ‘I’ll do to them as they have done to me; I’ll pay them back for what they did’” (PROVERBS 24:29).

Make a vow to be a person of integrity in thought, word, and deed.

- Learn to free yourself of any family secrets—refuse to carry them any longer.
- Learn to listen, to say *No*, to set boundaries, to give and receive, and to ask for what you need from people. Then practice, practice, practice these new, healthy patterns.
- Learn to feel your feelings, to express hurt, and to withdraw and think about what you need to do or say. Write out your action plan, rehearse it, then do it.

“Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1 PETER 1:13–15).

Make a new job description.

- My job is to discern the character of a person and to respond accordingly with maturity.
- My job is to be a “safe” person for my friends and family and to be present and attentive in my relationships.
- My job is to take care of myself and to be responsible for myself without hurting, punishing, attacking, getting even, or lying to myself or to others.

“I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live” (JOB 27:6).

Make a new commitment to yourself.

- *I will* let go of the old, self-centered me because I am growing into a new, Christ-centered me.
- *I will* exchange the lies I've believed about myself for God's truth about me according to His Word.
- *I will* no longer betray myself by making immature choices, and I will redeem my past, bad choices by making good, mature choices.

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (EPHESIANS 4:22–24).

Make mature relationships your highest goal.

- *Focus* on forming friendships in which you are free to learn, grow, and mature as opposed to emotional attachments that lead to roller-coaster relationships.
- *Focus* on any relationships that have the potential to trigger your codependent tendencies and guard your heart from the emotional highs and lows.
- *Focus* on building relationships with trustworthy, mature Christians whose goal is Christlikeness.

During a time of severe trial, Paul offered this encouragement to Timothy, his son in the faith:

"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"
(2 TIMOTHY 2:1).

How to Regain Balance: Recovery Step #3

Finding the Road to Freedom

Despite Adam and Eve's misplaced dependencies, God graciously provides for them and assures them of His unchanging love. He sacrifices animals to use their skins to make garments for Adam and Eve. He later blesses the couple with children.

But His greatest provision in regaining balance in their relationship is the future death and resurrection of Jesus, who will pay for Adam and Eve's sins and provide the way to receive eternal life. It is Jesus who once again makes everything perfect.

Scripture draws a parallel between Adam and Jesus:

*“For if, by the trespass of the one man
death reigned through that one man,
how much more will those who receive
God’s abundant provision of grace
and the gift of righteousness
reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”*

(ROMANS 5:17)

When you behave in a codependent way, you attempt to meet your needs in an effort to “do it all” or to be another person’s “all-in-all.” However, you can find the road to freedom by *releasing* your desire to control or to change another person.

When you give the Lord control of your life and release to Him the desire to change another person, you can rest in His assurance:

*“My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 12:9)

Release

If your heart's desire is to develop healthy, interdependent relationships, apply the directives of the following acrostic on R-E-L-E-A-S-E.

R-Recognize that you are overly dependent on another person, then choose to place your dependency on God.

- *Admit* that your codependency is a sin.
- *Pray* that God will give you the desire to put Him first and to please Him in all your relationships.
- *Determine* to look to the Lord to meet your needs for love, significance, and security.²⁵
- *Realize* that God did not create you to meet all the needs of another person.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (MARK 12:30).

E-Examine your patterns of codependent thinking.

- *Don't* believe that pleasing people is always Christlike.
- *Don't* think you should always assume the role of peacemaker.
- *Don't* fear losing the love of others when you allow them to suffer the consequences of their negative actions.
- *Don't* say *Yes* when you really believe you should say *No*.

“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (ACTS 24:16).

L-Let go of your “super responsible” mind-set.

- *Confess* that you are trying to be like God in the life of another person.
- *Trust* God to be actively working in the lives of people in your life.
- *Realize* that you cannot make another person be dependable or responsible.
- *Rest* in God's sovereign control over all people, events, and circumstances.

“What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (EXODUS 18:17–18).

E-Extend forgiveness to those who have caused you pain.

- *Reflect* on any type of abuse you have experienced in the past—verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual.
- *Answer*: What has been unjust and painful in your life?
- *Answer*: Who do you need to forgive and are you willing to release this person to God?
- *Choose* to forgive again whenever your angry feelings resurface.
“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

Prayer of Forgiveness

“God, you know the pain that I have experienced in my past.
I don’t want to keep carrying all of this pain for the rest of my life.
I release (list hurts) into your hands,
and I ask you to heal my emotional pain.
Lord, you know what (name of person) has done to hurt me.
As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name).
I take (name) off of my emotional hook
and put (name) onto your hook.
Thank you, Lord Jesus, for setting me FREE.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

A-Appropriate your identity in Christ.

- *Learn* to live out of your resources in Christ Jesus.
- *Know* the truth: “I can be emotionally set free because Christ lives in me.”
“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (JOHN 8:36).
- *Believe* the truth: “I can change from having my dependency on people to having my dependency on God through the power of Christ in me.”
“For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (ISAIAH 41:13).

- *Appropriate* the truth: “I will nurture only healthy, godly relationships because I have been given a new nature in Christ.”
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (GALATIANS 2:20).

S-Set healthy boundaries.

- *Communicate* the necessity for change.
“I realize I have not been responding to you in a healthy way. I have been far too dependent on you to meet my needs, and I have sought to meet all of your needs. I am committed to having healthy relationships and to putting God first in my life. I know I have had negative responses to you, and I intend to begin responding positively by making decisions based on what is right in the eyes of God.”
- *Establish* what you need to ask forgiveness for.
“I realize I was wrong for ____ (not speaking up when I should have, not being the person I should have been in this relationship). Will you forgive me?”
- *Establish* what your limits of responsibility will be.
“I feel responsible for _____. But I am not responsible for _____ (making you happy, making you feel significant). I want you to be happy, but I don’t have the power to make you happy.”
- *Establish* your limits of involvement.
“I want to do _____ with/for you, but I don’t feel led by God to do _____.”
“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty” (PROVERBS 27:12).

E-Exchange your emotional focus for a spiritual focus.

- *Make* God and your spiritual growth your first priority.
- *Attend* an in-depth Bible study in order to learn the heart of God and to grow spiritually with the people of God.
- *Memorize* sections of Scripture to put God’s Word in your heart and to learn His ways.

- *Redirect* your thoughts to the Lord and take “prayer walks” (talking out loud to the Lord as you walk regularly in your neighborhood or on a trail).

“Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word” (PSALM 119:35–37).

At the very core of codependency is idolatry—that is, giving greater priority to a person than to God himself. God created you and has a perfect plan for your life. He loves you and knows how to fulfill you. If you are in a codependent relationship . . .

Excessive care causes you to compromise your convictions.

Excessive loyalty leaves you without healthy boundaries.

Excessive “love” leads you to say *Yes* when you should say *No*.

God alone has the right to have primary rule in your heart and over your life. Any other substitute is simply idolatry. The Bible says,

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your strength.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 6:5)

Making It All Possible through Christ’s Power

The cure for codependency is rooted in developing an ever-deepening relationship with the Lord. Your increased intimacy with Him will naturally conform you to His character. When the Lord lives inside you, *you can live in His power*. This means that, because Christ was not codependent, you have His power to overcome codependency.

*“In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

(JOHN 16:33)

Releasing You

Releasing is not to stop loving you,
but is to love enough to stop leaning on you.

Releasing is not to stop caring for you,
but is to care enough to stop controlling you.

Releasing is not to turn away from you,
but is to turn to Christ, trusting His control over you.

Releasing is not to harm you,
but is to realize “my help” has been harmful.

Releasing is not to hurt you,
but is to be willing to be hurt for healing.

Releasing is not to judge you,
but is to let the divine Judge judge me.

Releasing is not to restrict you,
but is to restrict my demands of you.

Releasing is not to refuse you,
but is to refuse to keep reality from you.

Releasing is not to cut myself off from you,
but is to prune the unfruitful away from you.

Releasing is not to prove my power over you,
but is to admit I am powerless to change you.

Releasing is not to stop believing in you,
but is to believe the Lord alone will build character in you.

Releasing you is not to condemn the past,
but is to cherish the present and commit our future to God.

—June Hunt

How to Keep from Slipping Back into Codependency

There is a great deal of truth in the adage: *old habits die hard*.

The same can be said about codependency. Even the most sincere of hearts on the road to recovery can get sidetracked and slip back into codependent ways of relating. The temptation to form new relationship addictions is very real, so learn to recognize the thought patterns and behaviors that signal a slide back into codependence.²⁶

Indicators That Signal a Backslide into Codependence

Compulsive thoughts . . . “I feel incomplete without him.”

A sense of desperation accompanying the pursuit of a new relationship . . . “I don’t want to be alone any more.”

Acting on impulse rather than praying, seeking counsel, and analyzing true motives . . . “I have to have her in my life.”

A growing disinterest in healthy, reformed ways of relating . . . “I don’t know why I need to change.”

A preoccupation with saving, changing, or healing the partner in the new relationship . . . “He has to have me in his life.”

The resurgence of codependent feelings and behaviors reminiscent of former relationships . . . “It feels good to feel needed.”²⁷

Realize, codependency is a spiritual stronghold, and we can and must demolish every stronghold in our lives. The Bible says . . .

*“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.
On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
We demolish arguments and every pretension
that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,
and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 10:4–5)

Codependent Family Members

Question: “My mother and my brother are deeply entrenched in a sick, codependent relationship. No one dares confront the two directly because of fear of damaging the family dynamics. What can I do to help them and to help me not be impacted by their unhealthy relationship? Should we seek to intervene or should we simply pray?”

Answer: Prayer is paramount, so definitely pray for both your mother and brother and for other family members in pain over this unhealthy relationship.

Pray that . . .

- They will have discernment to recognize their codependent relationship and also that they will have the courage to change.
- They will become aware of the emotional pain their relationship is bringing on other family members and be convicted that they need to change.
- The Lord will make it clear if He wants someone to speak to them about their relationship and to then give that person both His wisdom and His heart when speaking.
- The motivation for all involved will be love for one another—to do what is ultimately best for everyone.
- God’s perfect will be done in the lives of all family members regardless of the choices any one of them makes.
- Every family member will become more sensitive to the legitimate, unmet needs of those around them and will seek to meet those needs in a healthy way.
- God will work within each family member to heal past wounds and will bring His good out of every situation.

- God will guard each heart from becoming bitter or hardened and that they will release this codependent relationship to Him.

*“My eyes are ever on the LORD,
for only he will release my feet
from the snare.”*

(PSALM 25:15)



SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

What does the Lord say about having
no other gods in my life . . . about making
my relationship with Him my priority?

*"You shall have **no other gods** before me."
(EXODUS 20:3)*

Can the **Son of God** **set you free**
from a codependent relationship?

*"So if the **Son sets you free**, you will be free indeed."
(JOHN 8:36)*

Doesn't God want me to **trust in** and **draw**
strength from significant people in my life?

*"This is what the LORD says:
'Cursed is the one who **trusts in** man,
who **draws strength from** mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the LORD."
(JEREMIAH 17:5)*

How do I **forgive a grievance** I have toward
someone who drains me emotionally?

*"Bear with each other and **forgive** one another
if any of you has **a grievance** against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
(COLOSSIANS 3:13)*

Am I to put my **trust in the Lord**
or put my **confidence** in people?

*“But blessed is the one who **trusts in the Lord**,
whose **confidence** is in him.”*

(JEREMIAH 17:7)

Don't I need someone to **depend on** to be
my **rock** of strength . . . **my refuge**?

*“My salvation and my honor **depend on** God;
he is my mighty **rock, my refuge.**”*

(PSALM 62:7)

When I think people need help,
should I insist that they **carry their own load**?

*“Each one should test their own actions.
Then they can take pride in themselves alone,
without comparing themselves to someone else,
for each one should **carry their own load.**”*

(GALATIANS 6:4–5)

Is there something wrong with seeking to **please**
people in order to **win** their **approval**?

*“Am I now trying to **win** the **approval** of human beings,
or of God? Or am I trying to **please people**?*

*If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

(GALATIANS 1:10)

Can God **give me strength** to break away
from a codependent relationship?

*"I can do all this through Christ
who **gives me strength.**"*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV)

Why should I **cast my anxiety on** the Lord
when I'm trying to become more independent?

*"**Cast** all your **anxiety on** him
because he cares for you."*

(1 PETER 5:7)



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God's Word is our sure and steady anchor, the foundation of our ministry and all our resources. We are grateful to God for His 30+ years of guidance and enabling us to impact the world with His truth that sets people free.

Resources for the Continuum of Care and Ministry

We present biblical hope and practical help through our print and digital resources (over two million books sold), radio broadcasts, and podcasts. Likewise, our counseling services and seminars, the International Christian Coaching Institute (ICCI), the Lifeline to Hope caregiver training program, credentialing and certifications, and a global outreach that touches over 60 countries in 36 languages and on 6 continents—are all designed to help people have a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(Jeremiah 29:11)

To learn more about Hope For The Heart, our ministry, resources, and initiatives, call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or visit HopeForTheHeart.org.

www.HopeForTheHeart.org

CODEPENDENCY

The Need to Be Needed

You've probably heard about getting hooked on drugs or alcohol or being glued to a slot machine from sunup to sundown, but is it possible to actually become addicted...to a person? Sadly, the answer is Yes. Codependency is a relationship addiction. Comparable to depending on false gods that are powerless to help, or depending on a broken water well that won't hold water, it simply won't work! In these *Keys for Living*, find ways to break the chains of relationship addiction and foster a renewed commitment to keep Christ first in your life.

KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



"First seek the counsel of the LORD."
(1 Kings 22:5)

Life is full of challenges, but there is hope. The *Keys for Living Library* provides biblical truth and practical help for more than 100 topics to help you overcome difficulties, grow in maturity, and move forward in life. In each of the 100+ Keys, you'll discover God's wisdom and guidance in a simple format:

- *Definitions* help you understand the topic from God's perspective.
- *Characteristics* give insight into the different aspects of the topic.
- *Causes* shed light on the underlying issues related to the topic.
- *Steps to Solution* show you how to be transformed and walk in freedom.

Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10). Our prayer is that God will use these *Keys for Living* to encourage, equip, and empower you with His life-changing truth.

