Codependency and Christian Living

The Problem:

On the surface, codependency sounds like “Christian teaching.” Codependents always put each other first before taking care of themselves. (Aren’t Christians to put others first?) Co dependents give themselves away. (Shouldn’t Christians do the same?) Codependents martyr themselves. (Christianity honors its martyrs.)

Compliance Patterns

As a codependent, you:

- Assume responsibility for other’s feelings and behaviors
- Feel guilty about other’s feelings and behaviors
- Have difficulty identifying what you are feeling
- Have difficulty expressing feelings
- Are afraid of your own anger, yet sometimes erupt in rage
- Worry about how others may respond to your feelings, opinions, and behavior
- Have difficulty making decisions
- Are afraid of being hurt and/or rejected by others
- Minimize, alter, or deny how you truly feel
- Are very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same
- Are afraid to express differing opinions or feeling
- Value other opinions and feelings more than your own
- Put other people’s needs and desires before your own
- Embarrassed to receive recognition and praise, or gifts
- Judge everything you think, say, or do harshly, never as “good enough”
- Are a perfectionist
- Are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long
- Do not ask others to meet your needs or desires
- Do not perceive yourself as lovable and worthwhile
- Compromise your own values and integrity to avoid rejection or other’s anger

In its broadest sense, codependency can be defined as an addiction to people, behaviors, or things. Codependency is the fallacy of trying to control inner feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside. To the codependent, control or the lack of it is central to every aspect of life.

The Solution

Jesus taught the value of the individual. He said we are to love others equal to ourselves, not more than ourselves. The love of self forms the basis for loving others. The differences between a life of service and codependency take several forms. Motivation differs. Does the individual give him/herself and his/her service freely or because he/she considers him/herself to be of no value? Does he/she seek to “please people?” Does he/she act out of guilt or fear? Does he/she act out a need to be needed (which means he/she actually uses the other person to meet his/her own needs; the “helpee” becomes an object to help the helper achieve his/her own goals).
Christian View of Recovery

- Codependents learn to gain his/her self-worth solely through the eyes of Jesus Christ.
- Christianity (the Bible) teaches that a person has worth simply because they were created by God.
- Contrary to the world’s view, a person’s self-worth is not based on the work they do or the service they perform.
- Service is to be an active choice. Codependents learn to “act” rather than “react.”
- Codependents allow healthy Christian service to bring joy.
- Christian faith calls for balanced living and taking care of oneself.
- Codependents learn to choose balanced behavior rather than addictive behavior and to allow others to be in charge of their own lives.
- Codependents learn to live balanced lives; taking responsibility for their own health and well-being.
- Codependents learn how to set and hold healthy boundaries and to set limits for themselves, not allowing others to compromise those boundaries.
- Codependents learn to help others in appropriate ways, by allowing others to act independently, rather than making others dependent on them.
- Codependents learn to be God-directed and be free from compulsiveness, knowing that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, brings the ultimate results.

Enabling

Enabling is defined as reacting to a person in such a way as to shield him/her from the full impact of the harmful consequences of his/her behavior. Enabling behavior differs from helping in that it permits or allows the person to be irresponsible, when truly helping them would encourage increased acceptance or personal responsibility.

Enabling is:

- **Protection** from natural consequences
- **Keeping secrets** about behavior from others in order to keep peace
- **Making excuses** for the behavior
- **Bailing out of trouble** (debts, tickets, paying lawyers, providing jobs, etc.)
- **Blaming others** for dependent person’s behavior (friends, teachers, church, employers, family, SELF, etc.)
- **Seeing the problem as a result of something else** (shyness, adolescence, loneliness, broken home, etc.)
- **Avoiding** the dependent person in order to keep peace (out of sight-out of mind)
- **Giving money** that is undeserved/uneared
- **Attempting to control** (planning activities, choosing friends, getting jobs)
- **Making threats** that have no follow-through or consistency
- **Taking care** of the dependent person (doing what he/she should be expected to do for themselves)