

## The Truth About Co-Dependency

by Beverly Littau

Co-dependency is a term that is used a great deal these days. It means different things to different people, so let us use the following definition for the purpose of clarity in this pamphlet: *“Co-dependency is a state of being dependent on another person to the point of being controlled or manipulated by that person.”*

A way of thinking of a co-dependent relationship is that both people are getting their unhealthy needs met in unhealthy ways. One may have the need to be dependent and needy, and the other may have the need to be needed. Whatever the needs are in the relationship, the unhealthy relationship is often maintained by a co-dependency of enabling and controlling.

A co-dependent relationship is characterized by some or all of these:

- A loss of identity
- Low self-worth
- Difficulty establishing healthy, intimate relationships
- Control and manipulation
- Fear of abandonment
- Feeling trapped
- Denial
- Addiction to the relationship dynamics
- Usually other addictions

It is important to remember that within any relationship there can be times when the relationship is unbalanced, with one person doing most or all of the giving and the other one being the recipient of care. One example is when one is suffering a major physical illness or has had a serious accident. Another example is when one person has suffered a major loss of some kind.

These types of things can put a normally healthy relationship in a state of unbalance that is perfectly normal. Co-dependency is a pervasive pattern, not something that is situational as a result of a life stressor. Usually, in a healthy relationship, once the stressor is past, the balance will begin to be restored again and there will be evidence once more of interdependence.

There are some questions to ask yourself when you are exploring whether your relationship has the unhealthy characteristics of co-dependence:

*Do I have difficulty setting and keeping boundaries?*

*Do I keep silent to keep the peace?*

*Do I feel sad and lonely when I am alone?*

*Do I defend my relationship to another person?*

*Do I feel angry when my help is not wanted?*

*Do I deny my own feelings and needs?*

*Do I fear conflict?*

*Do I blame myself for most of the problems?*

It is important to remember that God has created us to need relationships. We should enjoy the love and companionship of others, but when we begin to rely on another to meet all of our needs, that is when some unhealthy boundaries begin to form. God has created us to place all of our dependence upon Him. We must rely upon Him to meet our needs, and yes, sometimes He does that through our relationships with others.

God wants our dependence to be on Him, but He also desires for us to live in interdependence with the people in our lives. *Interdependence is characterized by a balanced dependence between or among people.* There is give and take. There is balance. There is mutual respect and care.

What is the solution to co-dependency? The solution, in general terms, is to begin to realize that you cannot be the person to solve all of the needs in your loved one's life. You are not the answer and you don't have the answer.

Begin to adapt some healthy ways of thinking. Surround yourself with healthy people who can help you change the way you think. Consider seeing a counselor if you feel the need.

Here are some healthy thoughts to get you started:

- I cannot meet my loved one's every need.
- My loved one must learn to rely on others besides me and upon God to meet their needs.
- I am not responsible for my loved one's feelings or behaviors.
- I will not say "yes" when healthy boundaries tell me to say "no."
- I do not need to be a people-pleaser to be a good Christian.
- I need to please God first, and not worry about the approval of others.

Co-dependency is a trap in which we are always trying to either *earn* another's love and approval or *keep* their love and approval. It is often characterized by fear, resentment, anger, depression, and anxiety.

It takes a lot of courage to step out of the pattern of co-dependency and begin to bring healthy boundaries into a relationship that has been unbalanced. With God's help we can become healthy in our relationships and we can begin to thrive!

### **Bible Verses to Consider**

**I Peter 5:7** – "Cast all your cares on Him, because He cares for you."

**Psalms 62:7** – "My salvation and glory depend on God; my strong rock, my refuge is in God."

**Jeremiah 17:5** – "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind, who makes human flesh his strength and turns his heart from the Lord."

**Jeremiah 17:7** – "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord."

**Psalms 91:15** - God says, "When he calls out to Me, I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and give him honor."

**Galatians 6:2-3 and 5** – "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you fulfill the law of Christ. For each person should carry his own load."

**II Corinthians 5:9** – "We make it our aim to please God."

**Acts 5:29** – "We ought to please God rather than men."

**James 5:12** – "Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no,' or you will be condemned."

**1 Thessalonians 4:10-12** – "We encourage you, brothers...to lead a quiet life, mind your own business, and work with your own hands...so that you may walk properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone."