

Live Your Own Life | letting go of codependency

■ by Charlene Brouwer, MA, LAMFT

Some of the words we commonly use can be especially hard to define. According to a project done by Kaplan and Dictionary.com, the top three words with the most definitions are “run” (179 different definitions), “take” (127), and “break” (123).

“Codependence,” while not as common, is another word that is complex in meaning. Used since the 1980’s in connection with emotional and relational health, this word has been especially popular in addiction recovery circles.

“Codependent” was originally used to describe someone who is dependent in an unhealthy way on someone who is addicted to alcohol, drugs, gambling, etc. However, a person can have codependent tendencies, even if they are not in a relationship with a person who has an addiction.

Melodie Beatie, author of *Codependent No More* suggests that, “The surest way to make ourselves crazy is to get involved in other people’s business, and the quickest way to become sane and happy is to tend to our own affairs.” We are being codependent when we lose sight of our own life because we are so involved in the life of someone else. In our codependence we are attempting to fix and control other people, while telling ourselves and others that we are “just trying to be helpful.”



Proverbs 19:19 gives us a picture of the chaos and futility that can characterize the life of someone who is codependent, “Short tempered people must pay their own penalty. If you rescue them once, you will have to do it again.” Repeatedly rescuing others can become a full time job, leaving little time or energy to devote to ourselves.

Letting go of codependency can be particularly challenging for Christians, as we strive to live a life of love and service. While Jesus asks his followers to deny themselves, notice that he asks us to carry our own cross daily. He does not ask us to carry a cross that belongs to someone else (Luke 9:23). In Galatians 6, Paul advises Christ’s followers to “Carry each other’s burdens” (v.2). Later in the same chapter he also states that “Each one should carry his own load” (v.5).

How do we live an emotionally healthy life, free from codependency, when even the Bible seems to give us conflicting messages? Following are some questions to ask ourselves daily:

- What or who occupies most of my daily thoughts, time, and energy?
- What are my true motivations for what I am presently saying or doing?
- What am I feeling and needing in this moment?
- How is God at work in my life at this time?

If you find yourself struggling with codependent tendencies, know that you are not alone! There are many helpful resources available today in the form of psychotherapy, support groups and reading material. In keeping with Step 11 of The Twelve Steps, we can begin by seeking to improve our own relationship with God, “praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.”



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