

Co-Dependency

Co-dependency is a modern word, so we would not expect to find it in the Bible, but it is a condition or behavior pattern that is ages old, and therefore it certainly is addressed in God's word. You are being co-dependent when you get so wrapped up in another person's (a loved one's) life, worrying about that person, trying to "fix" that person, and trying to protect that person from the consequences of their mistakes or sins, that it damages your own life and puts severe strains on your other relationships. From God's point of view, **co-dependency is you usurping His place**; it is thinking that YOU have to be God, and YOU have to do the things that only God can do in that person's life. If you are a Christian, then co-dependency is a violation of God's commandments to "be anxious for nothing," to "take no anxious thought," and to "give thanks always and in all circumstances." It is disobedience in the area of "trusting in the Lord with all your heart, and leaning not on your own understanding," because the co-dependent person is trying to work out all the circumstances of another person's life by their own understanding, and manipulating. Jesus tells us how futile all this worry and co-dependent anxiety is, when He says, "Which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to your life's span?" We could paraphrase it and say, "Which of you by being anxious or indulging in co-dependent behavior can change your loved one's behavior?"

- **Proverbs 3:5-7** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes...."
- **Matthew 6:27** "And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span?"
- **Matthew 6:31-33** "Therefore, DO NOT WORRY...." "But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

This co-dependent worrying then is sin, because God tells us NOT to worry or be anxious about ANYTHING. If you continue to worry and be anxious or fearful about this loved one, you are disobeying God, but more importantly, **you are getting in the WAY of God**, and hindering Him from working in that person's life. When you look at your worrying and manipulating in this light, you realize how very serious it is, and that **instead of helping the person you love**, you are actually preventing God from doing all that He would like to do, or needs to do, in that person's life. Instead of worrying and manipulating, turn all that energy and compassion towards prayer. PRAY for that loved one, and allow God to be God in their life, and receive the peace of God in YOUR heart and life. The Lord loves your loved one much, much more than you could ever possibly love them, and He has the added advantage of knowing exactly what is in your loved one's heart, and of knowing what will happen in the future, and just how much and when to administer correction and discipline.

- **Philippians 4:6-7** "Be ANXIOUS for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your REQUESTS be made known to God. And **the peace of God**, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

You must RELEASE your anxiety to the Lord, and in fact **RELEASE that loved one completely into God's hands**, and then praise and give Him thanks. I Peter 5:7 calls it "casting all your cares on the Lord." **Fear and worry are the opposite of faith. ASK the Lord for the faith**, trust, and patience to put everything in His hands and **leave the results up to Him**. Don't try to tell God HOW YOU think He ought to answer your prayer, or how He should work in your loved one's life. You can put it all in God's hands because He loves you and wants what is best for you, and will work ALL things together for good. If you keep on insisting that God answer your prayers YOUR WAY and on YOUR SCHEDULE or timing, that is really a form of PRIDE (I Peter 5:5-7 "**God resists the proud**"). If anxious thoughts come to you, you must take those thoughts captive. If you are tempted to worry and DOUBT, or if you

find yourself falling back into co-dependent manipulations of any kind, stand against that temptation just as you would any other TEMPTATION to SIN. Don't be double-minded by releasing your loved one into God's hands one minute, and then taking it all back by getting in the mix, and trying to manipulate and "fix" the situation again yourself.

- **Romans 8:28** "And we know that ALL things work together for GOOD to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
- **I Peter 5:5-7** "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (in due time), **casting ALL your care (worry, anxiety, fear) upon Him**, because He cares for you."
- **Psalms 37:4-5 & 23-24** "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall GIVE YOU the DESIRES of YOUR HEART. COMMIT your way to the Lord, TRUST also in Him, and He shall BRING IT TO PASS. The STEPS of a righteous man are ORDERED by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand."
- **James 1:6-8** "But let him ASK in FAITH, nothing wavering (doubting). For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive ANYTHING of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Let's look at two situations, the story of the Prodigal Son in the Bible, and a recent situation in someone's life, to see how co-dependent behaviors don't work, and how trusting in God does work.

1.) The Prodigal Son - How God uses "bad" circumstances in someone's life to bring about repentance and good.

- **Luke 15:11-24** "And He said, 'A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." And he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there **he squandered his estate with loose living**. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and **he began to be in need**. And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine (pigs). And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and **no one was giving anything to him**. But **when he came to his senses**, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.'" And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found." And they began to be merry."

Jesus told this story as an illustration of our loving heavenly Father, and how He receives us back again from whatever "far country" we may have wandered to, and whatever trouble we've gotten into. But let's also look at this story from the earthly father's point of view. If the "Prodigal Son's" father had known where his son was, and what kind of trouble he was getting into, don't you think he might have been tempted to bail him out, or send him money, or call and leave messages begging the son to come home? As it was, there was no one to help him when he ran out of money and friends. The Prodigal Son was left to "wallow in the pigpen" and

suffer the consequences of his own behavior and wrong choices. **He must have suffered for some time**, because he got to the point of wishing he could even eat the pigs' food! No one was there to provide nice, hot meals just because he was hungry and homeless. Notice that it is immediately after "no one was giving anything to him" that it says he "came to his senses"! There certainly is a time and place for feeding and helping the homeless, but if someone's hunger and homelessness is the RESULT of their own sin, wrong choices, and rebellion, God may use those very circumstances to break down their stubbornness and pride, and bring them back to their senses. We see the earthly father in this story as watching and waiting for his son, so I think we can assume that he was praying earnestly for him. He was ready to restore his son to full position as son when he admitted his wrongdoing, but not before. He rushed down the road to greet his son **when the son was ALREADY on his way home and repentant**, but **he did NOT rush down to rescue him out of the pigpen!** Sometimes, the "pigpens" of our lives are NEEDED to show us what fools we are when we try to run away from our loving Heavenly Father. Jonah in the belly of the great fish is also an example of how God may allow us to reach the very bottom, before we are ready to turn back to God.

2.) Co-Dependency Tactics That Don't Work - How our co-dependent behavior may drive our loved ones further away, and may delay God's chastening and working in their lives. The following is an e-mail from a real situation, but the names have been deleted to maintain privacy: "I was still struggling with my hurt feelings with _____ from this morning, so once again for the zillionth time I had to repent for taking back what I thought I had given over to the Lord. These hurt feelings continued to come up over and over again. I am doing better now. It was just hard for me to understand that **after I left him a message crying at how upset I was he never returned my call**. It was hard for me to accept **the fact that my being upset and crying, didn't make him feel bad or call or anything**. I left him many messages and he just hasn't called back. So that's it. I really have no control over this at all, so once again, I gave it over to the Lord, there is nothing else I can do. I love _____, and am concerned at the hardness and stubbornness of his heart. I took it personally, like he just doesn't care and that hurt."

Whether the situation is with a wife, husband, girlfriend, boyfriend, adult or teenage child, or other family member or loved one, we can learn a lesson about co-dependent behavior and thinking from this one little incident:

A.) Note how the hurting one says, **"It was just hard for me to understand that after I left him a message crying at how upset I was he never returned my call."** Co-dependent behavior uses this kind of guilt-inducing tactics, but after a while, these tactics lose their effectiveness, if they ever had any effectiveness. What is insanity? Doing the same things over and over again, expecting different results. The person at the other end of the co-dependent's crying message is usually angry or disgusted at the behavior, especially if it happens over and over again, and it only drives them further away from the desired result. Instead, you must PRAY and learn to **TRUST God to work in that person's heart**, and then you must behave in a calm and mature way that will cause that person to respect you. There is always a great deal of disrespect on the part of the person at the other end of the co-dependent one's behavior. That disrespect will never cause them to change their behavior.

B.) This is similar to "A" above - **"my being upset and crying didn't make him feel bad or call or anything."** God's word tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-11), and yet how many times do we try to bring someone under conviction by our crying, whining, or being upset? God's word also tells us that we can pray for someone's spiritual eyes to be enlightened, and for them to see and realize the truth, and for them to come to repentance and escape from the devil's trap (Ephesians 1:18, II Timothy 2:25-26). Why don't you stop crying, stop being afraid, and "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today."

- **Exodus 14:13-14** "And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.....The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.'"

C.) "So that's it. I really have no control over this at all, so once again, I gave it over to the Lord, there is nothing else I can do." Finally, we see some light at the end of the tunnel. We are back at Steps 1 and 2 again, admitting our powerlessness (having no control over a situation or person), and realizing that only God can restore us to sanity.

Another issue involved in worry and co-dependency is doubting God's ability. We must understand that there is nothing beyond God's ability, but there may be some things that are not His will for our lives, and therefore He will withhold those things.

- **Genesis 18:14** "Is ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."
- **Job 42:2** "I know that **You can do all things**, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted."
- **Jeremiah 32:17 & 27** "Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and Your outstretched arm! **NOTHING is TOO DIFFICULT** for You." "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is ANYTHING too DIFFICULT for Me?"
- **Matthew 19:26** "But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but **with God ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.**'"
- **Mark 10:27** "But looking at them, Jesus said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for **WITH GOD all things are POSSIBLE.**'"
- **Luke 1:37** "For with God **NOTHING will be impossible.**"
- **Luke 18:27** "But He said, 'The things which are IMPOSSIBLE with men are **POSSIBLE with God.**'"
- **Ephesians 3:20** "Now to **Him who is ABLE** to do EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANTLY above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."

If you are praying for someone, and have committed your loved one into God's hands, there may be certain reasons for your prayers not being answered right away, or according to your time schedule.

- **1.) FREE WILL** - God will not FORCE someone against their will, either for salvation, or in a Christian's life for repentance, etc. Some Christians remain ignorant and stubborn out of their own choice and free will. II Timothy 2:24-26
- **2.) GOD'S TIMING** - Some things take time, because God is working all things together, and waiting for certain things to happen. Romans 4:16-21; Rom. 8:28; Psalm 37:5-7
- **3.) SIN or LACK OF PERSONAL GROWTH** - Obvious sin and disobedience will prevent God from answering our prayers. Also, lack of surrender to His will, and lack of putting the Lord FIRST PLACE in our lives. Mark 11:25; Psalm 66:18; I Peter 5:5-7; Rom. 12:1-2; I John 3:18-22; I Peter 3:12; II Peter 1:3-11; Matthew 6:33
- **4.) DOUBT AND UNBELIEF** - Lack of REAL faith, and wavering back and forth. James 1:6-8; James 5:15; Matt. 15:28; Mark 11:24
- **5.) IGNORANCE OF GOD'S WORD** - Not knowing the promises of God. John 15:7; Psalm 119:38,58,65; Hosea 4:6
- **6.) FAILURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS IN GOD'S WORD** - Pride, stubbornness, thinking we know better than God how He should answer us. Genesis 4:3-7; II Kings 5:8-14
- **7.) NOT GOD'S WILL** - We may be asking for something that is not His will for us, or something that is completely against His will for any child of His. I John 5:14-15; Psalm 84:11

- **8.) ASKING WITH WRONG MOTIVES** - The thing we're asking for may be in God's will, but He may withhold it if our MOTIVES are selfish or based in PRIDE. James 4:1-6; I Peter 5:5-7

Here are some prayers right out of God's word, that you can pray for your loved one. The first prayer is if your loved one is a Christian, but just not walking with the Lord as they should. The second prayer is for your loved one if they are unsaved. Obviously, the first and most important thing is for your loved one to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and then your prayers for their behavior will be more effective.

Sample Prayer for Your Loved One (instead of co-dependent behaviors)

(see Ephesians 1:17-19; Eph. 3:16-20; Col. 1:9-11, II Tim. 2:25-26)

Lord, I bring _____ to You now in prayer. I make my requests to You for _____ with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6) and ask that _____ might be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that he/she might walk in a manner worthy of You, Lord, pleasing You in all respects, and being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of You; strengthened with Your glorious power and might. I ask You, Lord, to grant repentance to _____, that _____ may come to their senses and recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. I thank You and praise You, Lord, that You are doing exceeding abundantly above all that I can ask or think for _____ right now, by Your power that is working in his/her life. Lord, I ask that You give unto _____ the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You; that the eyes of his/her understanding will be enlightened; that he/she may know what is the hope of your calling for him/her, and what are the riches of the glory of his/her inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of Your power toward him/her, because he/she believes in You. Thank You and praise You, Lord, that You are granting to _____, according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with might by Your Spirit in his/her "inner man"; that Christ is dwelling in _____'s heart by faith; that You are causing _____ to be rooted and grounded in Your love - that he/she would truly be able to comprehend how much You love him/her - and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and that You are causing _____ to be filled with all the fullness of God through Your Holy Spirit (see Eph. 5:18).

Sample Prayer for Salvation for Your Loved One (instead of co-dependent behaviors)

(See Acts 26:18, II Corinthians 4:4 & 6, John 6:44)

Lord, I pray that You would open _____'s eyes, and turn him/her from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto You. I pray that _____ might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance in heaven through Your Son Jesus Christ. Lord, I ask You to remove the blinding that Satan has put in the mind of _____ and I ask You to shine the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ into _____'s heart, to bring _____ the knowledge of who Jesus really is - He is the very image of God, not just a good man or a prophet. And I ask You, Heavenly Father, to draw _____ to Your Son Jesus Christ.