

Co-Dependency Part 2 - The "Enabler"

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 (usually 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 trying to usurp 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. The term "enabler" is also a modern word, and not found in the Bible by that name, but the behavior is as old as the Fall of Man. An enabler is one who enables or facilitates another person to continue in their addiction, dysfunctional behavior, immaturity or sin. It could be by giving money to someone rather than allowing them to stand on their own two feet and provide for themselves. It could be a person making phone calls and making excuses for someone who is suffering from a hangover, or who can't make it to work because of substance abuse of some kind. It could be bailing someone out from jail, or any other form of intervention between that person and the consequences of their own actions. Some enablers, especially parents to their children, are helping them out of guilt because of abuse or neglect in the past, or trying to make up for something they were deprived of during childhood. Many co-dependent people and enablers have low self esteem, and they are afraid to say "No" to the one they've been helping, or it makes them feel good about themselves to think they are helping or rescuing someone, when in reality, their "help" and attempts to rescue that person are only making things worse, putting off the inevitable consequences, or hindering any growth and maturity in that person's life.

If you are a Christian, then co-dependency and enabling 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 enabler 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 manipulating 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 & 31-33** "And which of you **by being anxious** can add a single cubit to his life's span?" "Therefore, **DO NOT WORRY**...." "But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Co-dependent worrying is sin, because God tells us NOT to worry or be anxious about ANYTHING. More importantly, if you are an enabler, **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. 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.

- **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."

Now let's look at the story Jesus told about "The Prodigal Son" to see 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."

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 somehow, 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. There was no welfare system to support him. 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. **Your friend or loved one may NEED to** end up temporarily in a homeless shelter, or in jail, or have their children taken away from them, or some other kind of "hitting bottom" before God can work in their life, or before they will listen to Him. They probably won't like it, and may turn against you for a while, but God's word promises "the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by" His discipline.

- **Hebrews 12:11** "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present (while you're going through it), but grievous (horrible); nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Here's the big question: **How do we know when we are being co-dependent and enabling someone, and when we are just obeying the many commandments in the Bible to love one another and give to the poor?** It may take much prayer, asking God for discernment, wisdom and judgment in a particular situation, and searching your own heart for your motives in helping a particular person. God's word does say that faith without works is dead, and telling someone to "be warmed and be filled" without giving them what they need for their body is hypocritical. However, God's word also says, **"He who will not work, let him not eat."** It may not be an easy decision in knowing where to draw the line between compassionate Christian caring for another, and enabling-type behavior that is really hindering God's work in someone's life.

- **James 2:15-16** "If a brother or sister **is naked and destitute of daily food**, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things that are needed for the body, what does it profit?"
- **I Timothy 6:8** "And **having food and clothing**, with these we shall be content."
- **Matthew 6:31-33** "Therefore, do not worry, saying, '**What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?** For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But **SEEK FIRST** the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and **ALL** these things shall be added unto you."

The Scripture in James indicates a person who is "naked and destitute of food" (James 2:15), and I Timothy 6:8 and Matthew 6:31-33 both talk about our necessities as being "having food and clothing", so it looks like the "poor" that we are supposed to help are those who are so poor that they are down to needing food and clothing. God's word does not say we have to support other Christians **in the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed, or to which they aspire**. We need to have discernment as to whether a fellow believer in the church or a family member is behind in their bills because they overspend, or are living above their means, or are holding out for the "perfect career job" and won't take any other jobs, or what. There may also be situations where a person is using the money God gave them for food and necessities, and is wasting it on alcohol, drugs, pornography, or other "pleasures of the flesh". We are not responsible to provide for their needs when they are sinning or being wasteful of God's provision. God promises to supply food and clothing to us, as well as our other basic needs **WHEN** we are putting Him first in our lives. If you try to support someone or meet their needs **when God is not providing**, you may be preventing God from dealing with that person, if that person is not putting God first in their life.

- **II Thessalonians 3:6-12** "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from (avoid) **every brother who leads an unruly (undisciplined, irresponsible) life** and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example; because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but **with labor and hardship we kept working night and day** so that we might not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this (to be supported by them), but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you **this order: If anyone will not work, neither let him eat**. For we hear that some among you are **leading an undisciplined life**, doing no work at all, but **acting like BUSYBODIES**. Now such persons we **command** and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread."
- **I Timothy 5:13-15** "And besides **they learn to be idle**, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. For some have already turned aside after Satan."
- **I Peter 4:15** "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or **as a BUSYBODY in other people's matters**."

A busybody is one word in the Bible that could mean an enabler. The Bible talks about those who have too much spare time on their hands, and exhorts them to get to work doing something productive, and not be busybodies in other peoples' affairs. If you are a busybody it is caused by idleness and too much time spent looking at other's lives instead of working on your own issues and growing and maturing in Christ. **The sin of pride** comes in as you believe that you can help or organize someone else's life better than they are doing themselves.

Earlier, we said that it may take much prayer, **asking God for discernment, wisdom and judgment** in a particular situation, in order to draw the line between enabling and helping someone who deserves and needs help. There is a mistaken idea among some Christians that we are NEVER allowed to "judge" one another, and the scripture verse they use is Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, lest you be judged." However, if you read it in context, you see that Jesus is only talking about the kind of "judging" that involves going around **trying to "fix" everybody else's life**, when your own life is still messed up! Jesus says FIRST remove the plank or log from your own eye, and **THEN you will see clearly** to remove the speck from your brother's eye. That means there IS a time and place for one to "see clearly" and judge someone else's life. Also, Galatians 6:1-4 says that only those who are "spiritually mature" should try to restore a brother who has fallen into sin, and that it should be done in a spirit of humility and not in pride. How would we ever be able to restore a brother or sister if we were never allowed to JUDGE the sin in their life? I Corinthians 14:26b says "Let all things be done for edification." Edification means BUILDING UP, so ALL things, including JUDGING a person or situation, must be done for the building up of the individual, not for tearing them down.

- **Matthew 7:1-5** "Judge not, that you be not judged..... And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye,' and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will **see clearly to remove the speck** out of your brother's eye."
- **Galatians 6:1-4** "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, **you who are spiritual restore** such a one **in a spirit of gentleness (humility)**, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone **thinks himself to be something (PRIDE)**, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."