



ABBA Ministries

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Illuminating Life through Scripture

Codependency

Codependency is the attempt to control one's internal feelings by manipulating one's external environment. Whether through control of others, compulsive behaviors, or possession of things, codependent people feel empty inside and seek to fill this void with the very things which perpetually create deeper emptiness.

Codependency has many faces. Those codependent on others are haunted by the belief that their happiness depends on someone else acting the way they wish them to act. Conversely, unhappiness, they feel, is the result of their partner doing the wrong thing. Sometimes codependent people deceive themselves into thinking that others will do what they want if they just act the right way. Relational codependents frequently find themselves in the "rescuer" role, attempting to save others while ignoring their own needs and desires.

Those codependent on behaviors look for fulfillment in work, alcohol or drug use, viewing pornography or other sexual addictions, eating disorders, excessive neatness or orderliness, and other such compulsions. While participating in these activities brings temporary relief, the obvious life imbalance and their awareness of the unusual nature of their actions causes further pain which then causes one to seek further relief. Thus, a vicious cycle is established whereby the activities which bring relief further fuel the need for relief and result in uncontrolled repetition of behaviors.

Those codependent on things look for fulfillment through possession. They believe that the secret to fulfillment is owning a better house, car, boat, stereo system, jewelry, clothes, etc. Acquiring something new and better brings only a momentary sense of fulfillment. Soon the emptiness returns with the first scratch, dent, tarnish, or release of a new and improved version of what the codependent owns. The lie of "I'll be happy when I get ..." continues unchallenged as happiness seems always to be only one possession away.

Recovery from codependency involves exploring and accepting the pain which the codependent seeks to avoid. While several "authorities" might encourage you to forget about the hurts you have experienced and just "get on with it", a thorough inventory of where you have been provides necessary information to discover problematic patterns and suggest appropriate changes. Codependent people already have strong denial systems and don't need the encouragement from others to continue living in their fantasy worlds.

Careful scrutiny and acceptance of one's pain eventually leads through grief to new self-perceptions and experiences. Developing new personal boundaries and taking the risk of building open relationships leads to a more satisfying and fulfilling life.