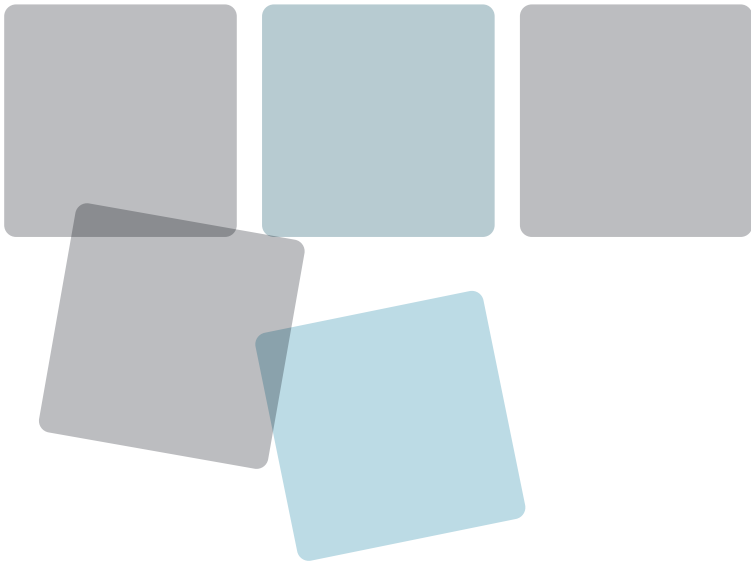


CODEPENDENCY

What It Is—And How to Break Free



Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.



Codependency: What It Is—And How to Break Free

By Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.

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CODEPENDENCY

What It Is—And How to Break Free



Codependency, or dependency, is an unhealthy relationship structure in which strong feelings of attraction are mistaken for true love. The underlying motivating energy that drives and sustains dependency relationships is the exact opposite of love; it is fear—fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, fear of inadequacy, fear of not being loved, fear of being alone, fear of being bad, fear of punishment, fear of condemnation, and the myriad other forms that fear takes. Such fear causes internal insecurity, a feeling of terror, dread, and doubt, which is often accompanied by guilt and shame.

For the dependent person, the internal sense of self is typically formed from imagined or perceived flaws. Any actual shortcomings are markedly inflated and distorted by the fear into crushing doubts and a warped sense of individuality—one marked by the foreboding feeling of certain rejection if others ever saw them in the same way they feel about themselves. “If people knew me, they would hate me; I don’t deserve to be loved; I am not as good as others,” etc.

The fear and distorted sense of self cause feelings of desperation, a crushing sense of failure, which demands that action be taken to relieve the emotional burden. The internal self-condemnation and sense of inadequacy can be momentarily relieved when one experiences acceptance, validation, or approval from another. The experience of perceiving oneself to be loved, valued, and appreciated provides an emotional counterbalance to the sinking feelings of inadequacy.

However, for the dependent person, this external validation becomes an internal emotional counterweight upon which they *depend* for their internal sense of wholeness and peace. That is, they



need someone else to make them feel whole, complete, worthwhile, acceptable, and secure in themselves as a person.

Trapped in the Cycle

Even though other people's approval makes them feel better about themselves (in that moment), because no objective change has happened in the heart, mind, or attitude of the dependent person about themselves, they don't actually *believe* they are worthy of the affection they are receiving. They fear it is only a matter of time before they will be "found out," rejected, and lose the affirmation they so desire. Thus, they live, instead of in other-centered love, in fear of losing that which they desperately need.

Such a state of mind leads to interpreting innocent events as threats—a spouse comes home late and suspicion arises that they were with another, more lovable person; a comment is made about not enjoying a certain dish, which is interpreted as "I can't do anything right." This leads to external monitoring, attempts to control, accusations, and criticisms, all based on fear of loss rather than on love for the other.



Further, the person with this internal sense of inadequacy doesn't believe that truly mature, healthy people will find them attractive, so being around such people increases their sense of anxiety and fear of rejection; thus, they gravitate toward and prefer people struggling with similar emotional problems, which causes the codependent parties to inflame the fears and wounds in one another rather than help each other heal.

If you had been living in the woods for weeks and were unwashed, unshaven, and wearing dirty clothes, with whom would you feel more comfortable associating with: a typical church crowd, doctors at a renowned medical convention, patrons at a nice restaurant, or homeless drug addicts living in a tent city? In a similar manner, those who have

formed a sense of self that is viewed as less than others will actively avoid emotionally healthy people and, instead, seek to form relationships with people struggling with similar problems, which leads to the very common codependent relationship.

Repeated Self-Destruction

Let me be clear: People struggling with dependency or who are in codependent relationships are not “evil” people; they are not “bad” people. They are hurting, wounded, struggling people, and in my experience, they often are some of the best people in heart, people who desperately long to be good, healthy, happy, and free—people who want to be successful and to be bastions of strength for their families and communities but who struggle to achieve that outcome simply because of unhealed emotional wounds.

The codependent relationship is a result of the emotional woundedness impacting and directing their choices in how they connect and relate to people. The

decisions of a dependent person are primarily made out of fear rather than other-centered love; thus, decisions are made in regard to what they think the other person will think of them, how the other person will respond, how the other person will feel, rather than what is objectively right, healthy, and reasonable in their governance of self.

This kind of decision-making moves the motive for making choices away from one’s own judgment, from what one determines would actually be best in any given situation, to their *perception* of what another person would be most pleased with or least disappointed with, regardless of what is actually healthiest.

For instance, a codependent person might determine that it is healthy and reasonable to say yes to an invitation to attend a Bible study





one evening after work. But rather than saying yes, they say no because of the fear that their significant other will be mad at them if they do. The fear of the other person's response overrules their own judgment—and the emotional need not to be rejected or devalued by their partner, and the need to keep the partner happy, is more important to them than doing what their own judgment determines is best. This is ultimately driven by fear, the fear of losing the support, affection, and affirmation of the one they emotionally depend upon.

Unfortunately, this type of decision-making worsens the individual who makes such decisions. Why? When we make a choice to go against our own good judgment for ourselves, our judgment makes a new judgment that says about oneself, "You're weak! You're a coward! You're spineless! You make me sick!" And, as a result, our self-esteem falls further, making us feel even more certain that we are less than others—thus, we need greater external approval to offset our increasing internal condemnation and we fear external disapproval even more, making us more likely to give in to the wishes of the other person, perpetuating the dependency cycle.

This process persists in codependent relationships because one's internal wholeness, peace with self, and well-being don't come from a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ, from knowing the truth of one's worth as a child of God, from developing within oneself an internal healthy self-judgment, or from the experience of actually choosing to do

what one determines, in their own judgment, is best, but, instead, one's internal sense of self comes from the validation and approval of others.

The thought of losing that external validation is experienced as terrifying—as if one is going to die.

Imagine the case of a navy diver, the old-fashioned type depicted in the movie *Men of Honor* starring Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Robert De Niro. In that movie, they wore suits with air lines to the surface where pumps delivered air to the divers below. If you were one of those men, you would be dependent on those on the surface for your air. Should someone on the surface tell you to stand on one foot or they would cut off your air, what would you do? And if you wanted to go to the right, but the ship turned to the left, what choice would you have? It parallels the situation in a dependent relationship, in which true freedom does not exist. But because the need is so great, intense feelings get associated with the one toward whom the dependence is directed.



Imagine yourself drowning underwater and then someone brings you an air line. Would you value that person? Would you have intense feelings for the individual? Would you want to hold on to him or her? And how would it feel if he or she decided to leave and take the air line with them?

Individuals can become so dependent on the emotional support from those on whom they rely that they experience the threat of losing their source of nurturance with the same fear and anxiety that divers would if someone threatened to cut their air off. It feels as if they are going to die. Because their anxiety is so intense, persons in dependent relationships go to extremes



and take desperate measures to prove their “love” to the ones on whom they depend in order to convince them to stay. And if the proclamations of affection don’t get returned, often the dependent persons will threaten harm to themselves or even those on whom they cling—all designed to retain control of the needed person.¹

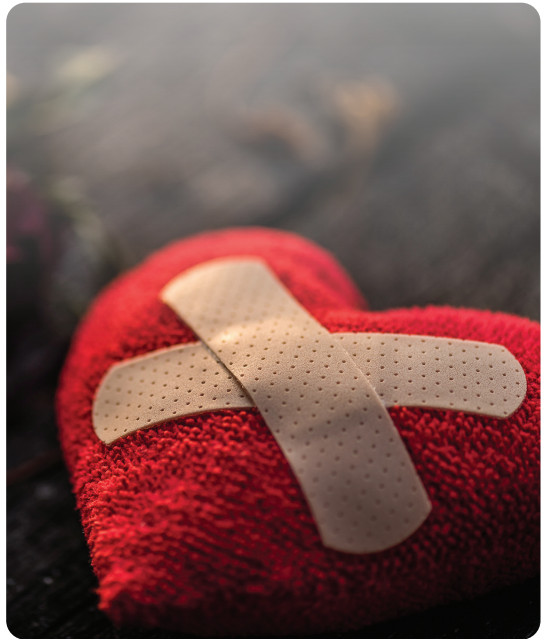
The Need for Healing

There is healing for people who struggle with dependency relationships, but the first steps are realizing that one is struggling with dependency and differentiating those emotions from healthy love.

A simple test to determine if your relationship is a healthy love relationship—in which flawed people are applying godly principles to help one another overcome their shortcomings and to mature and grow versus a

dependency relationship in which partners are only causing each other more emotional wounds—is to look at the list that I have included on the next page. Take each item and ask yourself, “Over the course of this relationship, compared to where I was when I entered this relationship, where am I today? Am I healthier or, in fact, getting worse?”

Put a checkmark next to the appropriate statement in each column. Then look at the total number of checkmarks for each column; if the vast majority are on the dependency side, then it is highly likely that you are in a relationship governed by fear and insecurity rather than love.



1 Jennings, Timothy, *Could It Be This Simple? A Biblical Model for Healing the Mind*, Lennox Publishing, 2010, p. 70.

The Test: Since being in this relationship ...

LOVE RELATIONSHIP

___ I am emotionally and mentally healthier.

___ I have greater freedom to be me.

___ I worry less about my partner's attitude toward me.

___ I give to bring joy to my partner.

___ I have much less worry and fear.

___ The relationship is stable.

___ I do most things because it is best.

___ I am honest with myself and my partner.

___ I am more patient.

___ We rarely bring up past mistakes.

DEPENDENCY RELATIONSHIP

___ I am emotionally and mentally unhealthier.

___ I have less freedom to be me.

___ I worry more about my partner's attitude toward me.

___ I give to make my partner happy with me.

___ I have more worry and fear.

___ The relationship is unstable.

___ I do most things because it feels best.

___ I shade the truth to avoid conflict.

___ I am more impatient.

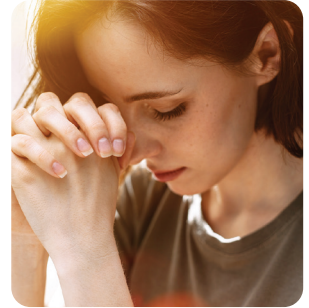
___ We keep score of past wrongs.

If you find yourself in a codependent relationship, don't be discouraged; in fact, be encouraged that you have just taken the first step toward health and wellness, which is recognizing and admitting the truth, realizing a problem exists. And now, with that awareness, you can make choices to heal, change, and overcome!

Steps to Breaking the Dependency Cycle

If you are in a dependency cycle, consider the following simple steps to deal with the fear and insecurity that dominate your decision-making:

1 Step 1: Go to Jesus, right now, and tell Him about your fears, heartaches, wounds, doubts, and insecurities. He already knows them, but He cannot fix your heart without your engagement, permission, and cooperation. So, go to Him and tell Him all about your struggles. Ask Him to become your source of love, validation, comfort, and strength. Accept His offer to be your Friend, Comforter, Counselor, Savior, and Healer. He longs to pour His love into your heart. (See Romans 5:5.) Repeat this step at the beginning of every day and any time you are feeling lonely and afraid.



2 Step 2: Choose to love truth above all things—especially feelings. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). If we want to get well, to heal, we must be truthful with ourselves about our situation. Start with the truth of who you are—a child of God, wounded to be sure, but highly prized, one whom Jesus can heal and restore if you let Him.

But also recognize this truth: Once there is brokenness, woundedness, or injury of any kind—there are no pain-free options! The only options we have after we are wounded are to heal or not heal, but the path of healing, whether setting a bone, cleaning dirt out of an abrasion, or resolving trauma issues, is accompanied by pain and discomfort. If we choose only that which hurts the least and feels the best in the moment, then we persistently choose to avoid healing and things will get worse. Refocus your mind and base your choice on the truth: “I have wounds, and my wounds can be healed, but only if I stop running from the discomfort, stand my ground, and apply the truth to my life.”



If you are confused and don't know how to address the problems to bring healing, then seek professional help. Just as none of us would try to set a broken bone by ourselves, but would seek the help of an orthopedic surgeon, likewise, seek professional Christian counseling for your broken heart!

3

Step 3: Recognize that feelings can lie.

Just because something hurts doesn't mean it is harmful. Look past the feeling to understand why that feeling is there. Is the pain being caused by cleaning dirt out of a wound, setting a bone, or going to therapy? Then recognize the feelings are the legitimate discomfort that comes from resolving wounds and don't conclude that because it feels bad, it is bad. Feelings must be understood in the light of objective truth!



4

Step 4: Apply the truth. When the feeling of fear arises—the fear of rejection, insecurity, or the internal discomfort that comes when the person you are currently emotionally dependent upon is upset with you—at that very moment, inside your own head, say: “STOP! What is the truth? Am I doing what is unhealthy, wrong, unreasonable, or am I doing what is right, healthy, and reasonable in governance of myself but my partner doesn't like it?” If the answer is the latter, then apply step 5.



5

Step 5: Set the other person free to respond in any way they choose. Inside your own heart and mind say, “I give my partner freedom to be mad if they need to be mad, to pout if they need to pout, to shout, rage, slam doors, and get upset if that is the only way they can cope in this moment. I do not give myself the freedom to choose evil or to change my actions simply because the person I love





doesn't like my choice. If they want me to make a different choice, I eagerly invite their ideas, rationale, evidence, and perspective to persuade me to a more rational, healthy, and mature decision—but I will no longer make decisions in the governance of myself based on how another person feels or responds." And when you set the other person free to have any response they choose, you have just set yourself free from their control over you! (If the other person becomes physically violent, do what is right and healthy: get away and call the police.)

6

Step 6: Differentiate imagination from reality. Don't allow your imagination to create fantasy futures that don't exist and then react to those imagined fears. Instead, govern your imagination to plan your actions based on what is objectively true, right, reasonable, and healthy.



7

Step 7: Define what is actually yours to choose, govern, or control—and let go of that which is not. And what is always yours to choose, govern, and control is yourself, your beliefs, your boundaries, your attitudes, your actions, but you are never in control of what other people think, feel, or how they respond. Learning to set others free will free you from the burden of worrying about their responses and attitudes toward you.



8

Step 8: Recognize that your partner's response informs you about them. Incorporate that information into an ever-expanding assessment of reality, of who you are dealing with, and then respond by applying that truth in your own decision-making in the governance of self. Set new boundaries by not taking the blame for another's shortcomings but allowing others to hold responsibility for themselves.





If you have struggled with dependency relationships, don't be discouraged! I encourage you to experience hope and healing by applying God's methods and principles of truth, altruistic love, and freedom to your life.

And if you or someone you love is struggling with dependency problems and you have tried self-help solutions, outpatient counseling, or other interventions yet things are not improving, and you would like an intensive, Christ-centered holistic treatment program, consider Honey Lake Clinic as a therapeutic option.



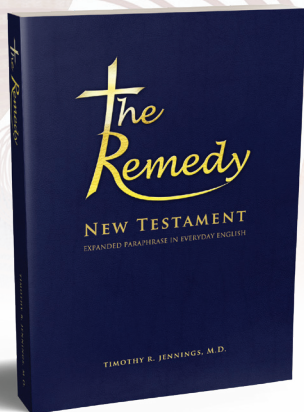
Honey Lake Clinic is a holistic residential treatment center where we help people identify and resolve the underlying fears, insecurities, and traumas that contribute to dependency attachments. We treat the whole person—mind, body, and spirit—with proven, reality-based interventions that help people experience restoration to wellness, to harmony with the laws of health, the protocols upon which God has built life to exist and operate.

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DISCOVER empowering resources

by Dr. Timothy Jennings to enrich your life
and the lives of those around you!



The Remedy New Testament: Expanded Paraphrase in Everyday English

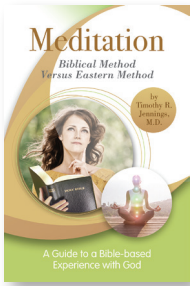
An easy-to-understand New Testament paraphrase that makes the gospel of God's kingdom of love that Jesus lived and taught real and accessible. During the Dark Ages, Christian leaders replaced God's love as the central pillar of the gospel with human law, rules, judgment, and punishment, teaching that God runs His kingdom like human governments do. This fundamentally altered the church that Jesus established, resulting in things like the Inquisition, Crusades, and burning people at the stake. While most Bible

translations were done by good-hearted people, having accepted this idea that God's law and government work like human law and government, they innocently translated into the text fear-inducing ideas about God that drive people away from the faith. This enlightening paraphrase by Dr. Jennings offers a clearer view of the true message of Jesus Christ based on the reality that God built His universe to operate in harmony with His nature of love. *The Remedy* will reorient your heart and mind toward God's character of love and His mission to heal and restore you and all humankind!



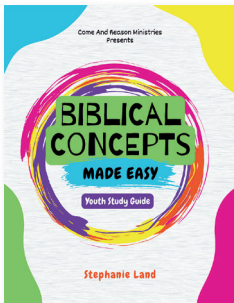
Powerful Sharing Tracts

Come and Reason Ministries now offers thought-provoking sharing tracts that will pique the curiosity of those locked into a false picture of our loving God and the Bible. These small, colorful, and eye-catching tools can be shared with anyone at any time. Each tract reveals compelling, life-changing truths about a designer God. More topics are on the way, so check our website often.



Meditation: Biblical Method vs. Eastern Method

Does meditation matter in your experience and understanding of God? Yes—it does! In this brief but practical guide, Dr. Jennings teaches you to discern the differences between biblical and Eastern meditation, the divergent practices, and their impact on brain function and your heart and mind.



Biblical Concepts Made Easy

Introducing a fantastic Christian resource for parents and educators wanting to teach young people the profound lessons of God’s love and goodness through a design-law perspective! Authored by Stephanie Land, this engaging 96-page activity book from Come and Reason Ministries imparts essential, life-changing principles in a way that everyone can understand. Packed with engaging activities and plenty of style, *Biblical Concepts Made Easy* seamlessly conveys the last message of God’s love for humanity to prepare every heart for heaven. Say “goodbye” to your struggles in finding ways to teach these divine concepts to young minds—and “hello” to a fun, effective learning experience like you’ve never seen before!



The Lie Magazine

As you look at the world today, do you long for the coming of Christ? Have you seen the rise in corruption and abuse and wondered, “*What is Jesus waiting for?*” Have you heard sermons suggesting one reason or another yet been left unsatisfied? Then we invite you to read our newest magazine, *The Lie that Deceived Angels, Infects Christianity, and Delays the Second Coming of Christ*.

We are persuaded that one single lie persists within all branches of Christianity that is obstructing the gospel from being presented in its purest light and doing its final work. The latter rain is soon to be poured out, the entire world is settling into one of two camps, and Jesus is preparing His people. Now is the time to throw off the last lie and present God in His true glory!

Many of these resources are available for free at comeandreason.com. Stop by today!



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Doesn't it seem like the whole world is going off the rails? Are you feeling down or anxious about your place, wondering how you can practice God's design principles for life amid all this confusion, chaos, and contradictory information?

Then you'll love **Designed4More!** During this intriguing and enlightening 30-minute video podcast, Timothy R. Jennings, M.D., founder of Come and Reason Ministries and adult medical director of Honey Lake Clinic, and various featured guests explore God's design protocols (laws of health) that govern the four domains of life—mind, body, spirit, and relationship—and provide practical insights for joyful living and overcoming the obstacles and spiritual battles you face every day. As you listen, you'll cherish learning just how much God designed you for more—more love, peace, health, and happiness!



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