

CODEPENDENCY

Balancing an
Unbalanced Relationship

June Hunt



HOPE
for the Heart

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Balancing an Unbalanced
Relationship

JUNE HUNT



AspirePress

Torrance, California

www.rose-publishing.com ©2013 Rose Publishing, Inc. Aspire Press

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Title: Codependency Product Code: 204X ISBN-13: 9781596366510

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Codependency: Balancing and Unbalanced Relationship

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Aspire Press, a division of Rose Publishing, Inc.

4733 Torrance Blvd., #259

Torrance, California 90503 USA

www.aspirepress.com

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Printed in the United States of America
011212DP

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Dear friend,

I hate to admit it. I wish it weren't true. But I know what it's like to have been a "closet codependent." (Actually, those closest to me knew it, even if they didn't know the word *codependent*.)

In my heart of hearts, I know what it's like to compromise my conscience in order to *comply*, to be a "peace-at-any-price" person in order to *appease*, to put up with chaos in order to *avoid conflict*. Although I myself had not heard of "codependency," I found myself in an exhilarating, yet fearful relationship, full of highs and lows—in a roller-coaster relationship with continual ups and downs, but I did not know how to get off the ride!

In truth, even though I knew *something* in the relationship was wrong and *something* needed to change, I was desperately "needy" of connection and deathly fearful of rejection. When my "friend" would threaten to leave, I would beg, plead, and promise *whatever was necessary* in a desperate attempt to stay connected. My immense fear of being abandoned led me into a long season of insecurity. At that time, I viewed my loyalty as noble. Today, I see my loyalty as excessive.

By prioritizing exclusive loyalty to a person, I relinquished my highest loyalty to the Lord.

Sadly, I didn't know that these high/low swings were not "normal." After all, that destructive dynamic was part of *my normal*—the normal, volatile relationship I witnessed between my parents. Because Dad had threatened to put Mother in a mental institution, each day when I came home from school, I never knew whether she would be at home or sent away. Dad would often say to me, "*Your mother is mentally ill today.*" Every time he said those words *my blood would boil*. The problem was this: I knew he had the money and the power to *pay off a psychiatrist!* Fortunately, every psychiatrist who evaluated Mother told him that she was not mentally ill. But his continued efforts petrified both Mother and me and left both of us terribly insecure. Such is the breeding ground for codependency.

Loyalty to my mother became the highest priority in my life. Even if it meant lying, I had to protect her. I had a never-spoken commitment: "If we are both thrown out of the house, I will 'sweep streets' (literally) to pay for a little apartment and buy enough food to keep us alive." Somehow, I would take care of Mother. Ultimately, I felt responsible

for her welfare, and it was “do or die.” (I would do it or die.) In truth, we had a role reversal.

Later, when I became an adult, I found myself having *excessive loyalty*—“excessive” because my highest loyalty was to a person, not to the Lord. I was controlled more by my fear in a friendship than by my faith in Christ. Without even knowing it, I had let a person take the place that the Lord alone should have had.

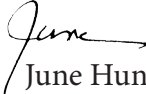
To move away from that codependent dynamic was more difficult than I ever imagined, and it took longer than I ever dreamed, but oh, was it worth the effort—and the pain.

What indescribable peace when we learn that our security is in the Lord and when our own relationships are right in God’s sight! I know, because today I am truly free.

If you’ve ever struggled with loving a person more than God, this book is for you. Through its pages, you’ll discover how to get out from underneath the “trapped” feeling that has plagued you for so long. You’ll learn never to settle for what *looks* good, but always to choose what *is* best. And as you go, you will have my sincere prayer that the Lord

will create in you an undivided heart with complete dependence on Him—a new heart to set you free to live without fear—a pure heart for you to become the person He created you to be.

Yours in the Lord’s hope,


June Hunt

*“Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”*
(Psalm 51:10)

CODEPENDENCY

Balancing an Unbalanced Relationship

When God gave us His Ten Commandments, He began with these words, “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). He knew that if we would make our relationship with Him our top priority, He would bless our lives, and, through our other relationships, we would be a blessing to others.

The primary problem with codependency is that it violates the heart of God’s first commandment. In a codependent relationship, you allow someone else to take the place that God alone should have in your heart. You allow another person to be your “god.” If you have a *misplaced dependency*, you will have neither *peace with God* nor the *peace of God*. But if you put the Lord first, living each day *dependent on Him*, you will have God’s peace, even when others are not peaceful toward you. This is one reason God says to us...

**“You shall have
no other gods before me.”
(Exodus 20:3)**



DEFINITIONS

Imagine that you have been handpicked by God to impact all the people around you. You have been *chosen* to be the liberator throughout the land, *chosen* to have the respect of all the people, *chosen* as the highest judge over the entire nation. God has even spelled out the specifics you must do in order to protect your power and safeguard your strength. Soon, the awesome stories of your success spread like wildfire. Then, in walks Delilah!

You know you are not to reveal the secret of your strength, because God has said, “Don’t tell.” Yet you feel torn. You want to please God, but you also want to please Delilah, who has asked you to disclose the source of your strength. You try to resist, but the more you do, the more she cries and begs, prods, and pleads. Now you find yourself in *the Delilah Dilemma*. As you try to take care of her feelings, you cave in to her manipulation.

Finally, you confide that your strength is in your obedience to God in never, ever cutting your hair. Big mistake—a big mistake that leads to unimagined misery! Delilah tells the enemy Philistines, and they cut your hair

and take you captive. However, your biggest mistake is not what you *said*, but what you *did*—you let Delilah be your “god” instead of letting God be your God. (See Judges 13–16.)

WHAT IS Dependency?

If Samson had not been so dependent on pleasing Delilah—if he had not been a “codependent people-pleaser”—he would not have lost his strength, his status, or his sight, nor would he have lost his spiritual insight. Ultimately, his *dependency* led to his *disobedience*, which in turn led to his *downfall*. In truth, *Samson’s pride* caused his own downfall, for he prioritized the words of Delilah over the words of God.

**“Before his downfall
a man’s heart is proud,
but humility comes before honor.”
(Proverbs 18:12)**

- ▶ A **dependency** is a reliance on something or someone else for support or existence. “I have to have this to live.”
- ▶ A **dependency** can be either negative or positive, such as being dependent on cocaine versus being dependent on Christ. “This is necessary for my life.”

- ▶ A **dependency** can be an addiction to any object, behavior, or person that represents an underlying attempt to get emotional needs met.¹

“I must do this to meet my needs to make me happy.”

You Can Be Dependent on ...

OBJECTS

- ▶ A chemical addiction to drugs (alcohol, tobacco, cocaine)
- ▶ A sexual addiction to erotica items (pornography—magazines, videos—sex toys)

BEHAVIORS

- ▶ An addiction to behaviors that appear to be bad, those that are not widely socially acceptable and can be harmful (inappropriate sex, gambling, excessive spending, compulsive eating)
- ▶ An addiction to behaviors that appear to be good, those that are widely socially acceptable but may be equally harmful (perfectionism, workaholism, caregiving, even anorexia or bulimia)

PEOPLE

- ▶ A “love” addiction in which you feel that your identity is in another person. (A weak

“love addict” is emotionally dependent on someone “strong.”)

- ▶ A “savior” addiction in which you feel that your identity is in your ability to meet the needs of another person. (A strong “savior” needs to be needed by someone “weak.”)

Because addictions provide a momentary “high,” good feelings are associated with them. However, the book of Proverbs gives this poignant warning.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”
(Proverbs 14:12)

QUESTION: “What is wrong with people depending on people?”

ANSWER: We should have a healthy “interdependence” on others in the sense that we should value and enjoy each other, love and learn from each other, but we should not be totally dependent on each other. Essentially, this kind of relationship involves a healthy, mutual give-and-take, where neither person looks to the other to meet each and every need. However, many people have a *misplaced dependency* on others. These kinds of relationships are not healthy, for God intends for us to live in total dependence on Him.

Over and over, the Bible portrays how godly people learn to have a *strong dependence* on the Lord rather than a *weak dependence* on each other. The apostle Paul said we should ...

**“... not rely on ourselves but on God.”
(2 Corinthians 1:9)**

WHAT IS Codependency?²

Though the word *codependency* may be fairly new, the concept is age-old. We can certainly see how supposedly *strong Samson* violates his values by giving in to seemingly *dependent Delilah*. But this compromise of codependency was not his first. During the time of his seven-day wedding feast, Samson gave a riddle as a wager to the Philistines (the godless people of his new wife). His wife cried the entire time, “*You hate me! You don’t really love me. You haven’t told me the answer*” (Judges 14:16). On the final day of the feast, Samson was worn down and told his wife. Then, in turn, she told the Philistines.

As a result, violence and bloodshed ran rampant, only because *strong Samson* didn’t act with the strength of his convictions. Instead, he became weak-willed, following the persistent pleading of his *weak wife*. Samson needed to ...

**“Be strong in the Lord
and in his mighty power.”
(Ephesians 6:10)**

- ▶ Today, a *codependent* is anyone who is dependent on another person to the point of being controlled or manipulated by that person.
- ▶ The word *codependent* was first used in the 1970s to describe a family member living with an alcoholic. The prefix *co-* means “with” or “one associated with the action of another.”
- ▶ *Codependency* became the word that describes the dysfunctional behavior of family members seeking to adapt to the destructive behavior of the alcoholic.
- ▶ *Codependency* is a relationship addiction. Just as the alcoholic is dependent on alcohol, the codependent is dependent on *being needed* by the alcoholic, or on being needed by someone who is dependent.
- ▶ The “enabler” is a *codependent* person who *enables* the alcoholic (or other dependent person) to continue with the addiction without drawing and maintaining boundaries. Codependency involves being too dependent on someone or something that cannot meet your needs.