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MINISTRIES®

# FREEDOM FROM CO-DEPENDENCY

Teaching Notes by Joyce Meyer

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*Freedom*  
FROM  
**Co-Dependency**

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# FREEDOM FROM CO-DEPENDENCY

## I. What Is Co-Dependency?

A. When “someone else’s problem” controls my behavior and life decisions, I have become co-dependent.

1. A co-dependent is a person who is involved in a relationship with someone who is “dependent” on some kind of abnormal behavior.
2. The co-dependent person does not really live “their own life.” They are CONTROLLED by the problem of the dependent person.
3. They spend most of their time trying to please the dependent person and trying to **FIX, RESCUE,** or **HELP** them.

You can lead a mule to water, but you can’t make him drink.

B. If you are **co-dependent**, you must declare your **independence** and become **dependent** on God.

C. We are often too involved in other people’s problems.

1. **Hebrews 12:1** teaches us to strip off and throw aside every encumbrance, weight, sin, and all that clings to and entangles us.
2. Some people become weights – they cling to us and drag us down. If we get entangled in their problems, it will prevent us from reaching our own goals.

- a. Example: You may have a goal on Monday morning to spend the day getting your house clean and doing the grocery shopping and the laundry. Your “needy” friend calls – can she come over? She is depressed and needs you to talk to her. Your first thought is “not again.” But then you are attacked with guilt – after all, you are a Christian. You should be willing to lay aside your desires and help others.
- b. If the same person needs so much from us that we cannot obey God, we are out of balance if we keep trying to give in to them.
  - 1) **I Thessalonians 2:4** – We speak to please God and not man.
  - 2) **Galatians 1:10a-b** – *Now am I trying to win the favor of men, or of God? Do I seek to please men?*
  - 3) We must all ask ourselves this all-important question.
- c. People like this need to learn to go to God. If we keep standing between God and them, we are not ministering – we are hindering.

## II. Types Of Dependencies That Can Make You A Co-Dependent Person

- A. Alcohol, drugs, or other substance abuse
- B. Controller or manipulator
  1. I was controlling and manipulating. It was rooted in fear of being hurt, which came from an abusive past.
  2. If I stayed “in control” of things, I felt safer.
  3. A person who is a controller is wrong, but the person who allows themselves to be controlled is just as wrong.

4. Always remember: “WE DON’T HELP PEOPLE IF WE DON’T CONFRONT THEM.”
5. I tried (without knowing what I was doing) to make Dave co-dependent on my hang-ups, but he demanded the right to live his life. He loved me. He helped me as much as I would allow him to, but he would not let me control him.

- a. **I Corinthians 9:19** – *For although I am free in every way from anyone’s control, I have made myself a bondservant to everyone, so that I might gain the more [for Christ].*

- b. If we refuse to be anyone’s slave, we are then free to be their servant.

- c. Dave was a true servant to me: he helped me, loved me, encouraged me, was patient with my hang-ups, and did things for me.

**He did them as a free man, motivated  
by desire not by demand.**

6. For many years he let me have my way about a lot of things just to keep peace; but **SUDDENLY**, he started confronting my behavior. It was very hard for me. My flesh went absolutely wild, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

### C. Perfectionist

1. A perfectionist can make life narrow and miserable for everyone they are in relationship with. It is almost impossible to please them.
2. They can be temperamental people (easily angered) who are centered on themselves and what they want. Their **perfect plan** begins to control everyone’s life.
  - a. They need the revelation of **Proverbs 16:9** – Man’s mind plans his way, but God directs his steps.

**Romans 12:16** would also help them greatly –  
Adjust yourself to people and things.

b. **Perfectionist, get a grip and face reality.**

**Nothing and nobody is perfect – not even you!**

3. They can also be deeply insecure and searching for worth through perfect lives, looks, behavior, or surroundings.
4. I was “out of balance” concerning the way my house looked. I cleaned constantly and was unable to allow my family to really enjoy our home for very long without wanting them to clean things up.
  - a. I think when we feel messy inside; extremely neat surroundings somehow make us feel a little more together.
  - b. Of course, we should be orderly, neat and clean; but not extreme and excessive.

D. Workaholic

1. Workaholics always want everybody to work. If anybody is resting or enjoying, they are encouraged to WORK. Work and accomplishment become everything.
2. Workaholics are often hiding or running from something. Working all the time prevents them from having to deal with it.
3. **I Peter 5:8** – Be well balanced, for your adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, in hunger, seeking someone to seize upon and devour.

E. Sexual perversions

1. Some people cannot perform sexually without perverted behavior. If they are dependent on perversion and insist that you join them, they have made you co-dependent.

F. Hypochondriac

1. Some individuals control others through their abundance of aches and pains, sicknesses and diseases. It is a never-ending cycle. All they want to talk about is how they feel.
2. Even when a person is genuinely sick, it does no good to constantly think and talk about it. It is difficult to suffer alone, but we must remember that **Jesus went to the garden alone** – all of his friends fell asleep. There are times in our life when nobody can help us but God.

G. Eating disorders

1. I have seen families almost totally destroyed by one daughter in the family having an eating disorder. All their conversation, time, and effort went into trying to get her well for years.
2. Shouldn't we try to help people? How can a family avoid allowing a situation like this to gain control over everyone?
  - a. Yes, we should try to help people; but they must want help and be ready to do everything they can to get help and cooperate with it.
  - b. **People will never be healed or set free on someone else's effort alone.**
3. Eating disorders are quickly becoming one of our number one problems. The root of an eating disorder is an emotional problem – rejection, abuse, feeling unloved, severely insecure, perfectionist, etc.

**Ephesians 6:12** – We must remember that we war not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and wickedness in high places

4. If you are strong enough spiritually that the devil cannot control you directly, he may try to do so through another individual, who either does not know how to resist the devil or simply does not want to.

#### H. Identity crisis problems

1. Some people are insecure to the point of it being a sickness. They need others to keep them “propped up” and “fixed” all the time. You cannot be honest with them – they are touchy about everything.
2. Trying to be in relationship with someone who is having an “identity crisis” is very difficult. They are usually centered on themselves.

They cannot put much into a relationship; they are **TOO NEEDY**. **They need** to be encouraged; **they need** people to understand them; **they need** more attention; **they need** people to listen to them; **they need** to be put in positions they are really not qualified for just to make them feel good about themselves. **They need** you not to confront them; it is too difficult for them. They misunderstand things all the time. If you tell them no, you don’t care about them. If you don’t invite them everywhere you go, you are rejecting them, and on and on.

3. They are always trying to figure out some deep “inner feeling” they have. They don’t understand themselves, “Why do I feel this way? Why do I act this way?”

**Most of us don’t understand ourselves until we are about 50, and by then we don’t care anymore.**

#### I. Overcoming an abusive past

1. I know how difficult this is, but I also know that we often begin to **use** our problems to get our own way and to get attention.
2. We must be careful of having a “victim” mentality.

- a. Let God take what Satan meant for your harm and work it out to your good.
- b. Genesis 50:20 – Think of how long Joseph could have taken to get over the violence, abuse, rejection, and hatred of his brothers.

**His positive attitude plus centering his life on doing God's will made the difference.**

- 1) **Had Joseph lived in the twentieth or twenty-first century, he might still be trying to get emotional healing. Our society makes provision for people to linger in these problems.**
- 2) Our whole society (often, even the church) is geared toward me-ism. We need to be more outreach minded, get our minds off of ourselves, and let God show His miracle-working power in our lives.
3. We cannot blame everything on our past to the point of taking no responsibility for bad and ungodly behavior.

### III. The Key To Freedom

- A. **John 5:1-9** – Do you really want to get well?
- B. **Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 5** – Destroy your enemies and show them no mercy.
  1. Don't "flirt" with your hang-ups.
- C. **Deuteronomy 7:22** – God will deliver you **little by little** if you will keep pressing on.
- D. **This is your time to break free! Make a decision and refuse to go back to Egypt!**

E. God always demands an effort before a blessing is given.

1. **Matthew 17:27** – The disciples had to go fishing to find the money for taxes due.

2. **Mark 3:5** – The man with the withered hand was told to stretch out his hand.

I am sure he was tempted to think, “I can’t.” But he made an effort, and Jesus met him to help him across the finish line.

3. **Luke 5:4** – The disciples were told to **come out into the deep** and get ready for a haul.

4. **Luke 5:24** – The crippled man was told to pick up his bed and walk.

“But Lord, don’t You see my condition; how can You expect me to do that?”

5. **Luke 17:14** – The lepers were told to go show themselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cured and made clean.

Sometimes we think too much and lose our miracle. This man may have thought, “What am I going to show them? I still have leprosy.”

6. **John 2:7-8** – Wine for the wedding required the filling of six waterpots with water and a command to draw some out and take it to the manager of the feast.

“Well, what if it remains water and I get into trouble?”

7. **John 9:7** – The blind man, after submitting to having saliva and dirt rubbed on him, was told to go wash in a pool of water.

A little too much reasoning could have stopped the process.

8. **John 11:39** – The raising of Lazarus from the dead required the people to **take away the stone**.

- a. Martha's first thoughts and comments were about the stink.
- b. **Some people never get raised out of their problems – they get too caught up in the stink.**

#### IV. More Traits Of Co-Dependency

- A. The co-dependent person is so busy taking care of others that he neglects to take care of himself.
  - 1. Often, people in full-time ministry fall prey to this lifestyle.
  - 2. Everyone's emergency can run their life unless they demand respect.
- B. The co-dependent has an **unbalanced perception** of responsibility. He or she often takes on a **false sense of responsibility**.
  - 1. Parents may do this with children.
 

They may feel responsible for the child's problem.  
They wonder if it may be something they did.  
They want to fix it, to make up for their mistakes.
  - 2. A wife with a husband or a husband with a wife
  - 3. It is **GOD'S JOB** to FIX PEOPLE – **NOT OURS**.
 

**Jeremiah 17:14** – *Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved . . .*
  - 4. Often, the co-dependent begins to get their worth and value from being everyone's savior.

### C. The enabler

1. We can actually **enable** people to stay in bondage by continuing to try to fix them instead of staying balanced and being led by the Holy Spirit.
2. Example: We had a woman in our conference recently who came into a prayer line where I was ministering. I noticed she had a very strange look in her eyes. She was staring at me and had her arms tightly wrapped about her chest. As I reached out to touch her, she became wild, fell on the floor, got into a fetal position, and had to be carried to the back by several ushers to receive ministry. Linda and others spent quite a long time with her. They ministered deliverance, love, and encouragement; and she felt better.

As I preached in the afternoon service, this woman began to act the same way in one of the rows with others all around her. Once again, she had to be carried out. It disrupted the entire service and brought all the attention onto her. Linda once again went to the back with her. As she lay on the floor having her fit, Linda got the discernment that she was using this to control and bring attention to herself. Linda said, "Okay, you can lay here. This usher will wait outside the door, but I am going back to the service." They watched the woman; and as she realized nobody was watching her, she got up and left the building.

3. I have other individuals who followed me from conference to conference, and they have behaved the same way in every conference. We finally had to resort to asking them not to come.
4. Continuing to let people like this draw you away from your purpose only enables them to continue their wrong behavior.
5. If they are in that bad of a condition, they should be in "God-Anointed" professional treatment, under the care of someone called and anointed to deal with those kinds of cases.

**THERE IS A TIME AND A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING.**

**THERE IS A PURPOSE FOR EVERYTHING.**

MY PURPOSE WHEN I COME TO TOWN  
IS **NOT** TO COUNSEL EVERYONE.

- D. Lack of objectivity
1. The co-dependent person may be so emotionally entangled in the dependent person's problem, they can no longer judge or determine properly.
  2. They don't know what is right or wrong for them to do. Most of the time their comment is, "I just don't know what to do."

V. **Breaking Out Of Co-Dependent And Controlling Relationships**

- A. First, realize there is a difference in a "breakthrough" and "breaking out."
1. A "breakthrough" may amount to a crack in the problem that gives us some daylight or relief.
  2. "Breaking out" means total freedom – no more bondage.

**DON'T just look for a BREAKTHROUGH –  
BE DETERMINED to BREAK OUT!**

- B. Realize that it is sin to allow anything to have control over you except the Holy Spirit.
1. Too often we call sin "our problem." If we call sin "**sin**," we might get more serious about dealing with it.
- C. **Romans 14:23** – Whatever is not of faith is sin.
- D. **I Corinthians 6:12** – I will not be the slave of anything or be brought under its power.
- E. You may be **addicted** to a wrong relationship. If so, realize you will go through some withdrawal symptoms. You will be tempted to go back to old ways, but stand your ground.

Say out loud:

**“IF I DON’T DO THIS NOW,  
I WILL ALWAYS BE IN THIS BONDAGE.”**

- F. Other things you might experience as you break out:
1. Emotional grief and sadness that you won’t be keeping this person “fixed” any more
  2. You may feel guilty, as if you are abandoning them.
  3. You may be afraid they can’t make it without you.
  4. You may find that they are on your mind constantly for a while.  
  
If you do, pray and don’t talk about them excessively.
  5. You may experience fear.
    - a. “What are they thinking of me?”
    - b. “What if I lose them altogether?”

## **VI. Be Firm About Following The Holy Spirit.**

- A. **Romans 7:6** – Following the Spirit brings “newness of life.”
- B. **Romans 8:4** – Following the flesh (yours or someone else’s) does not meet God’s requirements.
- C. **Romans 8:14** – Spiritual maturity requires being led by the Spirit.

**Co-dependents don’t act independently as led by the Spirit – they usually “re-act.” Part of maturity is learning to act on God’s Word, not to react emotionally.**

- D. Expect a war between your flesh and spirit.

1. **I Peter 4:12** – *Beloved, do not be amazed and bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test your quality . . .*
- E. Expect to suffer for a period of time, especially mentally and emotionally.
1. **I Peter 4:1-2** – Those who are willing to suffer are done with intentional sin.
    - a. There is a difference in intentional sin (things that we know are wrong when we do them) and unintentional sin (things that suddenly happen and then we realize it was wrong).
    - b. Example: If someone insults me and I suddenly get angry and say some things I should not say – it may happen so fast that it is over by the time I realize what I have done. But after I realize what is happening and I choose to stay angry, I am in a different level of sin.
- F. **Romans 8:17** – If we want to share His glory, we must share His suffering.
1. Jesus suffered in order to do the will of God, and then He was taken into glory.

## VII. Identify – Detach – Decide

- A. **Identify** – If you are going to be staying in a relationship that has been a controlling or co-dependent relationship, you will need to begin identifying “habit patterns” or “cycles” that need to be broken.
1. “The thing” that **always** happens in a given situation
 

Example: When I felt rejected if Dave disagreed with me, there were always certain things that happened. I began to try to convince him I was right so he would agree with me. He began to feel manipulated and started getting angry.

I became confused and honestly did not know what was happening. I said, “We can never communicate about anything.” He became angrier. I became more confused; he finally stormed out of the room or out of the house, and nothing was ever resolved.

B. **Detach** – When you feel the same old emotions rising up, get away from the situation long enough to separate emotions from godly wisdom.

1. Even after a problem cycle is identified, you will still react emotionally and mentally the same way for a period of time. Detaching gives you time to **DECIDE** how you will handle it and not just follow your feelings.
2. After God revealed to me that I felt rejected when Dave did not agree with my opinions, and I needed to separate his acceptance of me from his acceptance of my opinions – I had to go off by myself and really think sometimes to get through an incident and handle it properly.
3. If the pressure of “close” proximity is simply too strong:
  - a. Go to another room.
  - b. Go to the bathroom.
  - c. Tell them you will call them back.

Example: If a friend calls and you can feel the manipulation starting – get off the phone, get your mind made up, and then call them back **PREPARED** to not allow manipulation.

- d. Take a walk.
- e. Go for a ride.
- f. Go away for a weekend.
- g. Go to the grocery store.

- C. **Decide** – You detach so you can decide.
1. This is not withdrawal – your purpose is to deal with it wisely, NOT to avoid it.
  2. When you detach, you can become objective – see things more clearly and recognize what is actually happening.
  3. Without objectivity, we don't see things normally.
    - a. When Dave tried to correct our children, I became afraid he would be too hard on them. I always interfered, and he did not like it. I was corrected too harshly as a child, and my only reference point of how fathers treated children was how my father treated me. I had to learn to detach and become objective.
    - b. I had to talk to myself – “Joyce, you know Dave is not going to hurt the children. He has a better understanding of the proper way to correct children than you do. Joyce, you need to trust Dave. Joyce, this is a reaction from your past.”

### VIII. I Don't Want To Face This – Is There Any Other Way?

- A. **NO!**
- B. Problems never just “go away” – they must be dealt with.
- C. If the person you are having problems with right now died or moved to another town, there would always be another person to torment you.
- D. I believe God has used this teaching to OPEN PRISON DOORS – **ARE YOU WILLING TO WALK OUT?**
- E. Jesus said, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” Remember:  
**JESUS WILL be with you EVERY STEP of the journey.**





