

Chapter 2 – Codependency

WE MUST DISCOVER WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR INSIDE NOT OUTSIDE OF OURSELVES

We all have an inner peace we can learn to consciously access.

External rational thought creates external feelings.

Internal conscious thought accesses internal feelings.

Spiritual Intelligence Inventory

1. A codependent gives of themselves until there is no real self left. True or False?
2. Some people need to nurture the little child in them. True or False?
3. No pain, no gain. True or False?
4. Some people have a black hole inside them that consumes their life. True or False?
5. Climactic events of the past can cause emotional scars. True or False?
6. I feel guilty because others blame me for letting them down. True or False?
7. Not all who depend on external events for their lives become dysfunctional. True or False?

How Am I Feeling?

"Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" Romans 12:2. One who conforms to the world acts as a codependent. They say, "You look like you are feeling great," and then asks, "How am I feeling?" The only way to escape the condition is to become transformed by the renewing of our minds.

The Decade of Codependency

I have been through the "Decade of Codependency". It came on us like a storm during the 80s. Everyone was using the term. I attended the First National Conference on Codependency. As a matter of fact I attended two of them the same year in two different states with two different sponsors. The second one, in Arizona, had over 120 workshops and panels led by all the big names of the time. It was a watershed experience. I brought home 124 tapes from the conference, and listened to them all at least twice, some many times over.

One interesting commonality of the two conferences was that the panels agreed there was no clinical definition for the term "codependent". Here were some of the greatest minds in therapy treating a sickness for which they had no definition. They were randomly slapping on their own therapies to see what would work. Since they had no sure diagnosis, they had to simply experiment with a cure. Their own therapies were as good

as anything else one might try. But it is like treating a person with penicillin who has a virus: it is an ineffective treatment, and will in fact lessen the individual's future receptivity to lifesaving penicillin.

Another illustration: it is like mechanics working on a car with their specialty but not with the knowledge of what is wrong. At best they wind up helping the driver cope with driving a car that is not running well; at worst they put the driver at risk.

What Codependency Is Not

The questions for this series (noted above) are examples of statements made by well intentioned therapists putting their own therapies on a sickness (for which they have no definition) in hope of a cure.

In fact, these statements tell more about what codependency is not, rather than what it is. For example, one of the marks attributed to a codependent is "they give of themselves until there is no real self left" We will talk about the real self in the next chapter on spirituality. The truth is, the real self is inside and it is always there, we just need to discover it.

Another approach in dealing with codependency is to treat the "child within". Some say we need to nurture the little child in us. Some people carry teddy bears around to hug and pretend to nurture the child within. All people have thoughts of childhood, some happy and some painful, but childhood thoughts do not make a child.

I went to a conference where the leader had people identify and bring the little children out of themselves. Some, including the leader, had become so attached to the child, they had to continually nurture it even after they left the conference. They had now taken on the task of nurturing the dependent child within for the rest of their lives! It reminded me of those watch-like creatures from Japan, which need to be tended to, or else they will "die". There must be better things for people to do, like changing their way of thinking.

One of the cutest phrases is "no pain no gain." It may be true in the physical arena, if you are an athlete, but it is not an absolute truth in the emotional arena.

There are some people who think they cannot learn anything unless they suffer. They are like the Quaker who told his stubborn mule, "Mule thou knowest I will not beat thee. But what thou dost not know is, I will sell thee to a Southern Baptist, and he will beat the living hell out of thee." Emotional pain is caused by thought. The painless thing to do is to change the thought and get rid of the pain.

Another concept of the codependent is that they have a "black hole" inside them which consumes their life. I was a leader at a conference and in one of my presentations, said the following: "Thought creates feeling. There is no such thing as a black hole within the self. There is only dysfunctional thinking." There was a woman in attendance, who I knew to struggle with her codependent feelings. She had been taught the "black hole" notion and had thought it to be true. My thoughts on the subject changed her way of

thinking and immediately she was freed from the "Black Hole" burden because she recognized the truth.

Some think climactic events of the past can cause emotional scars. Thoughts about climactic events can cause painful memories. There are no wounded people.

People feel wounded only because they think wounded. Change your way of thinking, and you can get a fresh start immediately. Some think not all who depend on external events for their life become dysfunctional. But one thing leads to another. If you believe "event creates feeling", you will act in either a dependent or codependent manner.

Codependency Defined; Shame and Guilt

It is difficult to treat a sickness without a proper diagnosis or definition. It's like the judge who said he did not have a definition of pornography but he knew it when he saw it. If you do not have a proper definition, it's like putting the button in the wrong hole. One thing leads to another. You must start with the right hole.

In defining codependency, we can also define dependency. There is a similarity between the two: They can both be defined as behavior resulting in the belief that the event creates the feeling. The only difference between them is that the feelings of the dependent are determined by the action of the other, while the feelings of the codependent are determined by the response of the dependent to the action of the codependent. The dependent says "Because you did this I feel angry with you. If you had not done that, I would not have felt angry, so it's all your fault."

The codependent thinks "Because I did that, they are angry with me. If I had not done that, they would not feel angry, and so I feel guilty because it is my fault." A confusing way to live, don't you think?

There are No Codependents

It is not a matter of what a person does, it is a matter of who is the fastest. We have given people the label "codependent" because they act in a codependent manner. This is unfortunate. Some people have read books to discover if they are codependent. There never have been any codependent people, just people who act, at times, in a codependent manner.

When a codependent is not acting as a codependent, he is not codependent. I say this because if you have two dysfunctional people together in any kind of relationship, one will act as a dependent most of the time and the other as a codependent, depending on which one is the fastest.

I have seen married couples in which the wife was acting as a codependent, and the husband was acting as a dependent. They got divorced and the wife married a person who was more codependent than she was, and so she became the dependent and he became the codependent!

Boundaries

It is critical that people realize the importance of internal conscious boundary control. When I was in graduate school working on my counseling degree, we studied boundaries. A lack of boundaries is the cause of all dysfunctional behavior, from the dependent who becomes angry at others, to the codependent who keeps giving to everyone even if they have nothing to give.

The problem in working with boundaries is there is no therapeutic recognition of the difference between external and internal boundaries. External boundaries are the symptoms, and internal boundaries are the cause. When you only deal with external boundaries you wind up with a lot of rules and laws to follow in order to protect your internal, personal boundaries.

When you deal directly with internal boundaries you recognize that when people are in a low mood they have less boundary control than when they are in a high mood. When we are in a low mood we often seek what we are looking for outside of ourselves, rather than accessing it within ourselves.

Rather than train ourselves to survive our low moods with external boundary control, why not teach ourselves how to raise our internal mood level? We cannot raise our internal mood level when we cannot control our conscious thought. And because our internal and our external experiences are connected, we will have difficulty with our boundaries.

The reason people have weak boundaries is because they have not been able to differentiate between the rational, or that which you can logically deduce by using your physical faculties, and the conscious, that which you can logically intuit by using your spiritual faculties.

I discovered this when counseling a person who had very weak boundaries. I asked this person to sense my presence, which he could easily do by using his physical faculties, but he could not sense my presence. He did not know how to consciously, with his spiritual faculties, discern something other than me at that moment. His conscious/spiritual and rational/physical faculties were enmeshed.

When our conscious and rational faculties are enmeshed, we need to practice internal boundary control, or awareness of our conscious thought. When we are aware of our conscious thought, we can choose that on which we want to focus.

For example, consciously sense the presence of things, seen and unseen, and then practice not sensing their presence by sensing something else. Sensing the presence of things or people is the first step. You can, right now, sense the presence of the things around you. Your computer for instance. The second step is to sense the presence of one's Inner Peace while still in the physical presence of your computer (or chair, or whatever). Inner peace is unseen, and yet you know it is within you. You have experienced it before. To perform this second step, we are required to use our conscious thought or spiritual faculties.

If this is an unfamiliar concept to you, it is not because you do not have ability to think consciously or use your spiritual faculties, it is because we do not talk about this part of ourselves very often. I have read a lot of books, heard a lot of sermons, attended many conferences and I have never heard anyone talk about rational and conscious thought, or physical and spiritual faculties.

We don't discuss it much, and yet most people understand intuitively what we are talking about. We know that we use our physical faculties for the seen: sight, touch, taste, etc. And we know we use our spiritual faculties for the equally real, unseen: love, joy, and peace. Our conscious thought or spiritual faculties are what will allow us to practice boundary control. They will allow us to recognize the difference experiencing Inner Peace can make. That indeed, the presence of inner peace within us alleviates the need to seek the answer to "How am I feeling?" outside of ourselves.

When one is in the peace the process of boundary control is simply common sense. When out of the peace, we are relying on our rational/physical faculties for a function they were never created to perform, and boundary control becomes a difficult taskmaster that must be obeyed.

Try internal boundary control right now while you are reading. We can experience a spiritual awakening anytime we take to heart the question (you can ask yourself this question anytime you become aware that you are caught in a cycle of dependency/codependency), "What difference does being in the Peace or out of the Peace make while going through a difficult time?"

When we experience inner peace, our thinking has changed, and we understand that the difficult event did not create the feeling of peace we are now experiencing. An internal response of inner peace comes from understanding that thought creates feeling, not the event. Believing the event creates the feeling ($E = F$) is the cause of codependency. Understanding thought creates feeling is the cause of a healthy emotional and spiritual life.

The following formula for rational thought may be helpful: $E + T = F$

Event Triggers Thought Which Creates the Feeling

Accessing the presence of God's peace (which is within you) is the key to eliminating all addiction, dependency, codependency, dysfunctional behavior, and all psychological problems. We no longer have to be victims of our past and what happened to us, because we can learn to access God's peace within us.

The following formula for conscious thought may be helpful: $F + T = E$.

Trigger Thoughts That Impact the Response

Once again, try sensing the presence of anything or anyone that is around you now. Once you use your conscious thinking to sense the presence of something or someone else, focus on, do not think about, the presence of the peace of God.

Some doing this exercise are experiencing a sense of the presence of inner peace. Others are not. The only difference between those who are, and those who are not, is those who are, are using their internal conscious faculty to focus on the presence of the Spirit of Jesus within them. And those who are not are simply not using their internal consciousness to focus on their inner peace.

Now, take a moment and consider a painful event. Consider a time when you felt either more or less hurt when considering the same event. If what happened to us was the cause of our hurt we would feel the same hurt all the time. It is possible to feel God's inner peace when remembering the painful event. By freeing us from blaming others for our hurt, we will begin to regain control in our lives, enjoying the inner peace of God's presence.

Reflect and Wonder

Reflect on the fact that the mood you are in makes a difference. When this becomes obvious we realize the event cannot be causing the pain. You do not feel the same pain every time you think of the same event. Therefore, our mood influences our reaction, not the event.

Reflect on the truth: you do not have to feel pain every time you think of what happened to you.

Reflect on this until you see it as Truth. As you are reflecting, open yourself up to wondering about the presence of inner peace. What has been said here, could be referred to as, Applied Spiritual Intelligence 101. Applied Spiritual Intelligence 201 is learning how to consciously stay in the peace while outwardly going about the business of everyday life. Reflection, wonder and practice, it can make a world of difference. Indeed, one thing does lead to another.

Now check your answers and see if you have any change of heart.

Responses to Spiritual Intelligence Inventory

1. Codependents give of themselves until there is no real self left.
False - Their real self is inside and always there.

2. Some people need to nurture the little child in them.
False - All people have thoughts of childhood, some happy and some painful.

3. No pain, no gain.
False - Pain is caused by thought. Change the thought, get rid of the pain.

4. Some people have a black hole inside them that consumes their life.
False - There are no such things as black holes. There is only dysfunctional thinking.

4. Climactic events of the past can cause emotional scars.

False - Thoughts about climatic events can cause painful memories.

5. I feel guilty because others blame me for letting them down.

False - Codependent thoughts create codependent feelings. It is only fair.

7. Not all who depend on external events for their lives become dysfunctional.

False - One thing leads to another.