

# Depending on God

A biblical worksheet for recognizing unhealthy relational dependence and learning to love others without being ruled by fear, guilt, control, or human approval.

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## Recovering from Unhealthy Relational Dependence

Unhealthy dependence can develop in many kinds of relationships-with a parent, spouse, adult child, sibling, close friend, dating partner, ministry leader, or person who repeatedly depends on you in a crisis. It can be especially difficult to recognize in Christian relationships because fear, control, or emotional enmeshment may be intertwined with sincere desires to honor parents, preserve marriage, serve others, maintain unity, show compassion, or avoid guilt.

The goal is not to become distant, cold, selfish, or rebellious. The goal is to love others freely and faithfully while depending most deeply on God. Healthy love accepts biblical responsibility without trying to control another person, carry responsibilities God has given to someone else, or make another person's approval the source of identity and peace.

## Common Situations

Unhealthy relational dependence can appear in a number of situations:

- A parent and adult child who remain emotionally enmeshed after the child has formed an adult household.
- A spouse who believes he or she must manage the other's moods, choices, spiritual growth, or happiness.
- A parent who continually rescues an adult child from the consequences of irresponsible decisions.
- A friend or sibling who expects constant availability, agreement, reassurance, or loyalty.
- A ministry leader or member whose identity depends on being needed, admired, obeyed, or indispensable.
- A caregiver who serves sacrificially but begins to believe that everything depends on him or her.
- A relationship shaped by repeated crises, manipulation, addiction, threats, or fear of abandonment.

Not every close, sacrificial, or emotionally intense relationship is codependent. The concern is a pattern in which love is increasingly controlled by fear, guilt, misplaced responsibility, or the need for another person's approval.

## Signs of Unhealthy Dependence

A relationship may need careful examination when you regularly experience several of the following:

- Feeling responsible for another person's emotional well-being.
- Experiencing intense guilt whenever you disagree, say no, or make an independent decision.
- Believing that setting reasonable boundaries is selfish, dishonoring, or unchristian.
- Seeking a person's approval more than God's approval.

- Feeling anxious, angry, or panicked when the other person is disappointed with you.
- Being unable to make ordinary decisions without reassurance or permission.
- Rescuing someone from consequences that properly belong to his or her choices.
- Neglecting your own God-given responsibilities in order to manage another person's life.
- Hiding problems, making excuses, or controlling circumstances to preserve the relationship.
- Feeling trapped between competing loyalties—for example, between a spouse and a parent, a family and a friend, or a church and a ministry leader.
- Believing you must keep the relationship peaceful at any cost.
- Using another person's need for you as the foundation of your identity or worth.

In Christian relationships, unhealthy dependence can be disguised as submission, family loyalty, respect, compassion, ministry partnership, forgiveness, sacrificial service, or being a good spouse, parent, child, or friend. These are good biblical commitments, but they become distorted when they prevent truthful love, wise responsibility, mature decision-making, or obedience to God.

## What the Bible Teaches

The Bible calls us to love sacrificially, bear one another's burdens, honor rightful authority, remain faithful to our covenants, forgive, serve, and pursue peace. It also teaches that each person is accountable before God and must carry the responsibilities God has assigned to him or her.

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ... For each will have to bear his own load.” (Galatians 6:2, 5)

Biblical love helps carry crushing burdens, but it does not remove another person's ordinary responsibility. Love serves; it does not control. Love tells the truth; it does not protect destructive patterns. Love seeks peace; it does not make peace an idol.

For family relationships, Scripture teaches both honor and appropriate separation.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife...” (Genesis 2:24)

Leaving does not mean abandoning. It means establishing the adult responsibilities and primary earthly loyalties that God assigns. Jesus honored His family while refusing to let family expectations control His mission (Matthew 12:46-50). In every relationship, loyalty to Christ comes first (Matthew 10:37).

“The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.” (Proverbs 29:25)

## 1. Separate Responsibility from Love

You can love someone deeply without managing that person's emotions, choices, reputation, or happiness.

### Ask Yourself

- What has God actually made me responsible for in this relationship?
- What choices, feelings, and consequences belong to the other person?
- Am I offering wise help, or am I trying to prevent every disappointment and consequence?
- Am I neglecting my responsibilities because I am consumed with another person's life?

### **You Are Responsible For**

- Loving faithfully.
- Speaking truthfully and graciously.
- Keeping your promises and fulfilling your biblical responsibilities.
- Seeking wise counsel when needed.
- Responding to sin in a biblical way.
- Entrusting outcomes to God.

### **You Are Not Responsible For**

- Keeping another person happy.
- Preventing all disappointment, loneliness, anger, or anxiety.
- Making another person obey God.
- Protecting someone from every consequence.
- Carrying burdens that God has assigned to someone else.
- Guaranteeing the outcome of the relationship.

## **2. Identify Fear-Based Motivations**

Many unhealthy patterns continue because one or both people are ruled by fear.

### **Fear Of**

- Rejection or abandonment.
- Anger, conflict, or criticism.
- Being called selfish, disloyal, or unspiritual.
- Losing the relationship.
- Watching someone suffer consequences.
- Being misunderstood.
- Failing as a spouse, parent, child, friend, caregiver, or ministry leader.

**What would faithful obedience look like if I were not controlled by this person's reaction?**

The answer often reveals where repentance, courage, wisdom, and trust in God are needed.

## **3. Allow Disappointment Without Retaliation**

Many unhealthy relationships survive because one person cannot tolerate the other's disappointment. A mature believer can speak with love, make a wise decision, and allow another person to disagree or feel disappointed.

You might say, "I love you, and I understand that you are disappointed. After prayer and counsel, this is the decision I believe I should make."

Another person's disappointment is not automatic evidence that you have sinned. At the same time, do not use "boundaries" as an excuse for selfishness, harshness, avoidance, or refusing biblical duties. Examine both your decision and your manner before God.

## 4. Establish Boundaries Without Hostility

Healthy boundaries clarify what you can responsibly give, what you cannot promise, and what conduct you will not participate in. They are not punishment or revenge.

### Examples

- “I’m not available tonight, but I can talk tomorrow afternoon.”
- “I care about you, but I cannot make this decision for you.”
- “I will help you make a plan, but I cannot continue paying bills caused by the same irresponsible choices.”
- “I appreciate your advice. My spouse and I will make this decision together.”
- “I want to continue this conversation when we can speak without threats or insults.”
- “I cannot keep this destructive behavior secret. We need help from wise and appropriate people.”

A boundary cannot control another person's behavior. It clarifies your own truthful and responsible response.

## 5. Examine False Guilt and Rescuing

Many Christians carry guilt that God never intended. Ask:

- Did I violate Scripture, or did I simply violate someone's expectations?
- Am I refusing a biblical responsibility, or am I declining a responsibility that does not belong to me?
- Is my help strengthening responsible obedience, or making continued irresponsibility easier?
- Am I acting from compassion and wisdom, or from fear of another person's reaction?

Those distinctions matter. Sometimes a parent interprets independence as rebellion. A spouse may interpret disagreement as rejection. A friend may interpret limited availability as disloyalty. An adult child may interpret consequences as a lack of love. A ministry member may interpret wise limits as a lack of compassion. Human disappointment does not define guilt; God's Word does.

## 6. Build an Identity Rooted in Christ

Unhealthy dependence often asks, “What will this person think of me?” or “Who am I if this person no longer needs or approves of me?” before asking, “What does God think?”

Growth occurs when identity becomes rooted in union with Christ rather than in being needed, admired, approved, or able to keep everyone at peace. Because you belong to Christ, you can receive love gratefully without demanding it, give love freely without controlling the outcome, repent when you sin, and remain steady when another person is displeased.

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? ... If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10)

## When Additional Help Is Needed

Some situations require more than an individual boundary or private conversation. Seek wise pastoral and counseling help when the pattern involves coercive control, threats, violence, abuse, stalking, addiction, self-harm threats, serious financial exploitation, or repeated deception. Immediate danger should be reported to emergency services or the appropriate civil authorities. Biblical patience and forgiveness do not require concealing danger or enabling ongoing harm.

## Helpful Scriptures

- Genesis 2:24 - Leaving and cleaving.
- Psalm 27:10 - The Lord's faithful care when human relationships fail.
- Proverbs 29:25 - Trusting the Lord instead of fearing people.
- Matthew 10:37 - Christ above every human loyalty.
- Galatians 1:10 - Seeking God's approval rather than human approval.
- Galatians 6:2, 5 - Bearing burdens while carrying personal responsibilities.
- Ephesians 4:15 - Speaking the truth in love.
- Ephesians 6:1-4 - Honoring family relationships under God's authority.
- Colossians 3:1-4 - Finding life and identity in Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 - Depending on the sufficiency of God's grace.

## A Prayer

Father, teach me to love others without making them my master or making myself their savior. Give me wisdom to know my responsibilities, courage to speak truth and set wise limits, humility to repent when I am wrong, and faith to entrust other people and outcomes to You. Root my identity in Christ rather than in being needed or approved. Help me serve freely, faithfully, and without fear. Amen.

## Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1 Which relationship am I examining, and what pattern concerns me?
- 2 What am I afraid will happen if I stop managing, rescuing, pleasing, or seeking reassurance?
- 3 What responsibilities has God actually given me in this relationship?
- 4 What responsibilities belong to the other person?
- 5 Where have I confused love with control, rescue, unlimited availability, or approval?
- 6 What truth from Scripture addresses my fear, guilt, or desire for control?
- 7 What is one truthful, loving, and responsible step I can take this week?
- 8 From whom should I seek wise counsel and accountability?