

## Codependency

When I met my neighbor Denise, she was struggling with addictions. And I too was struggling, but with something different—with debilitating anxiety, along with a chronic case of acute codependency. I was finding it difficult to just take care of myself and my kids; and, yet, Denise was asking for my help to get to the grocery store (specifically when she received her monthly TANF). It seemed like the *Christian thing* to do—to help someone—even if I didn't feel the strength.

It actually might not have been a burden on me if it had truly been just one grocery store trip; but MULTIPLE *needs* would pop up during the month. Or, sometimes, after the shopping, Denise might suddenly ask to swing by someplace—like the liquor store for cheap smokes, because it was on the way home; or the library to drop off books; or another grocery store where they sold the \$7 coffee drink she liked. And, then, maybe, there would be just one more place—like our new, local marijuana dispensary. It was hard to sort through it all. My gut was saying *no*; my codependency was saying *yes*. I felt the need to take care of her as she was on the verge of a crisis—although it was a continual crisis, and although I was in the middle of MY OWN crisis. I rationalized away all the red flags by telling myself: *Jesus told us to love our neighbor; who am I to judge?*

After wrestling with my convictions, I decided I should AT LEAST draw a firm line with the marijuana. Sure, people may have legitimate reasons to buy non-prescription drugs; but it went against MY gut and MY conscience. And although I couldn't hear my God clearly in this situation, I DID know He gave me a conscience to follow.

## Codependency

But it didn't end there. At times, she'd also ask for money—for toilet paper as an example. Feeling the responsibility to think through all THOSE requests too, I quickly obtained a qualifying score in mental gymnastics. My fears were asking: *Are you sure your money is being spent where you are told it's being spent? And How are YOU capable of determining a 'want' versus a 'need' for another person when you can't even determine that for yourself?* I finally came to, yet, ANOTHER decision—I would say *no* to giving out money, but *yes* to occasionally buying her items.

Frankly, that didn't work out as well as my codependency said it would either. For instance, one time, she pleaded with me to buy her the \$7 coffee drink she enjoyed so much. My heartstrings were pulled, and my co-dependency began to coax: *Every mother deserves a special treat once in a while!* After purchasing it, however, I turned on myself: *Why am I buying a luxury item for a neighbor, when I can't even afford necessity items for my own children?* Codependency, of course, was the answer: Not wanting to confront; not wanting to let someone down; not wanting to say *no*—Even if that *no* was coming from my conscience which, again, I had deemed to be God's compass.

Another time, after driving her downtown for an appointment with DHS, she suddenly announced: *My blood sugar is really low, and because I'm a diabetic, it's important for me to eat something immediately; could you please buy me french fries at McDonald's?* At this request, my codependency and conscience did a quick dance. Codependency had the advantage, jumping into high alert mode, and stating emphatically: *A victim is sinking and needs rescuing! Pronto!* But yet my conscience got the last word in with a striking demand: *At the very least, let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'.* If I was going to say *yes*, I needed to willingly and joyfully do it—*as unto the*

## Codependency

*Lord*—like the Bible teaches. (Problem was, my faith teaches a lot of OTHER things too— Important things I was missing here.)

As we entered the McDonald’s drive-through line for the \$2 purchase, I was somewhat proud of myself for making this “heroic” choice, supporting Denise while simultaneously not doing so begrudgingly. The small but painstaking case seemed settled, right? Wrong. As I ordered into the intercom, Denise suddenly pushed herself across my lap and interjected: *Oh, and add a soda.*

At this point, my boundary violation alert turned on and, offended, I quickly refuted the request into the intercom: *No, don’t add a soda.* I then proceeded to gently but firmly—as though she were a small child—ask Denise if she’d like a free water. She accepted, although with disappointment. It seemed so petty saying *no* to a \$1 item, and yet this is where we were at. I knew I had to, at least, keep SOME boundaries—no matter how awkward—to maintain a form of sanity, WITHIN THE INSANITY.

Eventually, after a few months went by, I became too overwhelmed to keep my codependency in tow and told Denise to find someone else to drive her places. I held this ground for many months, although there WERE some occasions she’d stop by my home—to borrow my phone, to take food from my cabinets, or to choose a pair of my shoes. None of THESE requests actually overwhelmed me, but neither can I say they set right with me either.

This brings me to the last time I helped my neighbor (Sounds so terrible to my codependency to put it that way). She asked me to drive her to the pharmacy to fill a pain prescription for her teeth surgery. I thought it through, knowing full well I didn’t want to get back

## Codependency

into being her driver, let alone be the one to get her pain meds. I had a fear that whether it was a prescription or non-prescription, an emergency or non-emergency, consciously or subconsciously, she was always seeking to medicate. And, yet, I ended up justifying it THIS time because a professional (a doctor) had authorized it. *And besides!* —piped in codependency loud and clear—*I hadn't driven Denise anywhere in a long time! Perhaps I owed it to her for waiting on me so long!*

I DID, once again, TRY to set SOME boundaries. For example, I told her to *come back in an hour, after I had rested between kid events*. So, she left. However, she soon called crying, begging me to take her *RIGHT AWAY*. As it startled me, I answered *yes*, without even processing the question. That's a strange reason to let go of a boundary, but never-the-less that's how codependency works—setting up boundaries just to tear them down afterwards. Knowing I needed encouragement after this blatant upset, codependency reassured me: *You did the right thing; she's probably in great pain.*

On the way, I found out the surgery actually had been a whole two weeks prior, and she had had only minor dental work done that morning. Adding into the equation her quick change in mood, I knew it was doubtful she was actually in *DESPERATE* need of hydrocodone. But I had told her we would go, so we went. *I used the time to connect with her*, I told myself in comfort. But after waiting 20 minutes in my car at the pharmacy, she came back empty-handed and proceeded to ask me for \$2.75—*an unexpected copay*. My mouth dropped open, and both her eyes and mine darted to the coins we had heard rattling in my car doors the whole trip up.

## Codependency

I stood my ground, however: *No, I don't feel comfortable paying for ANY medications—prescription OR non-prescription—no matter how small the cost.* Once again, it felt petty and awkward, like in previous times. When we started driving away, she then asked: *Will you bring me back before they close at 6 p.m. if I get the money?* I paused to think if I could “willingly” (if not “joyfully” at this point) say *yes*; and, so, I said *yes*. She then asked, however: *If I find enough cans and bottles, will you take me to the grocery store to get the deposit, and THEN take me back to the pharmacy?* Thinking how ridiculous this was becoming, as well as the interference it would have on my plans with my children, I told her: *No, I wouldn't be able to do that.* Then, I dropped her back at home. But thirty minutes later, she called, repeating the same questions, this time in a desperate voice. I repeated my answers, repeated the boundaries, and then laid myself down, emotionally exhausted.

I didn't hear back from her until later that night when she texted me. That's when she thanked me for trying to help and let me know that she DID end up getting her two-day supply of hydrocodone. I didn't know HOW to reply to that text. I couldn't honestly tell her I was happy for her. Plus, the whole ordeal felt mind-boggling crazy; I couldn't believe I was, once again, entrapped in the complexities of codependency.

When I think upon this relationship now, I'd like to blame my neighbor. Codependency is good at blaming others. But I know it is ME who has the problem. No one MAKES ME do anything. It's my choice. Yet, codependency gets angry when it has to admit helping others is not always the answer and that people may just have to go without something (or two hundred somethings) before they change patterns of living. It grieves me to have to learn this lesson again and again.

## Codependency

Feeling drained and anxious, or even angry, are my telltale signs of active codependency, letting me know I am disconnecting from my conscience—and disconnecting from the God I know. And I've come to realize: If God's Spirit of Charity wants me involved in someone's life, there is grace and energy to do it—not confusion.

Codependency masks itself as love, self-sacrifice, and humility; but, in reality, it is full of self-reliance and pride. It enables the people around us to remain emotionally and spiritually sick—drawing them away from health and sanity, not closer; and it keeps us sick as well.

Codependency will even painstakingly detail for you every tiny, minute movement of another person, as well as my relationship to them—like I've done in this story—instead of simply admitting the obvious: *I'm a struggling codependent and am unable to navigate the complexities of sharing life with an addict.*

Wake up, Soul, and smell the \$7 coffee!

But don't buy it.