

BEYOND CO-DEPENDENCY: LIFE IN CHRIST

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Introduction: "When Needing Others Becomes Needing Too Much"

There is a prison with no visible bars, no locked doors, no armed guards—yet millions live within its walls. It is the prison of co-dependency, where the need for affirmation becomes an addiction, where the fear of rejection dictates every decision, and where the self slowly disappears into the expectations and demands of others. You may not even realize you're trapped until you find yourself exhausted from trying to earn love, terrified of being alone, and unable to recognize who you are apart from those you serve, please, or desperately need.

Perhaps you've felt it: the gnawing anxiety when someone seems distant, the compulsion to fix others' problems at the expense of your own well-being, the paralyzing fear that if you set a boundary, you'll be abandoned. You give and give, hoping that enough sacrifice will finally make you worthy of the love you crave. But no matter how much you pour out, the emptiness remains. Co-dependency whispers a cruel lie: *Your value depends on their approval. Your identity exists only in their eyes.*

Yet into this prison comes a truth so revolutionary, so liberating, that it has the power to shatter every chain: **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"** (Philippians 1:21 NASB).

When the apostle Paul penned these words from his own prison cell in Rome, he revealed the secret that had transformed his life from striving to thriving, from anxiety to assurance, from needing others for validation to resting in the love of God. Paul had discovered something the co-dependent heart desperately needs to know: true freedom doesn't come from needing less, but from needing *rightly*—not depending on others for identity, but depending on Christ for life itself.

This book is not about becoming independent, self-sufficient, or emotionally detached. God designed us for relationship, for community, for genuine interdependence. The problem isn't that we need people; it's that we've made people into gods, demanding from them what only God can provide:

unconditional love, unshakable security, and an identity that cannot be taken away.

Throughout the letter to the Philippians, Paul gives us a roadmap to freedom—not the false freedom of isolation, but the true freedom of Christ-centered interdependence. He shows us what it looks like to love others deeply without losing ourselves, to serve sacrificially without enabling dysfunction, and to build healthy relationships on the foundation of God's love rather than the quicksand of human approval. In Philippians, we discover how to move beyond the fear-driven dance of co-dependency into the joy-filled rhythm of life in Christ.

The contrast is stark and unmistakable: **Co-dependency thrives on the fear of loss; life in Christ thrives on security in love.** Co-dependency says, "I need you to need me, or I am nothing." Christ says, "You are mine, secure and beloved, and from that security you are free to love well." Co-dependency keeps us in constant calculation—*Have I done enough? Will they leave? What if I'm not needed?* Christ invites us to rest—*It is finished. You are accepted. You can breathe.*

Augustine understood this truth centuries ago when he wrote what might be summarized: **"The human soul was made to depend—not on others for identity—but on God for life."** We were created with a God-shaped vacuum that no human relationship can fill. When we try to fill it with the approval of others, we condemn both ourselves and them to inevitable disappointment. But when we find our life in Christ, we discover that we have all we need—and from that fullness, we can finally love others as Christ loves us: freely, generously, without the desperate strings of co-dependency attached.

In the pages ahead, we will walk through Philippians together, examining how Paul's words illuminate the path from co-dependency to freedom. We'll explore how Christ meets our deepest needs for security, identity, and purpose. We'll learn to recognize the patterns that keep us trapped and embrace the practices that set us free. We'll discover that life in Christ doesn't

mean we won't experience pain, rejection, or loss—but it does mean these things will no longer define us or destroy us.

If you're reading this book, chances are you've grown tired of the exhausting cycle of co-dependency. You're ready for something more, something real, something lasting. The good news is this: Christ is already standing at the door of your prison, key in hand, waiting to lead you into the wide-open spaces of His love.

The journey beyond co-dependency begins here—not with a formula, but with a Person. Not with self-help, but with the Savior. Not with independence, but with a life hidden with Christ in God, where you are finally, fully, forever free.

Chapter 1: From Pleasing People to Pursuing Christ

Philippians 1:1–11

The Bond-Servant's Secret

The letter to the Philippians opens with a peculiar introduction: "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1 NASB). Not apostles. Not church leaders. Not even faithful disciples. *Bond-servants*. The Greek word *doulos* carries the weight of complete ownership—a slave who has willingly surrendered all rights, all autonomy, all claim to self-determination. For most of us raised in cultures that prize independence and self-actualization, this sounds like the opposite of freedom. Yet Paul uses this title as his primary identity, and something remarkable radiates from these opening verses: unshakeable joy.

Here is a man writing from prison, uncertain of his future, separated from those he loves—and yet his letter overflows with rejoicing. He speaks of his chains with confidence, his circumstances with contentment, and his companions with genuine affection. What accounts for this supernatural joy? The answer lies in understanding what Paul has been freed *from* by becoming a bond-servant to Christ.

Paul had once been enslaved to the opinions of others. As a young Pharisee, he had been addicted to religious performance, zealous for the approval of his peers, and violently opposed to anything that threatened his status and reputation. He lived in the exhausting prison of people-pleasing, where worth was measured by achievement and identity was validated by the applause of others. But on the road to Damascus, Paul encountered the risen Christ—and everything changed. The man who once needed the affirmation of the Sanhedrin discovered he was already loved, already chosen, already complete in Jesus. In surrendering to Christ, Paul found the freedom that co-dependency had always promised but could never deliver.

The Co-Dependent's Confession

If we're honest, most of us know something of Paul's former prison. Co-dependency whispers a relentless message: "**I need others to validate my worth.**" This manifests in countless ways:

We say yes when we desperately want to say no, terrified that a boundary will result in rejection. We perform, achieve, and sacrifice, hoping that enough good deeds will finally prove we're worthy of love. We become chameleons, shape-shifting to match the expectations of whoever is in the room, losing ourselves in the process. We take responsibility for others' emotions, believing that if we just try harder, give more, or love better, we can earn the security we crave.

The cruel irony is that this strategy never works. The more we seek validation from others, the more elusive it becomes. People cannot bear the weight of being our source of worth—they will inevitably disappoint, change, or leave. And even when they do affirm us, it's never quite enough. The co-dependent heart is like a bucket with a hole in the bottom: no amount of external affirmation can fill it because the need itself is infinite.

Perhaps you've experienced the exhaustion of this cycle. You've bent yourself into impossible positions trying to keep someone happy. You've sacrificed your own needs, dreams, and boundaries on the altar of approval. You've lived in constant fear that one wrong move will expose you as unworthy and result in abandonment. You've given so much of yourself away that you no longer know who you are apart from what others need you to be.

This is not the life Christ died to give you.

The Declaration of True Identity

Against the co-dependent's anxious confession stands the gospel's confident declaration: "**I am already loved, chosen, and complete in Him.**"

Listen to how Paul describes the Philippian believers: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for

you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3–6 NASB).

Notice what Paul does *not* say. He doesn't thank God for their perfect performance. He doesn't rejoice over their ability to meet his needs. He doesn't express confidence in their willpower or their capacity to hold it all together. Instead, Paul's joy and confidence rest entirely on what *God* has done and what *God* will continue to do. The good work was begun by Him. The good work will be perfected by Him. Their identity is secure not because of their achievement but because of God's faithfulness.

This is revolutionary for the co-dependent heart. You don't have to earn what has already been given. You don't have to perform to maintain what Christ has secured. "**He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus**" (Philippians 1:6 NASB). This is our anchor, our lifeline, our unshakeable foundation. God started something in you when He saved you, and He is personally committed to seeing it through to completion. Your worth is not up for debate. Your identity is not dependent on your performance. Your security is not contingent on others' approval.

You are loved—not because you've earned it, but because God is love.

You are chosen—not because you're perfect, but because His grace is sufficient.

You are complete in Christ—not because you have it all together, but because He who is complete has made you His own.

Partnership Born of Love, Not Need

One of the most beautiful aspects of Paul's letter is his genuine affection for the Philippian church. He speaks of them as partners in the gospel, expresses his longing to see them, and prays for their spiritual growth with tender intensity. But notice the foundation of this relationship: **true partnership in the gospel is born out of love, not need.**

Paul doesn't relate to the Philippians from a position of desperate need for their approval. He's not manipulating them to meet his emotional requirements. He's not anxious about whether they still like him or whether they're fulfilling his expectations. Instead, he relates to them from a place of fullness—he is so secure in Christ's love that he has genuine love to give them, with no strings attached.

This is the difference between co-dependent relationships and Christ-centered interdependence. Co-dependency says, "I need you to need me so I can feel valuable." Christ-centered relationships say, "I am already complete in Christ, and from that fullness, I can serve you without demanding that you complete me." Co-dependency creates entanglements of obligation and manipulation. Life in Christ creates partnerships of mutual love and encouragement, where both parties are free to be themselves and to grow in grace.

Paul can pray for their spiritual maturity without being threatened by it. He can celebrate their participation in the gospel without needing to control it. He can express genuine affection without demanding that they reciprocate in specific ways. This is what healthy, holy relationships look like—and they're only possible when our primary source of identity and security is Christ, not other people.

Affection Rooted in God's Reality

Paul's love for the Philippians is profound, but notice where it's rooted: "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:7–8 NASB).

Paul's affection flows from a shared reality in God's grace. They are fellow partakers, co-participants in something infinitely bigger than their personal relationship. And critically, Paul's longing for them is "with the affection of Christ Jesus"—his love for them is filtered through and empowered by Christ's

love. He doesn't love them to get something from them; he loves them because Christ first loved him, and that love overflows to others.

This is the pathway out of co-dependency: learning to receive our affirmation from Christ so that our affection for others becomes a gift rather than a demand. When we know we are held in God's love, we can hold others with open hands. When we understand that our value comes from being "in Christ," we stop demanding that others affirm us and start genuinely serving their good.

The Prayer That Transforms

Paul's prayer for the Philippians in verses 9–11 reveals what a heart liberated from co-dependency prays for: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9–11 NASB).

Notice that Paul doesn't pray for them to approve of him, to meet his needs, or to validate his ministry. He prays for their growth in discernment, their purity of heart, and their fruitfulness in righteousness. He prays that they would live in a way that glorifies God, not in a way that makes Paul feel good about himself. This is love without agenda, intercession without manipulation, concern for others that flows from concern for God's glory.

When we're trapped in co-dependency, our prayers become self-centered even when they're about others: "God, make them understand me. Make them appreciate what I do. Make them change so I can feel secure." But when we find our life in Christ, our prayers are transformed: "God, help them grow in Your love. Give them discernment to follow You. Fill them with Your righteousness, regardless of how that affects me."

The Road from Here

So how do we move from pleasing people to pursuing Christ? How do we transition from the anxious striving of co-dependency to the joyful surrender of the bond-servant? It begins with honest self-examination and intentional surrender.

Take time to journal where your affirmation-seeking tendencies arise. Ask yourself these diagnostic questions:

- When do I feel most anxious about others' opinions of me?
- In what relationships do I find myself performing or hiding my true self?
- Where am I saying yes out of fear rather than genuine desire?
- Who do I need to approve of me to feel okay about myself?
- What am I afraid will happen if I set a healthy boundary?
- In what ways am I trying to control others' perception of me?

These are uncomfortable questions, but they shine light into the hidden places where co-dependency has taken root. You cannot surrender what you haven't acknowledged. You cannot be freed from chains you pretend aren't there.

Then surrender these patterns to the One who began the good work in you. Bring your people-pleasing tendencies to the foot of the cross. Confess your addiction to approval. Acknowledge your fear of rejection. And then—this is critical—receive the truth of who you are in Christ. You are His bond-servant, which means you are no longer enslaved to the opinions of others. You are loved, chosen, and complete. He who began this good work will be faithful to complete it.

This isn't a one-time prayer but a daily, moment-by-moment practice. Every time you feel the pull of co-dependency—the urge to perform, the fear of disappointing someone, the compulsion to fix what isn't yours to fix—return to your identity as Christ's beloved. Remind yourself: I don't need their approval;

I already have His. I don't need to earn love; I've already been chosen. I don't need to be perfect; He who is perfect is making me complete.

Succeeding at What Matters

Francis Chan's words pierce through the fog of our people-pleasing: "**Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter.**"

How much of your life has been spent succeeding at earning others' approval while failing to pursue the One who already delights in you? How many years have you wasted trying to please people who were never meant to be your source of validation? How much energy have you poured into maintaining the image others have of you instead of becoming who God created you to be?

The tragic reality is that co-dependency can look successful on the outside—you're helpful, you're agreeable, you're always there when someone needs you. But inside, you're dying. You're succeeding at things that don't really matter while failing to embrace the one thing that does: life in Christ.

Paul discovered that true success isn't found in pleasing people but in pursuing Christ. True joy isn't found in being needed but in being loved. True freedom isn't found in independence but in the radical dependence of a bond-servant who belongs completely to Jesus.

This is the invitation of Philippians 1: to lay down the exhausting burden of people-pleasing and to take up the easy yoke of following Christ. To stop seeking affirmation from those who cannot satisfy and to rest in the approval of the One who calls you beloved. To move from the prison of co-dependency into the spacious place of life in Christ—where you are already loved, already chosen, already complete.

The good work has begun. And the One who started it will be faithful to finish it.

Not because of your performance.

Not because you've finally earned it.

But because He is faithful, and His love never fails.

Reflect and Respond:

1. Where in your life are you most tempted to seek validation from others rather than from Christ?
2. What would it look like for you to embrace Paul's identity as a "bond-servant of Christ Jesus" in your current circumstances?
3. Write Philippians 1:6 somewhere you'll see it daily this week. Let it remind you that God is faithful to complete what He's started in you— independent of others' opinions.

Chapter 2: Redefining Relationships through the Gospel

Philippians 1:12–26

Joy Behind Bars

"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12 NASB).

Read that sentence again slowly. Paul is writing from a Roman prison—chained to guards, uncertain whether he'll face execution, stripped of his freedom and separated from those he loves. And his opening line is essentially: "I want you to know... things are going great!"

For most of us, Paul's circumstances would be catastrophic. Imprisonment would feel like the ultimate rejection, proof that we'd failed, evidence that God had abandoned us. We'd be consumed with questions: *What do people think of me now? Has my reputation been ruined? Will my friends still value me if I can't perform or produce? What if they forget about me?*

But Paul's response reveals a stunning truth: **his imprisonment didn't rob him of joy because his identity wasn't tied to others' approval.** He wasn't devastated by loss of status because his status was secure in Christ. He wasn't anxious about what others thought because he knew what God thought. He wasn't panicked about controlling the narrative because he had relinquished control to the One who writes all stories for His glory.

This is the freedom that eludes the co-dependent heart. When our sense of worth is entangled with others' opinions, changing circumstances feel like existential threats. A critical comment becomes a death sentence. A friend's distance feels like abandonment. A season of obscurity terrifies us because if we're not seen, affirmed, and needed, who are we?

Paul shows us a radically different way to live—and it begins with understanding where true security is found.

The Greater Progress of the Gospel

Paul's perspective on his imprisonment is stunning: "My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" (Philippians 1:12–14 NASB).

Notice what Paul sees when he looks at his situation. He doesn't see personal loss; he sees gospel advancement. He doesn't see the end of his ministry; he sees new opportunities to witness to the palace guards. He doesn't see his suffering as meaningless; he sees it as inspiring others to greater boldness. Paul has learned to evaluate his life not by how much others affirm him, but by how much Christ is exalted through him.

This shift in perspective is essential for moving beyond co-dependency. The co-dependent evaluates every situation through the lens of self: *How does this make me look? What will people think? Am I being appreciated? Am I needed?* But Paul has been liberated into a Christ-centered lens: *Is the gospel advancing? Is Christ being made known? Are others being encouraged in their faith?*

When your primary concern shifts from being validated to Christ being glorified, you become remarkably free. Criticism can't destroy you because your worth isn't on trial. Obscurity can't threaten you because you're not seeking the spotlight. Even betrayal and opposition lose their power to devastate because you're not depending on people to give you what only Christ can provide.

When Others Preach Christ from Envy

But Paul's freedom is tested even further. Not only is he in prison, but some people are actually using his imprisonment as an opportunity to advance themselves: "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am

appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment" (Philippians 1:15–17 NASB).

Imagine the scene: Paul is chained in a Roman cell, unable to travel or preach freely. And some preachers, rather than standing with him in solidarity, are using his circumstances to promote themselves, preaching with impure motives, hoping to cause him distress. In the economy of co-dependency, this would be unbearable. These people are trying to steal his audience, damage his reputation, and kick him while he's down.

How does Paul respond? "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice" (Philippians 1:18 NASB).

Let that sink in. Paul rejoices—not because the situation is ideal, not because people's motives are pure, not because he's being treated fairly—but because Christ is being proclaimed. Paul's joy is not dependent on receiving proper recognition, fair treatment, or others' loyalty. His joy is anchored in something far more stable: the advance of Christ's kingdom.

This is the difference between co-dependency's fixation on control and Paul's relinquishment of control to Christ.

The Illusion of Control

Co-dependency is fundamentally about control—specifically, the desperate attempt to control how others perceive us, respond to us, and meet our needs. We try to control:

- **Outcomes:** We manipulate situations to ensure we're seen in a positive light.
- **Others' emotions:** We take responsibility for how people feel, believing if we just do more, they'll finally be happy (and thus we'll be secure).
- **The narrative:** We carefully manage what others know about us, terrified that if they see the real us, they'll reject us.

- **Relationships:** We cling, pursue, and chase, unable to give others the freedom to choose us or not choose us.

This exhausting cycle of control is born from fear—fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, fear of being exposed as unworthy. We believe that if we can just control enough variables, we can ensure the love and approval we desperately need. But control is an illusion, and the harder we grasp, the more everything slips through our fingers.

Paul had learned a far better way: relinquishing control to Christ. He couldn't control his circumstances—he was imprisoned. He couldn't control others' motives—they preached Christ from envy. He couldn't control the outcome—he didn't know if he would live or die. But he could trust that Christ was sovereign, that God's purposes would prevail, and that his identity was secure regardless of how things unfolded.

This is the great paradox: we find freedom not by gaining more control, but by surrendering control to the One who is actually in control. When we release our death grip on people and circumstances, we discover that Christ has been holding us all along.

Attachment vs. Abiding

One of the most crucial distinctions in moving beyond co-dependency is understanding **the difference between attachment and abiding**.

Attachment is characterized by:

- Fear-based clinging to people for emotional survival
- Anxiety when the relationship feels threatened
- Identity that rises and falls with the relationship's status
- Love that functions as a transaction: "I'll love you so you'll love me back"
- Inability to let go, even of unhealthy relationships
- The relationship serving primarily to meet our own emotional needs

Abiding is characterized by:

- Security rooted in Christ that overflows into healthy relationships
- Peace even when relationships go through difficult seasons
- Identity that remains stable in Christ regardless of relationship status
- Love that is freely given, not contingent on receiving love back
- Freedom to release relationships to God's sovereignty
- The relationship serving God's purposes and both parties' growth

Paul demonstrates abiding throughout this passage. He loves the Philippians deeply—his affection is genuine and profound. But he's not attached to them in a co-dependent way. His joy doesn't require their constant affirmation. His identity doesn't depend on their loyalty. His peace isn't contingent on their approval.

Instead, Paul abides in Christ—and from that abiding, he has genuine love to give. He writes: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake" (Philippians 1:21–24 NASB).

Notice the freedom here. Paul would prefer to depart and be with Christ—his ultimate security and joy is not in human relationships but in Christ Himself. Yet he's willing to remain for the sake of others, not because he needs them but because they need him. This is love without strings, service without manipulation, relationship without co-dependency.

Learning to Love for Christ's Sake

The co-dependent loves others for emotional survival. We attach to people because we need them to validate us, affirm us, and make us feel worthy. This isn't really love—it's need masquerading as love. It's taking disguised as

giving. And it places an impossible burden on the other person: be my source of life, or I will fall apart.

But Paul shows us how to **love others for Christ's sake, not for emotional survival**. He writes: "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again" (Philippians 1:25–26 NASB).

Paul's motivation for wanting to remain alive is their spiritual progress and joy. Not his need for their approval. Not his fear of being forgotten. Not his compulsion to be needed. He genuinely desires their good because he's secure in Christ's love.

This transforms everything. When we're secure in Christ, we can:

- **Serve without scorekeeping:** We give freely because we've been freely given to, not to put others in our debt.
- **Love without manipulation:** We genuinely desire others' good, not just their affirmation of us.
- **Encourage without needing credit:** We celebrate others' growth even when it doesn't benefit us directly.
- **Sacrifice without resentment:** We lay down our lives because Christ laid down His, not to earn love we're afraid we'll lose.
- **Release without bitterness:** We can let relationships go when necessary because our life is hidden with Christ in God.

This is the difference between loving from fullness and loving from emptiness. Co-dependency loves from a place of desperate need—and that kind of love eventually suffocates everyone involved. But when we abide in Christ, we love from a place of abundance, having received so much love that we can't help but overflow it to others.

Christ Exalted in Body, Life, or Death

The key verse of this chapter reveals the secret to Paul's freedom: "**Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death**" (Philippians 1:20 NASB).

This is Paul's litmus test for everything: Is Christ exalted? Not "Am I being appreciated?" Not "Are my needs being met?" Not "Are people treating me fairly?" The question is singular and clarifying: Is Christ being magnified in and through my life?

When this becomes our central question, we're liberated from the tyranny of people-pleasing. We no longer need every relationship to go well because our purpose transcends personal comfort. We no longer need constant affirmation because our goal is Christ's exaltation, not our elevation. We no longer need to control outcomes because we trust that whether we live or die, Christ will be glorified.

Paul can say "to live is Christ and to die is gain" because Christ has become everything to him. Living means more opportunity to make Christ known. Dying means being united with Christ forever. Either way, he wins. Either way, Christ is exalted. This is freedom—the kind of freedom that makes co-dependency's chains look like the prison they truly are.

Relationships as Altars, Not Stages

What if our relationships became altars where Christ is exalted instead of stages where we perform for love?

Think about the difference. A stage is where we perform—we present our best self, hide our weaknesses, and work desperately to earn applause. We're constantly aware of the audience, adjusting our performance based on their response, living in fear that we'll be booed off stage if we don't measure up. The stage is about us—our image, our acceptance, our validation.

But an altar is where we sacrifice. We bring our lives as living offerings to God, concerned primarily with His glory, not our reputation. We're honest about our

brokenness because the altar isn't about pretending to be perfect—it's about acknowledging our need for God's grace. We don't come to the altar to be applauded but to worship. And at the altar, we're freed from the exhausting performance because God already knows us fully and loves us completely.

What would it look like if you stopped treating your relationships as stages and started viewing them as altars?

In your marriage, instead of performing to earn your spouse's approval, what if you both came before God together, seeking to glorify Him in how you love, serve, and sanctify one another?

In your friendships, instead of carefully curating your image to seem impressive, what if you were honest about your struggles, celebrating Christ's work in your weakness rather than pretending you have it all together?

In your family, instead of trying to control how everyone feels about you, what if you focused on reflecting Christ's character whether you're misunderstood or not?

In your workplace, instead of obsessing over recognition, what if you worked "as for the Lord rather than for men" (Colossians 3:23), finding your satisfaction in His approval alone?

This isn't about caring less about relationships—it's about caring about them rightly. When relationships become altars, we actually love people more genuinely because we're not using them to meet needs only God can meet. We're free to serve their good without demanding that they serve ours. We're free to be honest without fearing rejection because our acceptance is secure in Christ. We're free to let Christ be exalted, even when it means we're not the hero of the story.

What You Cannot Keep, What You Cannot Lose

Jim Elliot's famous words echo Paul's perspective: "**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**"

Elliot wrote those words before he was martyred for the gospel in Ecuador, killed while attempting to reach the Huaorani people with the message of Christ. He gave his life—something he could not keep anyway—to gain eternal reward and see souls saved—something no one could take from him.

Paul understood this truth profoundly. He gave up his reputation—something he couldn't ultimately control. He gave up his freedom—something that could be taken at any moment. He gave up the comfort of being liked by everyone—something that was never guaranteed. But in exchange, he gained Christ—and no one, nothing, not even death itself could take Christ from him.

Co-dependency clings desperately to what we cannot keep: others' approval, relationships we can't control, an image we can't sustain. We exhaust ourselves protecting what is ultimately fragile, temporary, and uncertain. We're fools who refuse to give what we cannot keep, and in clinging to it, we lose what really matters.

But life in Christ invites us to give freely what we cannot keep anyway—our need to be needed, our demand to be affirmed, our addiction to approval—and in letting go, we gain what we cannot lose: the love of Christ, an identity secured in Him, and joy that transcends circumstances.

The Daily Practice of Relinquishment

So how do we move from co-dependent attachment to Christ-centered abiding? How do we transform our relationships from stages to altars? It requires the daily practice of relinquishment.

Each morning, surrender your relationships to Christ. Instead of waking up anxious about whether someone is upset with you or planning how to gain someone's approval, begin by consciously placing every relationship at the foot of the cross. Pray: "Lord, these people are Yours, not mine. My identity doesn't depend on how they treat me today. My joy doesn't depend on their affirmation. Help me love them for Your sake, not for my emotional survival."

Throughout the day, practice the litmus test of Philippians 1:20. When you're tempted to people-please, ask: "Will Christ be exalted in this

decision?" When you're hurt by someone's response, ask: "How can Christ be exalted in my response?" When you're anxious about a relationship, ask: "Is my goal Christ's glory or my comfort?"

When you're triggered into co-dependent patterns, recognize what's happening. Notice the fear, the need to control, the desperate grasping. And then return to your anchor: "To live is Christ, to die is gain. My life is hidden with Christ in God. I don't need this person's approval to be okay. I already have God's."

Regularly reflect on where you're still performing instead of abiding.

Journal about relationships where you feel you're on stage rather than at the altar. Identify the fears that drive you to seek control. Confess your attempts to find in people what only God can provide. And then receive again the truth that you are loved, chosen, and complete in Christ—not because of how well you perform, but because of how faithful He is.

Free to Live, Free to Die, Free to Love

Paul's posture toward life and death reveals the ultimate freedom from co-dependency: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21 NASB). He's so secure in Christ that he can hold both life and death with open hands. He's not grasping at life because he needs more time to earn God's approval—he already has it. He's not afraid of death because it can't separate him from Christ—it will only unite him more fully to the One he loves most.

This same freedom is available to you in your relationships. You can hold them with open hands because your life doesn't depend on them—your life is Christ. You can love without fear of loss because even if you lose the relationship, you cannot lose Christ. You can serve without needing anything in return because you've already received everything in Him.

This doesn't mean relationships don't matter. It means they matter rightly. We love people deeply, but we don't make them into gods. We invest in relationships genuinely, but we don't derive our identity from them. We grieve

losses authentically, but we're not destroyed by them because our foundation remains secure.

The gospel redefines relationships by relocating our source of life. We no longer need people to be our savior; we already have One. We no longer need relationships to complete us; we're already complete in Christ. We no longer need others' approval to give us worth; our worth was secured at the cross.

And from that secure place, we're finally free to love—not perfectly, but genuinely. Not from need, but from abundance. Not to get, but to give. Not to be exalted, but to see Christ exalted.

This is the gospel's invitation: to step off the stage and approach the altar. To release what you cannot keep and gain what you cannot lose. To stop performing for love and start abiding in the One who is love.

Paul discovered that joy doesn't come from controlling circumstances or managing others' opinions. Joy comes from Christ being exalted, whether by life or by death, whether in freedom or in chains, whether applauded or opposed.

And when Christ is exalted in your relationships—when they become altars instead of stages—you'll discover the same shocking truth Paul did: even in a prison cell, chained to a guard, criticized by enemies, and uncertain of the future, you can have joy.

Because your joy doesn't depend on them.

It depends on Him.

And He will never let you go.

Reflect and Respond:

1. In what relationships are you still performing on a stage rather than worshiping at an altar? What would need to change for Christ to be exalted there instead of your reputation protected?

2. Where are you trying to control outcomes, people, or narratives? What would it look like to relinquish that control to Christ this week?
3. Paul could say "to live is Christ, to die is gain." What would you say completes this sentence for you: "To live is _____"? If your answer is anything other than Christ, you've identified where co-dependency still has a foothold. Bring that to Jesus today.

Chapter 3: The Mind of Christ: The Antidote to Co-dependency

Philippians 2:1-11

The Great Fear

"If I stop pleasing others, I'll have nothing left."

This is the whisper that keeps us trapped. The co-dependent heart is convinced that setting boundaries equals selfishness, that saying no equals abandonment, that attending to our own needs equals narcissism. **Co-dependency says, "I'll lose myself if I stop pleasing others."** And so we keep performing, accommodating, sacrificing—not out of love, but out of terror. We're afraid that if we stop being what everyone needs us to be, we'll disappear entirely.

The tragic irony is that in trying to preserve ourselves by pleasing everyone, we've already lost ourselves. We've erased our preferences to match others'. We've silenced our voice to avoid conflict. We've abandoned our boundaries to maintain connection. We've given away so much of who we are that when someone asks, "What do you want? What do you need? Who are you apart from what you do for others?"—we have no answer.

Co-dependency promised that if we made ourselves indispensable, we'd be secure. But instead, we've become invisible. We're so busy being whoever others need us to be that we've forgotten who God created us to be.

Into this prison of self-erasure comes Jesus with a word that sounds terrifying at first but turns out to be the most liberating truth we'll ever hear: **"Lose yourself in Me, and you will find life."**

The Paradox of the Gospel

"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:1-2 NASB).

Notice how Paul begins this famous passage. Before he calls the Philippians to humility and Christ-likeness, he roots them in their identity: *if* there is encouragement in Christ (there is), *if* there is consolation of love (there is), *if* there is fellowship of the Spirit (there is), *if* there is affection and compassion (there is). Paul is saying: You already have everything you need. You are already connected to Christ, loved by God, indwelt by the Spirit, surrounded by divine affection. You're not operating from emptiness; you're operating from fullness.

This is crucial because it reveals the fundamental difference between co-dependent self-erasure and Christ-like humility. **Co-dependency erases the self to earn love. Christ-centered humility expresses the self from a place of already being loved.**

Think about it this way: When you're co-dependent, you serve others because you need something from them—their approval, their validation, their presence, their dependence on you. You empty yourself not because you're full, but because you're desperately trying to fill the void. You give and give, hoping that enough self-sacrifice will finally make you worthy of the love you crave. This isn't humility; it's a transaction disguised as virtue.

But when you have "the mind of Christ," you serve from a completely different place. You give because you've been given to. You love because you've been loved. You lay down your life because Christ first laid down His for you. You're not trying to earn anything; you're expressing gratitude. You're not grasping for security; you're overflowing with it.

Jesus didn't empty Himself on the cross because He needed our approval or feared our rejection. He emptied Himself because He was secure in the Father's love, and from that security, He chose to rescue us. This is the paradox: Christ lost His life and found it glorified. He descended and was exalted. He served and was crowned King. And He invites us into the same pattern—but only if we're willing to lose ourselves in Him first.

Do Nothing from Selfishness or Empty Conceit

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3–4 NASB).

On the surface, these verses might sound like they're affirming co-dependency: *See? Put others first. Regard them as more important. Don't think about your own interests.* But look closer. Paul isn't calling us to self-erasure; he's calling us away from two specific sins: **selfishness and empty conceit.**

Selfishness is the opposite of love—it's using others for our own gain, caring only about our needs, manipulating relationships to serve ourselves. But here's what's shocking: *co-dependency can be a form of selfishness.* When we people-please to earn approval, we're using the other person's validation to medicate our own insecurity. When we enable someone's dysfunction to feel needed, we're serving our need to be indispensable. When we can't set boundaries because we fear abandonment, we're prioritizing our emotional safety over the other person's growth.

Empty conceit is preoccupation with our image, status, and reputation—being driven by what others think rather than by what's actually good and true. And again, co-dependency is often rooted in empty conceit. We perform because we're obsessed with how we're perceived. We hide our true selves because we're terrified of being exposed as inadequate. We say yes when we should say no because we need to maintain the image of being helpful, selfless, indispensable.

Paul's alternative is radical: **humility of mind.** Not self-hatred. Not self-erasure. But a realistic, honest, grace-soaked assessment of ourselves and others. Humility sees the truth: I am a beloved child of God, deeply flawed but completely forgiven, utterly dependent on grace. And so is everyone else. I'm

not better than you, but I'm not worthless either. I have needs, and so do you. I have dignity, and so do you.

When Paul says "regard one another as more important than yourselves," he's not commanding co-dependent self-neglect. The Greek word for "regard" (*hēgeomai*) means to consider, to think, to evaluate thoughtfully. Paul is saying: Don't approach relationships with a mindset of "What can I get?" but rather "How can I serve?" Don't fixate on protecting your reputation; focus on genuinely caring for others. Don't be preoccupied with whether you're being appreciated; be concerned with whether you're actually being loving.

This is profoundly different from co-dependency. Co-dependency puts others first out of fear. Christ-like humility puts others first out of love. Co-dependency erases self. Christ-like humility has a strong, secure self to give. Co-dependency serves to get. Christ-like humility serves because it has already received.

The Mind of Christ

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5 NASB).

This is the key verse, the hinge on which everything turns. **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.** The word "attitude" is *phronēte* in Greek—it means mind, mindset, way of thinking, orientation of heart. Paul is saying: Let the way Jesus thought, the way He approached relationships, the way He held His identity—let that become your way too.

What was Christ's mindset? The next verses spell it out in one of the most magnificent passages in all of Scripture:

"[Christ Jesus], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6–8 NASB).

Let's break down what "the mind of Christ" looks like, because it's the perfect antidote to co-dependency.

1. Christ Knew Who He Was

"Although He existed in the form of God..." Jesus was secure in His identity. He knew He was God, equal with the Father, worthy of all glory and honor. His identity wasn't up for debate, wasn't dependent on others' opinions, wasn't something He needed to prove or defend.

This is where co-dependency falls apart: we don't know who we are. We have no secure identity, so we try to construct one from others' opinions. We become chameleons, shifting to match whatever will earn approval. But when you know who you are in Christ—beloved, chosen, adopted, sealed, secure—you don't need to perform for an identity. You already have one that can never be taken away.

2. Christ Didn't Grasp at Status

"[He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped..." Jesus had every right to demand recognition, insist on His prerogatives, and refuse to humble Himself. But He didn't cling to status or grasp at power. He held His position with open hands.

Co-dependency, by contrast, is all about grasping—desperately clutching at relationships, status, approval, anything that might give us a sense of worth. We can't let go because we're terrified of losing the little bit of validation we've managed to secure. But Christ shows us a different way: when you're secure in who you are, you can release what you have because your identity isn't tied to it.

3. Christ Emptied Himself—From Fullness, Not Emptiness

"But emptied Himself..." This is the heart of the passage, and it's crucial to understand what it means—and doesn't mean.

Jesus's self-emptying (*kenosis*) was not self-erasure. He didn't stop being God. He didn't lose His divine nature. He didn't cease to have value, dignity, or

identity. Rather, He voluntarily set aside the privileges of His divine position to take on human flesh, to enter into our suffering, to serve us in our need.

This is the difference between serving from fullness and serving from emptiness:

Serving from emptiness (co-dependency):

- Motivated by fear, need, or desperation
- Trying to earn love or prove worthiness
- Exhausting, resentful, and ultimately unsustainable
- Erases the self to become whatever others need
- Leads to burnout, bitterness, and feeling used
- Says: "I have to serve you so you'll love me"

Serving from fullness (Christ-likeness):

- Motivated by secure love and gratitude
- Expressing an identity already established
- Life-giving, joyful, and sustained by grace
- Maintains a healthy self while genuinely loving others
- Leads to fruitfulness, joy, and deeper relationships
- Says: "I'm free to serve you because I'm already loved"

Jesus emptied Himself, but notice what He emptied Himself of: His rights, His privileges, His comfort, His status. He didn't empty Himself of His identity, His worth, or His connection to the Father. In fact, throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus maintained clear boundaries, took time alone with the Father, said no to demands that weren't part of His mission, and refused to let others' opinions determine His actions.

This is the model: empty yourself of grasping, not of being. Empty yourself of the need to be served, but not of your inherent dignity as God's beloved.

Empty yourself of selfishness, but not of self-care. Empty yourself of the demand for recognition, but not of your identity as one in whom the Father is well pleased.

4. Christ Served from Mission, Not from Need

"Taking the form of a bond-servant..." Jesus became a servant—but His service was rooted in mission, not in a desperate need for approval. He knew why He came: "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10 NASB). His service had purpose, direction, and boundaries. He didn't heal everyone. He didn't meet every demand. He didn't try to please all people. He served according to the Father's will, not according to the crowd's expectations.

Co-dependent service lacks this clarity. We serve whoever is loudest, whoever makes us feel needed, whoever we're most afraid of disappointing. We have no clear sense of mission because we have no secure identity. Our service becomes scattered, exhausting, and ultimately ineffective because we're trying to be everything to everyone.

But when you have the mind of Christ, you serve strategically and purposefully. You know who God has called you to love and how He's called you to serve. You can say no to good things because you're committed to the best things. You can disappoint some people because you're more concerned with obeying God than with pleasing everyone.

5. Christ Humbled Himself—And Was Exalted

"He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8–11 NASB).

Here's the pattern that changes everything: **humility leads to exaltation**. Not self-promotion. Not performance. Not grasping for status. Jesus humbled

Himself, and God exalted Him. Jesus served, and God crowned Him King. Jesus died, and God raised Him to life.

This is the promise for those who have the mind of Christ: when you stop trying to exalt yourself through people-pleasing, God Himself will lift you up in due time (1 Peter 5:6). When you stop grasping for recognition, you'll discover that God sees and rewards in secret (Matthew 6:4). When you stop performing for human approval, you'll find that His "Well done, good and faithful servant" is the only approval that truly satisfies (Matthew 25:21).

Humility Is Not Self-Erasure

Let's be crystal clear: **humility is not self-erasure but Christ-centered wholeness.**

False humility (co-dependency's counterfeit) says:

- "I don't matter; only others matter"
- "I have no needs; I exist to meet yours"
- "I have no preferences; I'll be whatever you want me to be"
- "I have no boundaries; I'm available 24/7"
- "I have no voice; I'll stay silent to keep the peace"

This isn't humility; it's a lie. And it's a lie that dishonors the God who created you with dignity, purpose, and inherent worth. When you erase yourself, you're not glorifying God—you're diminishing His image in you. When you deny your needs, you're not being Christlike—you're being dishonest. When you lose yourself in others, you're not loving well—you're enabling unhealthy patterns.

True humility (Christ-like wholeness) says:

- "I matter because God says I matter, and so do you"
- "I have needs, and it's okay to acknowledge them, and so do you"
- "I have God-given preferences and personality, and so do you"

- "I have boundaries that honor both me and you as image-bearers"
- "I have a voice worth hearing, and so do you"

True humility isn't thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less often (C.S. Lewis). It's being so secure in God's love that you're free to focus on others without losing yourself in the process. It's having such a solid identity in Christ that you can genuinely serve without needing anything in return.

The Practice of Silent Surrender

So how do we develop the mind of Christ? How do we move from co-dependent self-erasure to Christ-like humility? Paul gives us the foundation: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." We need to cultivate the same mindset, the same orientation, the same way of thinking that Jesus had.

One of the most powerful practices for developing the mind of Christ is what we might call **silent surrender**—regularly praying the prayer Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: "**Not my will, but Yours**" (Luke 22:42).

This is the prayer that transforms us from people-pleasers into God-pleasers. Every time we're tempted to say yes out of fear, we pray: "Not my will to be liked, but Your will to be obeyed." Every time we're tempted to perform for approval, we pray: "Not my need for validation, but Your glory." Every time we're anxious about someone's opinion, we pray: "Not my reputation, but Your name be exalted."

This practice of silent surrender does several things:

It reminds us who we're ultimately serving. When we catch ourselves trying to please people at the expense of obeying God, this prayer reorients us. We remember: I'm Christ's bond-servant first, and that sets me free from being enslaved to anyone else's opinion.

It releases our grip on control. Co-dependency is fundamentally about trying to control outcomes—if I perform well enough, they'll love me; if I give enough,

they won't leave; if I'm indispensable, I'll be secure. "Not my will, but Yours" is the prayer that opens our hands and lets God be God.

It connects us to Christ's own journey. Jesus prayed this prayer in His darkest hour, facing suffering and death. When we pray it, we're joining Him in the path of obedience that leads through death to resurrection, through humility to exaltation, through surrender to glory.

It creates space for honest emotion while choosing faithful obedience.

Notice that Jesus didn't pray "Not my will" lightly or easily. He was in agony. He asked if there was another way. He was honest about His human desire to avoid suffering. But ultimately, He chose submission. We can do the same—we can acknowledge our fear of rejection, our desire for approval, our anxiety about boundaries—and still choose: "Not my will, but Yours."

Practice this prayer throughout your day:

- When you're about to say yes out of fear, pause and pray: "Not my will, but Yours."
- When someone's opinion is consuming your thoughts, redirect: "Not my will to be approved, but Your will be done."
- When you're tempted to control a relationship, release: "Not my will, but Yours."
- When you're exhausted from performing, surrender: "Not my will to be impressive, but Your will for me to rest in You."

This isn't a one-time prayer but a lifestyle of surrender. It's the daily practice of letting Christ's mind become your mind, His priorities become your priorities, His way of relating become your way of relating.

Serving with Joy, Not Fear or Obligation

The mind of Christ also transforms *how* we serve. Paul writes earlier in the passage about making his "joy complete" (Philippians 2:2), and throughout

the letter, joy is a dominant theme. This joy isn't superficial happiness; it's the deep satisfaction of living aligned with God's purposes.

When we serve with the mind of Christ, we serve differently:

Not from fear: "If I don't do this, they'll reject me" becomes "I'm secure in Christ; I can serve freely without fear."

Not from obligation: "I have to do this even though I'm exhausted" becomes "I get to serve because I've been served by Christ."

Not from need: "I need them to need me so I can feel valuable" becomes "I'm already valuable; I can serve without strings attached."

Not from guilt: "I should help because I'll feel terrible if I don't" becomes "I can help, or I can set a boundary—either way, God's love for me doesn't change."

But from joy: "This is how God has called me to reflect His love today" becomes the motivation for service that is sustainable, life-giving, and genuinely loving.

Here's the diagnostic question: When you serve, do you feel resentful, anxious, or depleted? Or do you feel a sense of purpose, peace, and even joy? If it's the former, you're likely serving from co-dependency—from fear, obligation, or need. If it's the latter, you're serving from the mind of Christ—from security, love, and gratitude.

This doesn't mean service is always easy or that we never feel tired. Jesus Himself was weary from ministry. But there's a difference between the weariness that comes from faithful stewardship and the exhaustion that comes from trying to earn love through performance. The first is sustainable because it's rooted in God's strength. The second is depleting because we're running on fumes, trying to manufacture worth through our works.

The Christian Ideal: Difficult but Not Impossible

G.K. Chesterton famously said: "**The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.**"

The mind of Christ is difficult. It's difficult to release control when we're terrified of outcomes. It's difficult to serve without demanding recognition when we're desperate for validation. It's difficult to set boundaries when we've been conditioned to believe that selflessness means self-erasure. It's difficult to pray "Not my will, but Yours" when we're convinced that our will is the only thing keeping us safe.

But just because it's difficult doesn't mean it's impossible. In fact, the promise of the gospel is that what we cannot do in our own strength, Christ does in us. Remember Paul's opening: "If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit..." We're not developing the mind of Christ through sheer willpower. We're receiving it as the Spirit transforms us from the inside out.

The Christian ideal isn't left untried because it's too hard; it's left untried because we'd rather cling to the familiar prison of co-dependency than risk the freedom of Christ-like humility. We'd rather perform for approval because at least we feel like we're doing something, rather than surrender to grace which requires admitting we can do nothing.

But here's the invitation: try it. Try having the mind of Christ for one day. Try praying "Not my will, but Yours" when you're tempted to people-please. Try serving from fullness instead of emptiness. Try setting a boundary and trusting that God's love for you doesn't depend on someone else's approval. Try losing yourself in Christ and see if you don't actually find yourself—the self God intended you to be all along.

It will be difficult. Old patterns die hard. The voice of co-dependency will scream that you're being selfish, that you'll be abandoned, that you're not doing enough. But keep choosing the mind of Christ. Keep surrendering. Keep

serving from fullness. Keep trusting that God is making you whole, not by erasing you but by restoring you into the image of His Son.

Finding Yourself by Losing Yourself

We return to where we began: the great fear that if we stop pleasing others, we'll lose ourselves.

But Christ says the opposite: "**Lose yourself in Me, and you will find life.**"

The paradox is real: when we try to preserve ourselves through people-pleasing, we lose ourselves. But when we lose ourselves in Christ—when we surrender our need for approval, our grasping for control, our performance for validation—we finally become who we were created to be.

In Christ, you discover:

- Your identity isn't based on what you do for others but on what Christ has done for you
- Your worth isn't determined by how much you're needed but by the fact that you're loved
- Your security isn't found in others' approval but in God's unchanging grace
- Your purpose isn't to make everyone happy but to glorify God and enjoy Him forever
- Your relationships aren't stages for performance but opportunities for genuine love

This is the mind of Christ: secure enough to serve, humble enough to love, whole enough to give without losing yourself. It's not self-erasure; it's Christ-centered wholeness. It's not grasping at status; it's resting in identity. It's not serving to get; it's serving from fullness.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

Let His mind become your mind.

Let His way become your way.

Let His humility that led to exaltation become the pattern of your life.

And discover that in losing yourself in Him, you find everything you've been looking for all along.

Reflect and Respond:

1. Where are you serving from emptiness rather than fullness? What would it look like to let Christ fill you first before you pour out to others?
2. Practice "silent surrender" this week. Each time you're tempted to people-please, pause and pray: "Not my will, but Yours." Journal what happens—what do you notice about your anxiety, your decisions, your relationships?
3. Are you confusing self-erasure with humility? Ask God to show you the difference. Write down one way you can practice Christ-like humility (maintaining your dignity while serving others) rather than co-dependent self-erasure this week.
4. Jesus "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." What are you grasping at—approval, control, recognition, being needed? Identify one thing you can release to God today.

Chapter 4: Working Out What God Has Already Worked In

Philippians 2:12–18

The Exhaustion of Earning

There's a particular kind of exhaustion that comes from trying to save everyone.

You know the feeling. Your friend is making destructive choices, and you lie awake at night crafting the perfect words that will finally make them see reason. Your family member is struggling, and you've appointed yourself their unofficial therapist, life coach, and emotional support system—all while neglecting your own well-being. Your coworker is drowning in their responsibilities, and even though you're barely keeping your own head above water, you take on their workload too because you can't bear to watch them fail.

Or perhaps the exhaustion comes from a different kind of saving: the relentless effort to earn approval, to prove your worth, to perform your way into acceptance. You work tirelessly to be everything everyone needs, convinced that if you just try harder, give more, sacrifice more completely, you'll finally achieve the security you crave. Each day is a performance review, and you're terrified of failing.

This is the treadmill of co-dependency: **working for approval, working to fix others, working to control outcomes, working to earn what can never be earned.** And the terrible truth is that no matter how hard we work, it's never enough. People still disappoint us. Others still make poor choices despite our best efforts. Approval remains elusive. And we remain exhausted, depleted, and desperate.

Into this exhaustion, Paul speaks a word that at first sounds like it's adding more weight to our already crushing burden: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12 NASB).

Work? More work? Haven't we been working hard enough already? But look again at what Paul actually says—and more importantly, what he says immediately after. The instruction isn't "work FOR your salvation." It's "work OUT your salvation." And the reason we can do this isn't because we're strong enough, but because "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13 NASB).

This changes everything.

Working For vs. Working Out

The difference between "working for" and "working out" is the difference between slavery and freedom, between anxiety and peace, between co-dependency and life in Christ.

Working FOR approval looks like this:

- Striving to earn God's love through perfect performance
- Trying to prove your worth through achievement and sacrifice
- Living in constant fear that you'll fail and be rejected
- Measuring your value by external results and others' responses
- Never feeling like you've done enough
- Driven by guilt, shame, and the terror of being found inadequate

Working OUT what God has already worked IN looks like this:

- Expressing the love you've already received, not earning it
- Cooperating with the transformation God is already doing in you
- Living in confidence that your acceptance is secure in Christ
- Measuring progress by faithfulness, not by outcomes you can't control
- Resting in the knowledge that God finishes what He starts
- Motivated by gratitude, joy, and trust in God's faithfulness

See the difference? Co-dependency says, "I must work to earn approval." The gospel says, "God is already at work in me; I get to participate in what He's doing."

Paul makes this explicit: "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12–13 NASB).

Notice the sequence: God is *already* at work in you. He's not waiting for you to get your act together before He starts. He's not holding back until you perform well enough. He's already working—giving you both the desire ("to will") and the power ("to work") to do what pleases Him. Your job isn't to manufacture the transformation. Your job is to work out what God is working in.

Think of it like a seed planted in soil. The life is already in the seed. The growth is already programmed into its DNA. The farmer doesn't create the life; the farmer cultivates the conditions for the life that's already there to flourish. Working out your salvation is like that—you're cultivating, cooperating, participating in what God has already initiated and will faithfully complete.

The God Who Is at Work in You

"For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13 NASB).

This verse is the antidote to co-dependency's crushing burden. Let it sink in:

It is God who is at work—not you alone, not your willpower, not your perfect performance. The primary actor in your transformation is God Himself. You're not the hero of this story; you're the beloved recipient of grace.

Who is at work in you—present tense, ongoing action. God isn't distant, waiting for you to figure things out. He's actively working in you right now, this very moment. Even when you don't feel it, even when you're struggling, even when you're failing—God is at work.

Both to will—He's giving you the desire to obey, the longing for holiness, the hunger for Him. Those moments when you want to do the right thing, when you're drawn to prayer, when you choose surrender over control—that's not you manufacturing righteousness. That's God at work in you, creating the very desires that lead to life.

And to work—He's also giving you the power to act on those desires. Transformation isn't just about wanting to change; it's about actually changing. And God provides both the want and the ability. You're not white-knuckling your way to holiness. You're receiving grace and cooperating with it.

For His good pleasure—The goal of God's work in you isn't your performance for others' approval. It's His glory, His pleasure, His purposes. And here's the beautiful irony: when you stop working for others' approval and start working out what God is working in you for His pleasure, you actually become healthier, freer, and more genuinely loving than you ever were in co-dependency.

This truth demolishes the foundation of co-dependency. If God is at work in you, you don't need to earn His approval through perfect performance—you already have it. If God is giving you both desire and power, you don't need to anxiously strive in your own strength—you can rest in His. If God is doing this for His pleasure, you don't need to obsess over others' opinions—only His matters, and His opinion of you is secure in Christ.

Freed from Being the Savior

One of the most liberating truths of Philippians 2:13 is this: **God's transforming power within frees us from needing to be the savior of others.**

If God is the One who works in people "both to will and to work," then you are not responsible for changing anyone. You can't. Only God can transform a human heart. Only God can give someone the desire and power to change. Only God can save.

This is revolutionary for the co-dependent, who has spent years trying to be everyone's savior:

- Trying to fix your struggling friend
- Trying to change your difficult family member
- Trying to save your wayward child
- Trying to rescue your troubled marriage partner
- Trying to heal your wounded parent

You've carried weight you were never meant to carry. You've taken responsibility for outcomes only God can control. You've exhausted yourself trying to do what only the Spirit can do. And all the while, you've been operating from a lie: that their transformation depends on you.

But it doesn't. God is at work in them, not you. God will give them both the desire and the power to change, not you. God will complete the good work He started in them, not you.

Your job is not to be their savior. Your job is to love them, to pray for them, to speak truth when appropriate, to set healthy boundaries, and to trust God with the outcomes.

This doesn't mean we don't care. It doesn't mean we're passive or indifferent. It means we recognize the proper boundaries: we're responsible *to* others (to love, to pray, to be faithful), but we're not responsible *for* others (to control, to fix, to guarantee their choices).

Listen to how freeing this is:

- You can love your friend without taking responsibility for their choices
- You can pray for your family member without anxiety about whether they change
- You can set boundaries with difficult people without guilt, knowing God is the One who transforms, not you

- You can be honest about your own limitations without feeling like you're abandoning anyone
- You can release outcomes to God without it being an act of giving up

This is what it means to trust that God is at work. You don't have to be omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent in people's lives. God already is. You get to be human—limited, finite, and dependent on grace. And that's exactly what God calls you to be.

The People-Pleaser's Burden

Paul addresses this directly: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14–15 NASB).

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing." At first glance, this might sound like Paul is telling us to be doormats—to serve without complaint, to give without questioning, to perform without expressing the exhaustion we feel. And indeed, co-dependency often masquerades as this kind of cheerful servitude.

But look at the context. Paul isn't calling us to perform for approval. He's calling us to work out what God is working in. And when we're operating from God's power rather than our own striving, when we're secure in His love rather than desperate for others' approval, we actually can "do all things without grumbling" because we're not doing them from a place of resentment, obligation, or fear.

The co-dependent grumbles inwardly even while performing outwardly. We say yes with a smile, but we're seething with resentment. We serve, but we're keeping score. We give, but we're bitter that no one appreciates it. We comply, but we're consumed with anger at the injustice of our situation. The grumbling may be silent, but it's corroding us from the inside out.

Why? Because we're working FOR approval, not working OUT what God has worked in. We're serving from emptiness, not fullness. We're performing out of fear, not obeying out of love. And that kind of service always produces grumbling because it's a burden we were never meant to carry.

But when we grasp that God is at work in us, when we trust that He's giving us both the desire and the power, when we rest in His approval rather than frantically seeking everyone else's—we find we can actually serve with joy. Not perfect joy, not constant joy, but genuine joy that flows from gratitude rather than anxiety.

Joy in Obedience vs. Anxiety in Performance

This is the shift Paul is calling us to: **joy in obedience replaces anxiety in performance.**

Anxiety in performance (co-dependency) asks:

- Did I do enough?
- Are they happy with me?
- What if I fail?
- Will they leave if I set a boundary?
- Am I meeting their expectations?
- Did I prove my worth today?

This produces constant mental anguish, physical exhaustion, emotional depletion, and spiritual drought. You're running on fumes, trying to be perfect for people who will never be satisfied because they weren't meant to be your source of validation in the first place.

Joy in obedience (life in Christ) asks:

- What is God calling me to do today?
- How can I cooperate with what He's doing in me?

- Am I being faithful to what He's asked, regardless of outcomes?
- Can I trust Him with what I can't control?
- Am I resting in His approval rather than performing for others'?

This produces sustainable service, deepening peace, genuine love, and spiritual fruitfulness. You're not striving in your own strength; you're receiving God's strength. You're not anxious about results; you're faithful in obedience. You're not exhausted from performance; you're renewed by grace.

Paul continues: "holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain" (Philippians 2:16 NASB). Notice what gives Paul confidence: not that everyone responded perfectly to his ministry, not that no one ever criticized him, not that all his efforts produced the exact outcomes he hoped for—but that he was faithful to hold fast the word of life. His joy is in obedience, not in controlled outcomes.

And then this remarkable statement: "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me" (Philippians 2:17–18 NASB).

Paul is saying: Even if my life is poured out, even if I give everything and receive nothing back, even if my service costs me everything—I rejoice. Why?

Because he's not serving to get. He's serving because God is at work in him. His joy doesn't depend on the Philippians' response. It depends on God's faithfulness.

This is what it looks like to be free from co-dependency. You can pour yourself out without needing anything back because you're not empty—you're being filled by God. You can sacrifice without resentment because you're not trying to earn approval—you already have God's. You can serve joyfully because you're not anxiously performing—you're cooperating with what God is doing.

Letting Go of Outcomes We Can't Control

But how? How do we actually do this? How do we let go of outcomes we can't control?

This is one of the hardest aspects of moving beyond co-dependency. We've spent so long trying to control people, situations, and outcomes that releasing our grip feels like jumping off a cliff. What if things fall apart? What if people make terrible choices? What if we're not there to fix it?

The answer is found in returning to Philippians 2:13: **God is at work.** He's at work in you, and He's at work in others. You can let go because He hasn't.

Here are some practical steps for releasing control:

1. Identify What You're Actually Responsible For

Make a list:

- **Things I AM responsible for:** My choices, my attitudes, my obedience, my boundaries, my growth, my responses, my faithfulness
- **Things I AM NOT responsible for:** Others' choices, others' emotions, others' spiritual growth, others' consequences, others' happiness, outcomes I can't control

When you try to control what's on the second list, you step into God's territory. When you neglect what's on the first list to manage the second, you abandon your actual calling.

2. Practice the Prayer of Release

When anxiety about outcomes grips you, pray specifically: "God, I release [this person/situation/outcome] to You. I trust that You are at work. I cannot control this, but You can. I choose to be faithful in what You've called me to do and leave the results to You."

This isn't a one-time prayer. It's a daily, sometimes hourly, practice of unclenching your fists and trusting God.

3. Distinguish Between Influence and Control

You have influence in many situations—and it's good to use that influence wisely and lovingly. But influence is not control. You can:

- Share your concerns with someone you love (influence)
- But you cannot make them change (control)

You can:

- Set healthy boundaries in a relationship (influence)
- But you cannot force someone to respect them (control)

You can:

- Pray fervently for someone's transformation (influence)
- But you cannot manipulate God or the person into the outcome you want (control)

Use your influence wisely. Release the illusion of control completely.

4. Reframe "Letting Go" as Faith, Not Abandonment

Co-dependency tells us that if we're not constantly managing, fixing, and controlling, we're abandoning people. But this is a lie. Letting go isn't abandonment; it's faith. It's trusting that God loves them more than you do, that God is more powerful than you are, and that God is already at work even when you can't see it.

You're not walking away from people when you release control. You're walking them to God and saying, "They're Yours. I trust You with them. I'll do what You call me to do, and I'll leave the outcomes to You."

5. Accept That God's Timeline Isn't Yours

We want change to happen immediately. We want to see results from our prayers, our efforts, our love. But God's timeline is often much longer than ours. Remember: "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the

day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6 NASB). God is committed to the completion, but He's not in a hurry by our standards.

Letting go means trusting God with the timeline as well as the outcome. It means being faithful today and trusting Him with tomorrow.

Faith Is Not Belief That God Will Do What You Want

Max Lucado's words cut through our attempts to disguise control as faith: **"Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that God will do what is right."**

This is perhaps the hardest truth for the co-dependent heart to accept. We've often framed our anxiety as care, our control as love, our manipulation as prayer. We tell ourselves we just want what's best for the people we love. And perhaps we do. But often, what we really want is for God to do things our way, on our timeline, according to our plan.

True faith surrenders the outcomes entirely to God—even when His "right" doesn't match our "want."

Consider these difficult truths:

- God may allow someone you love to face consequences you desperately want to prevent
- God may not change a person in the way or timeframe you think is best
- God may call you to let go of a relationship you want to cling to
- God may allow suffering you would do anything to stop
- God may say no to prayers you've prayed with everything in you

This doesn't mean God is cruel. It means God is wise, sovereign, and good in ways that transcend our limited understanding. He sees the whole picture; we see only a fragment. He knows what will ultimately bring the most glory to Himself and the most good to His children; we know only what feels right in this moment.

Faith isn't believing God will do what we want. Faith is trusting that God will do what is right—even when we don't understand it, even when it hurts, even when it looks nothing like we hoped.

Working Out Your Salvation: Practical Steps

So what does it look like to "work out your salvation" rather than work for approval? Here are practical applications:

1. Start Each Day with a Declaration of Identity

Before you face the demands of the day, remind yourself: "God is at work in me. I don't have to earn His love today. I don't have to prove my worth. I don't have to control outcomes. I only need to cooperate with what He's doing."

2. Throughout the Day, Check Your Motivation

When you're about to say yes to something, pause and ask: "Am I doing this out of joy in obedience or anxiety in performance? Am I trying to earn approval or express gratitude? Am I trying to control an outcome or faithfully respond to God's call?"

If your motivation is fear, anxiety, or the need for approval, it might be time to say no—or at least to surrender your anxious grasping before you say yes.

3. Practice Faithful Obedience in Small Things

You can't control whether someone else changes. But you can control whether you're kind today. You can't control outcomes. But you can control whether you pray. You can't control others' responses. But you can control whether you speak truth in love.

Focus on the small, daily acts of faithful obedience. Trust God with everything else.

4. Celebrate God's Work, Not Your Performance

When you see progress—in yourself or others—your first response should be gratitude to God, not pride in yourself. "Look what God is doing!" not "Look

what I accomplished!" This keeps you rooted in the truth that God is the One at work.

5. When You Fail, Remember: God Is Still at Work

Co-dependency says failure is catastrophic because it means you've lost your chance to earn approval. The gospel says failure is painful but not final because God is still at work in you. He's not finished. He's faithful. Your stumble doesn't change His commitment to complete what He started.

6. Build Accountability That Encourages Rather Than Shames

Surround yourself with people who will remind you that God is at work in you. Not people who heap guilt and demand performance, but people who speak truth and point you back to grace. When you're tempted to fall back into co-dependent patterns, you need voices that say, "God is at work in you. You don't have to save everyone. You don't have to earn approval. Just be faithful today."

Fear and Trembling—But Not Anxiety

One final note on "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12 NASB). This phrase might sound like it's encouraging anxiety, but it's not. The "fear and trembling" Paul describes is a holy reverence for God, a sober recognition of the seriousness of spiritual life, a trembling awareness that we're dealing with the holy God.

But this is fundamentally different from the anxious fear of co-dependency:

Co-dependent fear says: "I'm terrified I won't measure up and will be rejected."

Holy fear says: "I'm in awe of God's holiness and grateful for His grace."

Co-dependent trembling says: "I'm shaking with anxiety about whether I've done enough."

Holy trembling says: "I'm humbled that the God of the universe is at work in me."

Co-dependent fear paralyzes. Holy fear motivates. Co-dependent trembling produces anxiety. Holy trembling produces worship. Don't confuse the two.

The Light That Shines Without Striving

Paul says that when we live this way—working out what God works in, trusting His transformation, releasing control—we become "lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15 NASB). Not because we're performing perfectly, but because we're reflecting the God who is at work in us.

There's something profoundly attractive about a person who is genuinely free. When people see you serving with joy instead of resentment, loving without strings attached, setting boundaries without guilt, releasing control without anxiety, trusting God with outcomes—they see something different. They see light.

And that light isn't manufactured by your striving. It's the natural overflow of a life in which God is at work.

You don't have to work for approval anymore. God is already at work in you. You don't have to save everyone anymore. God is at work in them too. You don't have to control outcomes anymore. God is sovereign over all.

Your job is simply to cooperate with what God is doing. To work out what He's working in. To be faithful in the small things. To trust Him with everything else.

And to rejoice—even if you're being poured out—because God is at work, and what He starts, He finishes.

That's not a burden. That's freedom.

Reflect and Respond:

1. In what areas of your life are you "working for approval" rather than "working out" what God is already working in you? How might your life change if you truly believed that God is at work in you, giving you both the desire and the power to obey?

2. Who are you trying to save or fix that only God can transform? Write their name(s) down, and practice the prayer of release: "God, I release [name] to You. I trust that You are at work in them. I cannot save them, but You can."
3. Make two lists: "What I AM responsible for" and "What I AM NOT responsible for." Look at your "not responsible for" list. How much energy are you spending trying to control those things? What would it look like to let them go?
4. Where are you confusing "God will do what I want" with "God will do what is right"? Is there a situation where you need to surrender your desired outcome and trust God's wisdom instead?
5. Practice checking your motivation today: Before each decision, ask "Am I doing this from joy in obedience or anxiety in performance?" Let your answer guide whether you proceed, pause, or say no.

Chapter 5: True Companionship, Not Codependent Partnership

Philippians 2:19–30

The Loneliness of Co-dependency

Here's one of the cruelest ironies of co-dependency: you can be surrounded by people and still be utterly alone.

You've given everything to maintain relationships. You've sacrificed your own needs to meet theirs. You've bent yourself into impossible shapes to be what they require. You're connected to dozens of people who need you, rely on you, perhaps even love you in their way. And yet, in the deepest part of your soul, you're isolated. Because no one really knows you—the real you, beneath the performance. And you're not sure anyone would love you if they did.

Co-dependency creates a particular kind of loneliness: the loneliness of being known only as a function, not as a person. You're the helper, the fixer, the one who's always there, the one who never says no. But who are you apart from what you do? When was the last time someone asked how *you're* really doing—and you told the truth? When was the last time you felt genuinely seen, known, and loved for who you are, not for what you provide?

This is the tragedy of codependent partnership: it masquerades as intimate connection while actually preventing it. We're tangled up with people—enmeshed, entangled, unable to function without them or imagine them functioning without us—but we're not truly connected soul to soul. We're bound by need, fear, and mutual dysfunction, not by love, truth, and shared purpose.

But there is another way. And Paul shows it to us in the beautiful example of his relationships with Timothy and Epaphroditus—relationships characterized not by codependent entanglement, but by Christ-centered companionship.

These are friendships that model self-giving love, not self-losing love.

When Others Seek Their Own Interests

Paul begins by explaining his plan to send Timothy to the Philippians: "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:19–21 NASB).

This is a stunning indictment. Paul is in Rome, presumably surrounded by Christians, yet he says Timothy is the only one with a "kindred spirit" who will "genuinely be concerned" for the Philippians' welfare. Why? Because "they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."

Now, before we harshly judge these unnamed Christians in Rome, we need to recognize something uncomfortable: seeking our own interests is the default mode of fallen humanity. It's also, ironically, the operating system of co-dependency—though it doesn't look like it on the surface.

Co-dependency appears to be other-focused, but underneath, it's profoundly self-interested:

- We "help" others because we need to be needed
- We "serve" because we're afraid of rejection if we don't
- We "sacrifice" because we're trying to earn approval and secure our position
- We focus on others' problems to avoid facing our own
- We attach to people because we need them to fill the void in our souls

We may look selfless, but we're actually seeking our own interests—specifically, our interest in feeling valuable, avoiding abandonment, controlling outcomes, and maintaining the image of being indispensable.

True, Christ-centered concern is fundamentally different:

- We serve because Christ served us, not because we need something back

- We help because we genuinely care about the other's good, not to earn security
- We give because we've received from God, not to create obligation
- We're honest about our own struggles while caring for others
- We attach to Christ first, and from that security, we love people freely

Timothy had this kind of genuine concern. He wasn't using the Philippians to meet his own needs. He wasn't serving them to feel valuable. He genuinely cared about their welfare because he shared Paul's heart, which was Christ's heart: **seeking the interests of others out of the overflow of Christ's love, not out of the emptiness of personal need.**

A Kindred Spirit: The Bond That Frees

"For I have no one else of kindred spirit..." (Philippians 2:20 NASB). The Greek word here is *isopsychon*—literally, "equal-souled" or "like-minded." Paul and Timothy shared a deep spiritual bond, a unity of purpose, a oneness of heart.

But notice what this bond is rooted in: not mutual neediness, but mutual commitment to Christ and His mission. Paul writes, "But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father" (Philippians 2:22 NASB).

Their bond is defined by:

- **Shared mission:** They're united in the gospel, not in emotional enmeshment
- **Proven character:** Timothy's worth is demonstrated through faithful service, not performance for approval
- **Appropriate relationship:** Paul describes it as a father-son dynamic, with clear roles and healthy boundaries
- **Mutual service:** They serve together, not one using the other

This is what **true companionship** looks like—and it's radically different from codependent partnership:

Codependent Partnership:

- Rooted in mutual neediness and fear
- Enmeshed boundaries—you can't tell where one person ends and the other begins
- Defined by what we get from each other
- Unstable—threatened by any change or distance
- Obsessive focus on the relationship itself
- Anxiety when apart; anxiety when together
- Communication driven by fear of abandonment or need for control
- Serving to earn love or maintain the connection

Christ-Centered Companionship:

- Rooted in shared love for Christ and His mission
- Healthy boundaries—two whole people choosing to walk together
- Defined by what we give and who we're becoming in Christ
- Stable—can handle distance, change, and seasons
- Focus on Christ and His kingdom, with the relationship serving that higher purpose
- Peace in togetherness; peace in separation
- Communication driven by truth, love, and genuine care
- Serving from fullness, not to earn anything

The key difference? **Timothy and Paul's relationship freed them both to be more fully themselves and more faithful to Christ. Codependent**

relationships bind both parties in patterns that prevent growth and hinder obedience.

Self-Giving Love vs. Self-Losing Love

This distinction is crucial: there is a profound difference between **self-giving love** (healthy, Christlike) and **self-losing love** (unhealthy, codependent).

Self-giving love:

- Says: "I will sacrifice for your good because I love you"
- Has a self to give—a secure identity rooted in Christ
- Maintains boundaries even while serving
- Can discern when to help and when to let someone face consequences
- Gives freely without demanding repayment
- Can say no when necessary without guilt
- Serves without losing oneself in the process

Self-losing love:

- Says: "I will sacrifice myself to keep you here"
- Has no stable self—identity is found only in the relationship
- Has no boundaries or constantly violated boundaries
- Cannot let others face consequences—must rescue, fix, enable
- Gives with hidden strings attached—expecting appreciation, loyalty, dependence
- Cannot say no without crippling guilt or fear
- Serves until there's nothing left—exhausted, resentful, empty

Jesus modeled self-giving love perfectly. He gave His life for us—the ultimate sacrifice. But He never lost Himself. He maintained His identity as the beloved Son. He set boundaries with crowds, with demands, with people who wanted

to use Him for their purposes. He said no when necessary. He took time away to pray. He spoke truth even when it cost Him followers. He loved sacrificially, but He never became enmeshed in unhealthy patterns.

Timothy exemplified this same self-giving love. Paul could trust him to go to Philippi not because Timothy had no self, but because he had a self rooted in Christ that could be given for the sake of the gospel. He wasn't going out of fear that Paul would reject him if he refused. He was going out of love—for Paul, for the Philippians, and ultimately for Christ.

Epaphroditus: The Man Who Nearly Died

Paul's description of Epaphroditus provides another beautiful example of healthy spiritual friendship: "But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow" (Philippians 2:25–27 NASB).

Notice several things about this relationship:

1. Multiple Dimensions of Relationship

Paul describes Epaphroditus with five terms: brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger, and minister. Their relationship isn't one-dimensional—it has multiple, healthy facets. He's not just Paul's helper (which would suggest codependency), nor just Paul's project (which would suggest control). He's a brother—an equal in Christ. A fellow worker—a partner in mission. A fellow soldier—someone who shares the battle. Their relationship has depth, mutuality, and appropriate roles.

2. Genuine Concern Without Enmeshment

Epaphroditus was longing for the Philippians and distressed that they'd heard he was sick. This shows genuine affection and appropriate concern. But

notice what's missing: there's no indication of manipulation, no guilt-tripping, no anxious clinging. He missed them. He was concerned about their worry. But he wasn't defined by their approval or destroyed by their distance.

3. Sacrificial Service That Goes Too Far

"For he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me" (Philippians 2:30 NASB).

Epaphroditus nearly died serving Paul and the Philippian church. This was clearly sacrificial love. But here's what's important: **there's a difference between sacrificial service and codependent self-destruction.**

Epaphroditus wasn't trying to earn approval through his service. He wasn't destroying himself to feel needed. He was genuinely serving Christ's mission, and in the process, he pushed himself too far physically. This can happen even in healthy relationships—we misjudge our limits, we give more than our bodies can sustain.

The difference is in what happens next.

4. Paul's Response: Protection, Not Exploitation

Look at Paul's response: He doesn't guilt Epaphroditus for getting sick. He doesn't suggest that if Epaphroditus had more faith, he wouldn't have gotten ill. He doesn't demand that Epaphroditus push through the sickness to keep serving. Instead, Paul is concerned for him, grateful for God's mercy in healing him, and now sending him home—not because Epaphroditus failed, but because he needs rest and the Philippians need to receive him with joy.

This is what healthy spiritual leadership looks like. **Paul cares about Epaphroditus as a person, not just as a tool for ministry.** He values him, protects him, and sends him home with honor.

A codependent relationship would look different:

- The leader would be angry that the worker got sick and couldn't fulfill all the demands

- The leader would exploit the worker's guilt, subtly suggesting they didn't sacrifice enough
- The leader would resist letting the worker go, creating dependence
- The worker would feel guilty for being sick and would hide their needs
- The worker would be terrified of disappointing the leader and would push through illness

But Paul and Epaphroditus's relationship is free from these toxic patterns. There's mutual respect, genuine care, freedom to acknowledge needs, and honor for sacrificial service that doesn't demand continued sacrifice beyond healthy limits.

Receive Him with Joy and Hold Him in High Regard

"Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me" (Philippians 2:29–30 NASB).

This is the key verse, and it reveals something crucial about healthy spiritual relationships: **honor without idolatry, appreciation without enmeshment, regard without worship.**

"Hold men like him in high regard." Paul is saying: Epaphroditus is worthy of honor. Respect him. Value him. Celebrate him. But notice what Paul doesn't say: He doesn't say, "Make Epaphroditus your source of life." He doesn't say, "Cling to him." He doesn't say, "Become dependent on him." He says to hold him in high regard "in the Lord"—meaning, value him for his Christlike character and service, not as a substitute for Christ.

This is the balance we desperately need: **We can deeply appreciate godly people without making them into our saviors. We can honor mentors without becoming emotionally dependent on them. We can value friends without losing ourselves in them.**

Co-dependency confuses honor with obsession. It turns appreciation into addiction. It makes people into gods and then resents them for not being divine. Healthy relationships honor people for who they are in Christ while keeping Christ as the ultimate source of life, identity, and security.

How to Discern Healthy vs. Unhealthy Spiritual Attachment

So how do we tell the difference between healthy spiritual friendship and unhealthy codependent attachment? Here are some diagnostic questions:

Questions About Your Relationship:

Healthy:

- Do we both have a relationship with Christ independent of each other?
- Can we be honest about our struggles without fear of rejection?
- Do we encourage each other's obedience to God, even when it's costly to us?
- Can we celebrate each other's growth and changing seasons without feeling threatened?
- Are we able to set boundaries without the relationship falling apart?
- Do we serve a shared mission beyond just "being there" for each other?
- Can we be apart without constant anxiety?
- Do we speak truth to each other in love, or do we avoid hard conversations to keep the peace?

Unhealthy:

- Does one or both of us use the other as a substitute for relationship with Christ?
- Are we performing or hiding our true selves to maintain the relationship?
- Do we enable each other's sin or dysfunction because we're afraid of conflict?

- Do we feel threatened when the other grows or changes?
- Are boundaries seen as betrayal or lack of love?
- Is the relationship itself the main point, with no higher purpose?
- Do we experience constant anxiety when apart, needing frequent reassurance?
- Do we avoid truth-telling because we're desperate to maintain the connection?

Questions About Yourself in the Relationship:

Healthy:

- Do I feel more like myself in this friendship, or less?
- Am I growing in Christlikeness through this relationship?
- Do I have the freedom to be honest about my thoughts, feelings, and limits?
- Can I say no without guilt or fear?
- Do I serve this person from fullness or from neediness?
- Is my identity stable whether this person affirms me or not?
- Can I trust God with this relationship, or am I constantly anxious about it?

Unhealthy:

- Do I feel like I'm losing myself trying to be what they need?
- Am I stagnating spiritually or compromising convictions to maintain peace?
- Do I hide parts of myself because I fear rejection?
- Do I say yes out of fear even when I should say no?
- Do I serve this person because I need something from them?

- Does my sense of worth rise and fall with this person's opinion of me?
- Am I obsessing over the relationship, unable to rest in God's sovereignty?

If you're answering "yes" to the unhealthy questions, you're likely in a codependent pattern. This doesn't mean the relationship is beyond redemption, but it does mean something needs to change.

Signs of Christ-Centered Relationships

Paul's descriptions of Timothy and Epaphroditus reveal several characteristics of healthy, Christ-centered relationships:

1. Mutual Encouragement

Paul says he hopes to send Timothy "so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition" (Philippians 2:19 NASB). Notice the mutuality: Paul encourages them, they encourage Paul. Timothy serves them, but Paul is also blessed by the report.

Healthy relationships flow both directions. One person isn't always the helper while the other is always the helped. One isn't always strong while the other is always weak. There's give and take, mutual support, reciprocal blessing.

Co-dependency, by contrast, creates rigid roles: the rescuer and the rescued, the strong one and the weak one, the helper and the helpless. These roles feel necessary to the co-dependent because they define the relationship. But they're actually stifling and dishonest—no one is always strong or always weak. We all need help at different times.

2. Shared Mission

Both Timothy and Epaphroditus are described in terms of the gospel mission. They're fellow workers, fellow soldiers, partners in advancing Christ's kingdom. The relationship isn't primarily about meeting each other's emotional needs—it's about serving Christ together.

This is crucial. **When a relationship's primary purpose is to meet mutual emotional needs, it becomes codependent. When a relationship exists to serve Christ's mission together, with emotional support as a byproduct, it remains healthy.**

Ask yourself: What is this relationship for? If your honest answer is "to make me feel secure" or "to fill my loneliness" or "to give me purpose," that's codependent. If your answer is "to encourage each other in following Christ" or "to serve God's kingdom together" or "to speak truth and sharpen each other," that's healthy.

3. Emotional Boundaries Grounded in Truth

Notice that Paul speaks frankly about Epaphroditus's sickness, his own potential sorrow, and his genuine affection for these men. He's emotionally honest—not suppressing feelings, not pretending to be invulnerable. But he's also boundaryed: he doesn't manipulate, doesn't guilt-trip, doesn't create unhealthy dependency.

Emotional boundaries grounded in truth means:

- We're honest about our feelings without making others responsible for them
- We express affection without creating obligation
- We share vulnerably without demanding that others fix us
- We care deeply without becoming enmeshed
- We speak truth even when it's uncomfortable
- We allow others to feel their feelings without having to manage them

Co-dependency either has no boundaries (complete enmeshment) or dishonest boundaries (performing, hiding, pretending). Christ-centered relationships have honest, loving boundaries that protect both parties while maintaining genuine connection.

4. Freedom to Leave and Return

Paul sends Timothy away. He sends Epaphroditus home. He doesn't cling to them. He doesn't create guilt about their leaving. He trusts that God will use their coming and going for His purposes.

This freedom—the ability to be together and apart without the relationship disintegrating—is a hallmark of health. **Co-dependency can't tolerate separation because the relationship is based on need. Christ-centered companionship can handle distance because the relationship is based on shared purpose in Christ, who is always present whether friends are near or far.**

5. Honor for Character, Not Just Performance

Paul honors Timothy for his genuine concern and proven worth—character qualities, not just achievements. He honors Epaphroditus for his heart of service, not just his output. The respect is for who they are in Christ, not merely what they produce.

Co-dependency values people for what they do—how they make us feel, what they provide, how they meet our needs. When they stop performing, the relationship is threatened. Christ-centered relationships value people for who they are—image-bearers of God, beloved children, people being conformed to Christ's likeness.

The Most Loving Thing We Can Do

Elisabeth Elliot's words capture the heart of Christ-centered relationships: **"The most loving thing we can do for others is to live wholeheartedly for God."**

This sounds counterintuitive to the co-dependent. We think the most loving thing is to make others our everything—to be constantly available, endlessly accommodating, wholly focused on their needs. We think love means having no life apart from them, no boundaries that might disappoint them, no priorities that compete with them.

But that's not love. That's idolatry. And it doesn't actually help anyone.

When you live wholeheartedly for God:

- You have a secure identity that doesn't require others to prop it up
- You have emotional and spiritual resources to give, not just neediness to share
- You model what it looks like to find your life in Christ, inviting others to do the same
- You speak truth because you fear God more than you fear man
- You set boundaries that honor everyone involved
- You love from overflow, not from emptiness
- You can celebrate others' growth without feeling threatened
- You can let relationships change and evolve without feeling destroyed

When both people in a relationship are living wholeheartedly for God, the relationship becomes a place of freedom, growth, and genuine love. When one or both are living for each other instead of for God, the relationship becomes a prison.

Timothy and Epaphroditus could serve Paul and the Philippians so effectively precisely because they weren't living primarily for Paul or the Philippians. They were living for Christ. And from that primary allegiance, they had something real to give.

Receiving Others in the Lord

"Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard" (Philippians 2:29 NASB).

Notice the phrase: "in the Lord." Everything is "in the Lord"—relationships, honor, service, joy. Christ is the atmosphere, the context, the foundation. We don't receive people as our saviors; we receive them "in the Lord." We don't honor them as our source; we honor them "in the Lord."

This is the key to healthy spiritual relationships: **keeping Christ at the center, not the relationship itself.**

When Christ is at the center:

- We can love deeply without idolizing
- We can honor greatly without worshiping
- We can serve sacrificially without losing ourselves
- We can enjoy companionship without demanding that it complete us
- We can grieve loss without being destroyed by it

When the relationship itself is at the center:

- Love becomes obsession
- Honor becomes worship
- Service becomes bondage
- Companionship becomes addiction
- Loss feels like death

The difference is everything.

Moving from Codependent Partnership to Christ-Centered Companionship

So how do you shift your relationships from codependent to Christ-centered? Here are practical steps:

1. Examine Your Current Relationships

Use the diagnostic questions earlier in this chapter to honestly assess your closest relationships. Don't panic if you see codependent patterns—awareness is the first step toward change.

2. Strengthen Your Primary Relationship with Christ

You cannot have healthy relationships with people if your relationship with Christ is anemic. Invest time in prayer, Scripture, worship, and solitude with God. Let Him become your primary source of identity, security, and love.

3. Practice Honest Communication

Start speaking the truth in love. Stop performing. Stop hiding. Stop managing others' emotions. Be honest about your feelings, your limits, your struggles. And give others permission to do the same.

4. Establish and Maintain Boundaries

Boundaries aren't walls; they're property lines. They define where you end and another begins. Practice saying no. Practice letting others face consequences. Practice not rescuing when someone needs to learn.

5. Cultivate Shared Mission

Find ways to serve Christ together with your friends—not just "doing life" together, but actually pursuing kingdom purposes. When you're focused on a mission bigger than yourselves, the relationship becomes healthier.

6. Release People to God

Practice praying: "Lord, this person is Yours, not mine. I release them to You. I trust You with them. Help me love them well without making them my god."

7. Seek Accountability

Find someone—a pastor, counselor, or mature Christian friend—who can speak into your relational patterns and help you see blind spots.

8. Be Patient with the Process

You didn't become codependent overnight; you won't become healthy overnight. Give yourself and others grace as you learn new patterns. Celebrate small steps forward.

The Beauty of Gospel Friendships

Timothy and Epaphroditus show us what's possible: relationships characterized by genuine love, mutual encouragement, shared purpose, appropriate boundaries, and Christ-centeredness. Friendships where both people are more fully themselves, more fully devoted to Christ, and more fully alive.

This is what God intended for human relationships—not the suffocating enmeshment of codependency, but the life-giving connection of Christ-centered companionship.

You were never meant to lose yourself in others. You were meant to find yourself in Christ and, from that security, to give yourself in healthy, life-giving relationships.

You were never meant to be someone's savior. You were meant to point them to the Savior.

You were never meant to derive your identity from how much you're needed. You were meant to derive your identity from being God's beloved child.

When you grasp these truths, your relationships are transformed. You can finally love people without using them. You can finally give without keeping score. You can finally enjoy companionship without demanding that it complete you.

Because you're already complete in Christ.

And from that completion, you're free—free to love, free to serve, free to honor others without losing yourself.

That's not loneliness. That's true companionship.

And it's worth far more than any codependent entanglement could ever offer.

Reflect and Respond:

1. Using the diagnostic questions in this chapter, evaluate your closest relationships. Are they characterized more by codependent partnership or Christ-centered companionship? Be specific about patterns you recognize.
2. Think of someone you admire spiritually—perhaps like Timothy or Epaphroditus. How can you "hold them in high regard" without making them an idol? What's the difference?
3. In which relationship are you most tempted toward codependency? What is one boundary you need to establish there? What's stopping you?
4. Elisabeth Elliot said, "The most loving thing we can do for others is to live wholeheartedly for God." How would your relationships change if you took this seriously? What would you do differently starting today?
5. Is there someone you need to "receive in the Lord with joy" rather than with codependent neediness or anxious control? What would that look like practically?

Chapter 6: Letting Go of Performance-Based Worth

Philippians 3:1-11

The Resume That Meant Nothing

Paul had an impressive resume.

If anyone could earn God's approval through credentials and performance, it was him. Listen to how he catalogs his qualifications: "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (Philippians 3:4-6 NASB).

Let's break down what Paul is saying. This isn't false humility or exaggeration. By the standards of first-century Judaism, Paul was elite:

Circumcised the eighth day: Not a convert, but born into the covenant. He didn't have to work his way in; he was in from the beginning.

Of the nation of Israel: Not just ethnically Jewish, but part of God's chosen people with a direct line to Abraham.

Of the tribe of Benjamin: The honored tribe that produced Israel's first king, Saul. Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David when the kingdom split. This was prestigious lineage.

A Hebrew of Hebrews: He spoke Hebrew, not just Greek. He was culturally pure, not diluted by Hellenistic influence.

As to the Law, a Pharisee: The strictest, most devoted sect. Pharisees were the spiritual elite, the ones who took holiness seriously, who added hundreds of rules to ensure they never broke God's commandments.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church: He was so devoted to his understanding of God's truth that he violently opposed what he saw as heresy. His passion was undeniable.

As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless: By external standards, he kept every rule, fulfilled every requirement, maintained every standard. Perfect performance.

If there was ever a man who could stand before God and say, "I earned this," it was Paul. If anyone could claim worth based on credentials, achievement, and performance, it was him. He had the pedigree, the education, the passion, the track record, the blameless performance.

And then he met Jesus.

The Great Reckoning

"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7 NASB).

Everything Paul had worked for, everything he had achieved, everything he had prided himself on, everything he thought made him valuable—he now counted as loss. The Greek word is *zēmia*—not just worthless, but actually detrimental. Paul's saying his resume wasn't just neutral; it was actively harmful because it had kept him from Christ.

But Paul doesn't stop there. He intensifies:

"More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:8–9 NASB).

"I count all things to be loss." Not just religious credentials. ALL things. Everything. Every achievement, every accolade, every bit of approval, every measure of success by human standards—all of it is loss compared to knowing Christ.

"Rubbish." The Greek word *skubalon* is even stronger than our English translation suggests. It means refuse, garbage, dung—the stuff you throw

away without a second thought, the stuff that has no value whatsoever. Paul is saying that compared to knowing Christ, everything else—including his impressive religious performance—is sewage.

This is shocking. This is the man who had every reason to boast, every credential to display, every achievement to hang on his wall—and he calls it all garbage.

Why?

"In view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

The Co-Dependency Connection

Here's what we need to understand: **Co-dependency is a form of spiritual legalism—earning love through performance.**

Paul's pre-Christian life was defined by trying to earn God's approval through perfect adherence to the Law. He thought if he could just be good enough, righteous enough, zealous enough, blameless enough—then he would be accepted, valued, secure. His identity was tied to his performance. His worth was based on his achievements. His security depended on his credentials.

Sound familiar?

Co-dependency operates on the exact same system:

- If I can just be helpful enough, I'll be loved
- If I can just be needed enough, I'll be secure
- If I can just be perfect enough, I'll be accepted
- If I can just sacrifice enough, I'll be valued
- If I can just perform well enough, I won't be abandoned

We're trying to earn through performance what can only be received through grace. We're attempting to establish our own righteousness through our works rather than receiving the righteousness that comes through faith. We're

building our identity on what we do rather than on who Christ is and what He's done.

This is legalism—whether it's religious legalism (earning God's approval through rule-keeping) or relational legalism (earning others' approval through people-pleasing). Both systems are rooted in the same lie: **Your worth must be earned. Your value must be proven. Your acceptance depends on your performance.**

And both systems are exhausting. Because no matter how much you achieve, it's never quite enough. No matter how perfectly you perform, there's always another standard to meet. No matter how much you sacrifice, there's always someone who needs more. The treadmill never stops. The bar keeps rising. The approval you desperately seek remains just out of reach.

Paul lived this way for years. He climbed the ladder of religious achievement, checking every box, exceeding every expectation. And he was miserable. Because performance-based worth is a prison, not a path to freedom.

The Surpassing Value

But then Paul encountered Christ. And everything changed.

"The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8 NASB).

The word "surpassing" is *hyperechō* in Greek—it means "to have in excess, to be superior, to excel, to go beyond." It's not just that Christ is valuable. It's that His value surpasses, exceeds, goes beyond, towers over everything else. There is no comparison. It's like comparing the sun to a candle, the ocean to a puddle, Mount Everest to an anthill.

And notice what Paul values: not what Christ can do for him, not what Christ can give him, but **knowing Christ Himself**. This isn't transactional. This isn't "Christ is valuable because He gets me into heaven" or "Christ is valuable because He meets my needs." This is relational. Personal. Intimate. **Knowing Christ Jesus.**

This is the key that unlocks the prison of performance-based worth. When you discover the surpassing value of knowing Christ—when you realize that His love for you, His acceptance of you, His delight in you is not based on your performance but on His grace—you're free. Free from the treadmill of earning. Free from the anxiety of performing. Free from the exhaustion of trying to prove your worth.

Because your worth isn't up for debate anymore. It's been settled. Not by what you've achieved, but by what Christ has done. Not by how well you've performed, but by how completely He's loved you. Not by your righteousness, but by His.

Not Having a Righteousness of My Own

"And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9 NASB).

This is the heart of the gospel, and it's the death blow to co-dependency.

"Not having a righteousness of my own." Paul had spent years trying to establish his own righteousness—to be good enough, to earn God's approval, to prove his worth through flawless performance. And he was better at it than almost anyone. He was "blameless" according to the Law. But it was still insufficient because it was his own—self-generated, self-maintained, self-dependent.

Co-dependency does the same thing. We try to establish our own worth through our performance:

- "I'm valuable because I'm needed"
- "I'm worthy because I'm helpful"
- "I'm acceptable because I'm perfect"
- "I'm secure because I'm indispensable"

This is a righteousness of our own—self-generated, self-maintained, self-dependent. And it's never enough. It's like trying to save yourself from drowning by pulling on your own hair. The harder you try, the more exhausted you become, and you never actually make progress.

"But that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God." Here's the stunning alternative: a righteousness that isn't yours, that you didn't earn, that you can't lose. A righteousness that comes from God, through faith in Christ.

When you trust in Christ, God credits you with Christ's righteousness. It's not that God overlooks your sin or pretends you're good when you're not. It's that He sees you *in Christ*—wrapped in His perfection, covered by His obedience, secured by His finished work. Your standing before God is no longer based on your performance. It's based on Christ's.

And if your standing before the God of the universe is secure in Christ, why are you still trying to earn your worth from people? If the Creator of all things has declared you righteous through faith, why are you still performing for the approval of fallen humans who can't save themselves, let alone you?

The surpassing value of knowing Christ sets us free from striving.

The Language of Obligation vs. the Language of Grace

One of the most practical ways to recognize and combat performance-based worth is to pay attention to your internal dialogue. Listen to how you talk to yourself—and how you talk about your relationships and responsibilities.

The language of co-dependency is the language of obligation:

- "I have to help them or they'll fall apart"
- "I have to say yes or they'll be upset with me"
- "I have to be perfect or I'll be rejected"
- "I have to fix this or I'm a failure"
- "I have to earn their approval or I'm worthless"

- "I have to keep everyone happy or something terrible will happen"

This is the language of slavery. The language of fear. The language of performance-based worth. Every "I have to" is weighted with anxiety, driven by fear, and rooted in the belief that your value depends on your performance.

The language of grace is radically different:

- "I get to serve because I've been served"
- "I get to love because I've been loved"
- "I get to give because I've received so much"
- "I get to rest because Christ's work is finished"
- "I get to be myself because I'm accepted in Christ"
- "I get to set boundaries because I'm secure in His love"

This is the language of freedom. The language of gratitude. The language of knowing Christ. Every "I get to" is infused with joy, empowered by grace, and rooted in the security of Christ's finished work.

Practical Application: Replace "I have to" with "I get to."

This isn't just positive thinking or semantic games. This is a fundamental reorientation of how you view your life, your service, and your worth.

When you catch yourself saying "I have to," stop and ask:

- Is this true? Do I actually have to, or is this coming from fear?
- What am I afraid will happen if I don't?
- Am I trying to earn something through this?
- What would it look like to approach this from freedom rather than fear?

Then, when appropriate, reframe:

- "I have to help or they'll reject me" becomes "I get to help because I want to reflect Christ's love—but my worth doesn't depend on their response"
- "I have to be perfect" becomes "I get to grow because I'm already accepted"
- "I have to say yes" becomes "I get to consider what God is calling me to, and that might mean saying no"

This shift from obligation to grace changes everything. It doesn't make you lazy or selfish. It makes you free. And from that freedom, you can actually love more genuinely, serve more joyfully, and give more generously—because you're no longer trying to earn what you've already received.

Grace Is Not Opposed to Effort

Dallas Willard's words are crucial here: "**Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning.**"

Some people hear the message of grace and think it means passivity—that we shouldn't try, shouldn't work, shouldn't strive for growth. But that's a misunderstanding. Grace doesn't eliminate effort; it transforms the motivation behind it.

Earning says:

- I work to gain approval
- I strive to prove my worth
- I perform to secure my position
- I achieve to earn love

Grace says:

- I work because I've already been approved

- I strive because my worth is secure
- I serve because my position is guaranteed
- I grow because I'm already loved

See the difference? The effort might look similar on the outside. Paul still worked hard after his conversion—he planted churches, endured suffering, discipled believers, wrote letters. But the motivation was completely different. He wasn't working to earn God's love; he was working from the overflow of having received it.

The same is true in relationships. Grace doesn't mean you stop serving people, stop caring about others, or stop working on your character. It means you do these things from a different place:

Before grace (co-dependency):

- You serve to earn approval → You're exhausted and resentful
- You give to secure your position → You keep score and feel bitter
- You sacrifice to prove you're worthy → You're never satisfied with what you've done
- You perform to avoid rejection → You're anxious and inauthentic

After grace (freedom in Christ):

- You serve out of gratitude → You're energized by love
- You give because you've received → You're generous without strings
- You sacrifice because Christ sacrificed → You're at peace with what you've offered
- You're authentic because you're secure → You're free to be yourself

The effort continues, but it's no longer driven by fear or the need to earn. It's motivated by love, empowered by grace, and rooted in security.

The Joy of Knowing Christ

"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10–11 NASB).

Notice Paul's desire: "**That I may know Him.**" After listing all his credentials and calling them rubbish, after emphasizing the surpassing value of knowing Christ, Paul reveals what he really wants: not just to know *about* Christ, but to *know Him*. Intimately. Personally. Deeply.

This is what performance-based worth robs from us—intimacy. When you're constantly performing, you can never truly be known. You're always presenting the version of yourself that you think will be accepted. You're always hiding the parts that don't measure up. You're always anxious that if people really knew you—the real you, with all your flaws, failures, and fears—they'd reject you.

But with Christ, you can be fully known and fully loved. He sees everything—every sin, every weakness, every dark corner of your heart—and He loves you completely. Not because you've earned it, but because of His grace. Not because you're perfect, but because He is. Not because you're impressive, but because His love is relentless.

When you experience this—really experience being known and loved by Christ—it changes how you relate to everyone else. You're no longer desperate for their approval because you have His. You're no longer performing for their acceptance because you're secure in His. You're no longer hiding behind a facade because you've been seen by the One who matters most and He hasn't turned away.

This is the surpassing value of knowing Christ: You can finally stop performing and start living.

What Are You Still Counting on?

Paul's radical reorientation requires honest self-examination. He looked at everything he'd been counting on for his worth—his pedigree, his achievements, his performance—and declared it all loss for the sake of knowing Christ.

What are you still counting on?

Maybe it's not religious credentials. But we all have our version of Paul's resume—the things we point to when we're trying to prove our worth:

- **Your helpfulness:** "I'm valuable because people need me"
- **Your achievements:** "I'm worthy because I've accomplished things"
- **Your appearance:** "I'm acceptable because I look the part"
- **Your performance:** "I'm secure because I do everything right"
- **Your relationships:** "I'm somebody because of who I'm connected to"
- **Your knowledge:** "I'm impressive because I'm smart"
- **Your sacrifices:** "I'm deserving because of what I've given up"
- **Your role:** "I'm important because of what I do"

These aren't necessarily bad things in themselves. Paul's credentials weren't evil—they were actually good things by religious standards. But they became toxic when he relied on them for his identity and worth instead of on Christ.

The question is: What would it feel like to lose these things? If you lost your role, your appearance, your achievements, your ability to help others—would you still know who you are? Would you still feel valuable? Would you still feel secure?

If the honest answer is no—if losing these things would devastate your sense of identity and worth—then you've made them into your functional savior. You're counting on them the way Paul once counted on his pedigree and performance. And you need to experience the same radical reorientation he did: counting it all as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ.

The Exchange

Here's what Paul discovered, and what he's inviting us into: an exchange.

You give up:

- Your self-generated righteousness for Christ's perfect righteousness
- Your performance-based worth for grace-based identity
- Your exhausting striving for restful receiving
- Your anxious earning for confident knowing
- Your impressive credentials for intimate relationship
- Your need to prove yourself for the security of being fully known and fully loved

You receive:

- "That I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him" (Philippians 3:8–9)
- The righteousness that comes from God through faith
- The power of His resurrection
- The fellowship of His sufferings
- Conformity to His death and resurrection
- The surpassing value of knowing Him

This is the best trade you'll ever make. You give up what you couldn't keep anyway—your self-generated attempts at worth—and you gain what can never be taken from you: Christ Himself.

Paul made this exchange and never looked back. He suffered the loss of all things, and he counted it joy. Why? Because what he gained—knowing Christ—was worth infinitely more than what he lost.

From Blameless Performance to Beautiful Relationship

There's a stunning contrast in Paul's story. Before Christ, he was "as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (Philippians 3:6 NASB). Externally perfect. Flawless performance. But miserable. Empty. Still striving.

After Christ, he readily admits he hasn't "already obtained it or...already become perfect" (Philippians 3:12 NASB). He's honest about his ongoing growth, his limitations, his unfinished journey. And yet he's joyful. At peace. Free.

What changed? He moved from blameless performance to beautiful relationship. He stopped trying to be perfect and started pursuing the One who is. He stopped earning and started receiving. He stopped performing and started knowing.

This is the invitation for the co-dependent: **You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be His.**

You don't have to earn love through flawless performance. You get to receive love through faith in Christ. You don't have to prove your worth through constant achievement. Your worth has already been established at the cross. You don't have to strive to be blameless. You get to rest in the One who is blameless and who covers you with His righteousness.

The Daily Practice of Letting Go

Letting go of performance-based worth isn't a one-time decision. It's a daily—sometimes moment-by-moment—practice of returning to the surpassing value of knowing Christ.

Here's how to cultivate this practice:

1. Start Each Day with Your True Identity

Before you face the demands and expectations of the day, remind yourself: "I am in Christ. I have His righteousness, not my own. My worth is not on trial today. I am fully known and fully loved."

2. Notice Your "I Have To" Statements

Pay attention when you catch yourself thinking or saying "I have to." Pause. Ask yourself: "Am I trying to earn something through this? What would it look like to approach this from grace instead of obligation?"

3. Confess Your Attempts at Self-Righteousness

When you realize you're slipping back into performance mode—trying to earn approval, prove your worth, secure your position through your efforts—confess it. "God, I'm trying to establish my own righteousness again. I'm trying to earn what You've already given me. Help me rest in Christ's finished work."

4. Meditate on Philippians 3:8

Write it out. Memorize it. Return to it throughout the day: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

5. Practice Gratitude for Grace

List specific ways God has shown you grace—not just salvation, but the daily grace of being loved despite your imperfections, accepted despite your failures, secure despite your weaknesses. Let gratitude displace the anxiety of performance.

6. Reframe Your Efforts

When you're serving, helping, working, loving—check your motivation. If it's fear-based or performance-driven, stop and reorient. "I'm not doing this to earn anything. I'm doing this because I've already received everything in Christ."

7. Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection

You're going to slip back into performance mode. You're going to forget that your worth is secure. You're going to try to earn approval through your efforts. When this happens, don't spiral into shame. Instead, acknowledge it, return to grace, and celebrate that you're growing in awareness. Progress, not perfection, is the goal.

What If You Believed It?

Consider for a moment: What if you truly believed that knowing Christ was of surpassing value? What if you genuinely counted everything else as loss compared to Him? What if you stopped trying to establish your own righteousness and rested completely in His?

Your anxiety would decrease. You wouldn't be constantly worried about measuring up because you'd know you already have Christ's righteousness.

Your relationships would improve. You wouldn't need people to validate you, so you could love them more freely and genuinely.

Your service would be joyful. You wouldn't be performing to earn; you'd be giving from gratitude.

Your identity would be stable. You wouldn't rise and fall with others' opinions because your worth would be anchored in Christ.

Your boundaries would be healthy. You could say no without guilt because you wouldn't be trying to prove your worth through constant availability.

Your rest would be real. You could stop striving because you'd know the work that matters most is already finished.

Your intimacy with God would deepen. You could be honest about your struggles because you'd know you're secure in His love, not performing for His approval.

This isn't fantasy. This is what Paul experienced. This is what he's inviting us into. This is the freedom that comes from letting go of performance-based worth and embracing the surpassing value of knowing Christ.

The Rubbish and the Riches

Paul's language is stark: Everything apart from knowing Christ is *skubalon*—rubbish, garbage, sewage. This might sound harsh, even offensive to our modern sensibilities. We want to believe that our achievements matter, that our credentials have value, that our performance counts for something.

And in their proper place, these things can be good. It's good to work hard, to grow in character, to serve others, to use your gifts. But when they become the basis of your worth, when you're counting on them for your identity, when you're relying on them for your security—they become rubbish. Not because they're inherently bad, but because they're insufficient. They cannot bear the weight you're asking them to carry.

Only Christ can be the foundation of your worth. Only knowing Him can satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. Only His righteousness can stand before a holy God.

So Paul makes the exchange: rubbish for riches. Loss for gain. His own righteousness for Christ's. Performance for relationship. Striving for knowing.

And he never regretted it for a single moment.

Neither will you.

The Invitation

The same invitation Paul received is extended to you: Stop counting on your credentials, your achievements, your performance, your perfect sacrifice. Stop trying to establish your own righteousness through how helpful you are, how needed you are, how perfect you are.

Count it all as loss—not because it has no value, but because it has no value *compared to knowing Christ*.

Let go of performance-based worth. Receive grace-based identity. Trade your striving for His rest. Exchange your self-generated righteousness for the righteousness that comes from God through faith.

And discover what Paul discovered: the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus your Lord is worth more than everything else combined.

It's worth more than the approval you're desperately seeking.

It's worth more than the security you're anxiously trying to earn.

It's worth more than the worth you're exhaustingly trying to prove.

Knowing Christ—really knowing Him, intimately, personally, deeply—is the treasure that makes everything else look like trash by comparison.

And here's the beautiful truth: He already knows you. Fully. Completely. Every sin, every weakness, every failure, every fear.

And He loves you. Not because you've earned it. But because He is grace.

Stop performing. Start receiving.

The surpassing value of knowing Christ is yours—not through your striving, but through faith.

And that changes everything.

Reflect and Respond:

1. What is your "resume"—the credentials, achievements, or roles you've been counting on for your worth? Write them down. Then practice Paul's radical reorientation: declare them "loss" compared to knowing Christ. How does that feel?
2. Listen to your internal dialogue this week. How often do you use "I have to" language? Write down these statements. Then practice reframing them as "I get to" statements rooted in grace. What shifts?

3. Dallas Willard said, "Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning." Where in your life are you confusing effort with earning? How would your motivation change if you believed you're working from approval, not for it?
4. Memorize Philippians 3:8 this week. Write it somewhere you'll see it daily. When you're tempted to perform for worth, return to this verse. Let it remind you of the surpassing value of knowing Christ.
5. What would it look like for you to pursue knowing Christ with the same intensity you've been pursuing others' approval? What would you need to let go of? What would you need to embrace?

Chapter 7: Pressing On Toward Wholeness in Christ

Philippians 3:12–21

The Weight of Yesterday

There's a particular kind of prison that has no walls, no bars, no locked doors—yet millions live confined within it. It's the prison of the past.

Maybe for you, it's a relationship that ended badly, and you replay the conversations in your mind, wondering what you could have said differently. Maybe it's a wound from childhood that still determines how you relate to people today—you're an adult in years, but emotionally, you're still that hurt child desperately seeking the approval you never received. Maybe it's a pattern of failed relationships, each one confirming the narrative you've believed about yourself: "I'm not enough. I'm too much. I'm unlovable. I'll always be abandoned."

Or perhaps it's not pain from the past that imprisons you—it's nostalgia for it. You're stuck in the "good old days" of a relationship that's over, unable to embrace the present because you're perpetually looking backward. You idealize what was, blind to its dysfunction, unable to move forward because you're convinced nothing ahead could be as good as what's behind.

This is the danger of living in the past: whether through regret, guilt, or nostalgia, we become attached to what was rather than advancing toward what can be. We're so focused on yesterday's wounds or yesterday's glories that we miss today's grace and tomorrow's promise.

Co-dependency thrives in this backward-looking orientation. We're haunted by past rejection, so we perform to prevent future abandonment. We're shaped by past wounds, so we desperately cling to anyone who offers temporary relief. We're defined by past failures, so we strive relentlessly to prove we're different now. The past has us in a chokehold, and we don't know how to break free.

But Paul offers a radically different way: "**Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**" (Philippians 3:13–14 NASB).

This is the invitation: from attachment to the past to advancement toward Christ. From being bound by what was to being freed for what will be. From the prison of yesterday to the promise of tomorrow.

Not Yet Perfect, But Pressing On

Paul begins this section with stunning honesty: "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12 NASB).

This confession is crucial. Remember, this is the same Paul who just listed his impressive credentials—blameless according to the Law, a Pharisee, zealous, accomplished. And now, in Christ, he's admitting: "**I haven't arrived. I'm not perfect. I'm still in process.**"

This is freeing for those of us trapped in the perfectionistic striving of co-dependency. We think we have to have it all together before we can move forward. We believe our past disqualifies us from a healthy future. We're convinced that until we're perfect, we're not worthy of love, acceptance, or wholeness.

But Paul demolishes this thinking. He says, essentially: "I'm not perfect. I'm not finished. But I'm not staying where I am. I'm pressing on."

The Christian life isn't about having already arrived; it's about pressing toward the destination. It's not about being perfect; it's about being in process. It's not about never falling; it's about getting back up and moving forward.

You don't have to be perfect to press on. You just have to be willing.

And notice Paul's motivation: "So that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." He's pursuing Christ because Christ first pursued him. He's reaching forward because he's already been grasped. He's

pressing on not to earn Christ's love, but to fully experience what Christ has already secured for him.

This is the difference between co-dependent striving and Christ-centered growth:

Co-dependent striving says:

- "I have to be perfect or I'm worthless"
- "I can't move forward until I've fixed everything from the past"
- "I'm pressing on to finally earn approval"
- "If I haven't arrived yet, I'm a failure"

Christ-centered growth says:

- "I'm not perfect, but I'm being perfected"
- "I can move forward while still healing from the past"
- "I'm pressing on because I've already been approved"
- "The journey matters as much as the destination"

You're not stuck. You're not disqualified. You're not defined by where you've been. You're in process—and that's exactly where God wants you.

One Thing I Do

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13–14 NASB).

"One thing I do." Not ten things. Not a complex, multifaceted strategy. One thing. Paul simplifies his entire life down to a single focus: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.

This singular focus is essential for breaking free from co-dependency. We tend to overcomplicate things—ten-step programs, elaborate strategies, constant

analysis of every relationship and pattern. But Paul says the core of forward movement is actually quite simple: let go of the past, reach for what's ahead, and press toward Christ.

Let's break down what this means practically.

Forgetting What Lies Behind

"Forgetting what lies behind" is one of the most misunderstood phrases in Scripture. Paul isn't advocating for amnesia. He's not suggesting we suppress memories or pretend the past didn't happen. He's not promoting denial or unhealthy detachment from our stories.

The Greek word for "forgetting" here is *epilanthanomai*—it means to neglect, to no longer care for, to disregard. It's not about erasing memory; it's about refusing to let the past control your present and determine your future. It's choosing not to be defined, dominated, or directed by what's behind you.

For the co-dependent, this is revolutionary. We've been so attached to past wounds, past patterns, past relationships, and past identities that we can't imagine living any other way. Our past has become our present—we're constantly replaying old scripts, reacting from old wounds, and relating from old fears.

But Paul says: **Stop letting the past have the final word. Stop giving yesterday authority over today. Stop being controlled by what happened back there when Christ is calling you forward from here.**

What to Forget (Disregard, Not Repress):

1. Past Failures That God Has Forgiven

If God has forgiven it, why are you still punishing yourself for it? If Christ has removed it as far as the east is from the west, why are you still carrying it? The enemy wants you stuck in guilt and shame, constantly looking back at your failures. But God says: "I forgive you. Now move forward."

For the co-dependent, this might mean:

- Forgiving yourself for staying too long in unhealthy relationships
- Releasing guilt over setting boundaries you should have set years ago
- Letting go of shame over past people-pleasing and enabling
- Accepting grace for the times you lost yourself trying to save others

2. Past Wounds That Have Defined You

You are not your trauma. You are not your abuse. You are not your abandonment. You are not your rejection. These things happened to you, but they don't have to define you.

Yes, the wounds are real. Yes, they need to be acknowledged, grieved, and healed. But there comes a point where you must choose: Will I be forever defined by what was done to me, or will I be defined by who Christ says I am?

Paul had plenty of past wounds—persecution, imprisonment, betrayal, shipwrecks, beatings. He doesn't pretend they didn't happen. But he refuses to let them define his future. He presses forward.

3. Past Relationships That Are Over

Some relationships end. Some people leave. Some connections that once were life-giving become toxic. Some chapters close.

Co-dependency struggles intensely with this. We hold on long after it's healthy to do so. We remain emotionally attached to people who've moved on. We can't let go even when the relationship is clearly over. We idealize what was and refuse to accept what is.

But healthy detachment isn't rejection; it's redemption. It's saying: "That season is over. God was in it, but He's also in what's next. I release what was so I can embrace what will be."

4. Past Identities That No Longer Fit

Who you were isn't who you are. The old labels—"the people-pleaser," "the rescuer," "the one who can't say no," "the one who always gets used," "the doormat," "the anxious one"—those don't have to define you anymore.

In Christ, you're a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). You don't have to keep living according to old identities that God has already transformed.

5. Past Victories That Breed Pride or Complacency

This is the nostalgia trap. Sometimes we're so attached to past successes, past seasons, or past versions of ourselves that we resist growth. We want to stay where we were because it was comfortable, familiar, or affirming.

But God is always calling us forward. Yesterday's victory isn't today's assignment. What worked in that season may not work in this one. Press forward.

Reaching Forward to What Lies Ahead

"Reaching forward to what lies ahead." The Greek word *epekteinomenos* is vivid—it means to stretch out, to strain forward like a runner leaning toward the finish line. It's active, intentional, focused.

This isn't passive waiting. This isn't "I'll deal with my co-dependency someday when I feel ready." This is aggressive pursuit. This is straining, stretching, pressing. This is choosing to move forward even when it's uncomfortable, even when you're not ready, even when you'd rather stay in the familiar dysfunction.

What to Reach For:

1. Wholeness in Christ

You're reaching for the person God created you to be—fully yourself, fully alive, fully free. Not enmeshed with others. Not lost in relationships. Not defined by how much you're needed. But whole, secure, complete in Christ.

2. Maturity in Love

You're reaching for the ability to love genuinely—not from neediness but from fullness. Love that serves without losing itself. Love that sacrifices without resentment. Love that gives freely without strings attached.

3. Freedom from Old Patterns

You're reaching for freedom from the cycles that have kept you trapped—the pattern of choosing emotionally unavailable people, the habit of saying yes when you should say no, the compulsion to fix others, the fear that drives you to perform.

4. Deeper Intimacy with God

You're reaching for a relationship with God that isn't based on performance, that isn't anxious about approval, that rests in His love and finds security in His presence.

5. The Upward Call of God

Paul says he's pressing "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The ultimate goal isn't just freedom from co-dependency—it's knowing Christ, being conformed to His image, and hearing Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The Posture of Pressing On

Notice Paul's language: "**I press on.**" This is *diōkō* in Greek—it means to pursue, to chase after, to follow hard after. It's the same word used for persecution—aggressive, relentless pursuit.

This is the opposite of the co-dependent's passivity. We wait for others to change. We hope things will get better on their own. We stay stuck because we're afraid of the discomfort of movement.

But pressing on requires:

1. Intentionality

Growth doesn't happen by accident. You have to choose it. Every day. Sometimes every hour. You have to consciously decide: "I'm not staying here. I'm moving forward. I'm pressing on."

2. Persistence

You'll face setbacks. You'll slip back into old patterns. You'll have days when you want to quit. But pressing on means getting back up and continuing the pursuit, even when progress feels slow.

3. Focus

"One thing I do." Not scattered attention, but laser focus. What's the one thing you need to do today to press forward? Maybe it's setting one boundary. Maybe it's praying "not my will, but Yours" when you're tempted to control. Maybe it's releasing someone to God. Whatever it is, focus on that one thing.

4. Endurance

This is a marathon, not a sprint. You're not going to overcome decades of co-dependent patterns in a week. But if you keep pressing, keep reaching, keep forgetting what's behind and straining for what's ahead—you will see transformation.

Let Those Who Are Mature Think This Way

"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained" (Philippians 3:15–16 NASB).

Paul uses "perfect" (*teleios*) here, meaning mature or complete—not sinlessly perfect, but spiritually mature. And the mark of maturity isn't having it all together; it's having the right attitude: forgetting what lies behind, reaching for what lies ahead, pressing toward Christ.

This is crucial for the co-dependent recovering in community. Paul says, essentially, "If you're mature in Christ, you'll have this forward-looking perspective. And if you don't yet have it, God will reveal it to you. In the meantime, keep living according to what you do understand."

Spiritual maturity doesn't mean perfection. It means:

- Not being stuck in the past
- Not being defined by wounds
- Not being controlled by old patterns
- Pressing forward even when it's hard
- Keeping your eyes on Christ, not on circumstances

And if you're not there yet? God will reveal it. Keep walking in the light you have. Keep growing. Keep pressing on.

Enemies of the Cross

Paul suddenly shifts to a warning: "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" (Philippians 3:17–19 NASB).

This seems like a harsh turn, but it's directly relevant to overcoming co-dependency. Paul weeps over those who are "enemies of the cross"—not because they're outwardly immoral, but because they've rejected the way of the cross in favor of earthly thinking.

Who are these people?

"Whose god is their appetite": They live for self-gratification, for meeting their own needs, for satisfying their desires. Ironically, this describes both the overtly selfish person and the co-dependent. Co-dependency can be a form

of self-worship disguised as service—we serve others, but ultimately it's to meet our own need to be needed, to feel valuable, to avoid abandonment.

"Whose glory is in their shame": They boast in what should humble them. They take pride in their dysfunction. In co-dependency, this might look like: "I'm such a giving person—I never think of myself!" (pride in unhealthy self-neglect), or "I'm irreplaceable—this person couldn't function without me!" (pride in enabling), or "I can handle anything—I don't need help!" (pride in refusing vulnerability).

"Who set their minds on earthly things": They're focused on temporal securities—relationships, approval, reputation, being needed—rather than on eternal realities in Christ.

Paul's warning is sobering: **There are patterns of living that seem good but are actually opposed to the way of the cross.** The cross is about death to self, surrender, letting go, trusting God. Co-dependency is about self-preservation through control, grasping, and self-reliance disguised as service.

We need to examine: Are we truly walking the way of the cross—letting go, dying to self, trusting God—or are we enemies of the cross, setting our minds on earthly securities and serving our own appetite for approval?

Our Citizenship Is in Heaven

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20–21 NASB).

Here's the antidote to earthly-mindedness: **remembering where you truly belong.**

Your citizenship is in heaven. Not in a relationship. Not in being needed. Not in others' approval. Not in your role. Not in your performance. Your true home, your ultimate allegiance, your secure identity—all are in heaven, with Christ.

This is the anchor that allows you to let go of the past and press forward. When your citizenship is in heaven:

You can release earthly securities because your true security is in Christ.

You can let go of toxic relationships because your ultimate relationship is with God.

You can stop performing for approval because you already have the approval of the King of Kings.

You can endure temporary loss because you're waiting for eternal gain.

You can die to self because you know you'll be raised to new life.

Co-dependency makes earthly relationships ultimate—they become your heaven, your source of life, your reason for being. But when you remember that your citizenship is in heaven, earthly relationships take their proper place: important but not ultimate, significant but not supreme, valuable but not your source of life.

We Eagerly Wait for a Savior

Notice: "**We eagerly wait for a Savior.**" Not "we eagerly try to be the savior." Not "we desperately search for someone to be our savior." We wait for *the* Savior—Jesus Christ.

This is the posture that frees us from co-dependency:

- We're not the savior (we can't fix everyone)
- Others aren't our savior (they can't complete us)
- We're waiting for the true Savior (and He's already secured our salvation)

The waiting is active, expectant, hope-filled. We're not passively stuck in the past. We're not anxiously trying to control the present. We're eagerly waiting for the Savior who will complete the transformation He's already begun.

"Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." The transformation isn't complete yet. You're still in your "humble state"—still struggling, still imperfect, still broken in places. But the promise is certain: Christ will transform you. Not might. Not if you perform well enough. Will. It's guaranteed.

And the power for this transformation? Not your willpower. Not your determination to change. **"By the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."** The same power that subjects all things to Christ is the power that's transforming you. You're not doing this alone.

Healthy Detachment: Redemption, Not Rejection

One of the most important distinctions for overcoming co-dependency is understanding what healthy detachment actually means. **Healthy detachment isn't rejection; it's redemption.**

Unhealthy attachment (co-dependency):

- You can't function without certain people
- Your emotions are completely dependent on others' moods
- You're responsible for others' feelings, choices, and consequences
- You lose yourself in relationships
- You can't let go even when it's clearly harmful
- You sacrifice your well-being to maintain connection

Unhealthy detachment (isolation, indifference):

- You cut people off completely to protect yourself
- You refuse to care because caring has hurt you
- You become cold, distant, emotionally unavailable
- You avoid all vulnerability and intimacy
- You reject relationships entirely

Healthy detachment (Christ-centered boundaries):

- You love people without being controlled by them
- You care deeply but recognize what's not yours to carry
- You release people and outcomes to God
- You maintain your identity while staying connected
- You can grieve and let go when necessary
- You set boundaries that honor both you and others

Healthy detachment is redemptive because it allows:

- **You to be redeemed:** Free to be yourself, to grow, to heal, to become who God created you to be
- **Others to be redeemed:** Free to face consequences, to make their own choices, to have their own relationship with God without you as the mediator
- **The relationship to be redeemed:** Moving from enmeshment to genuine connection, from co-dependency to Christ-centered companionship

When Paul says "forgetting what lies behind," he's not advocating for cutting off everyone from your past or becoming emotionally unavailable. He's advocating for healthy detachment from what's holding you back—whether that's old wounds, old patterns, or old ways of relating that keep you from pressing forward in Christ.

Our Hearts Are Restless Until They Rest in You

Augustine's famous words capture the core issue beneath co-dependency:
"Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

We are made for God. Created by Him, for Him, to find our ultimate satisfaction, security, and identity in Him. But when we don't rest in God, we become restless—anxiously searching for something, anything, to fill the void.

We look to relationships, to being needed, to approval, to performance, to achievement. And none of it satisfies. None of it brings rest.

Co-dependency is restlessness masquerading as relationship. It's anxiety driving connection. It's need creating attachment. It's desperation disguised as devotion.

But there's another way: **resting in God and, from that rest, engaging in healthy relationships.**

When your heart rests in God:

- You stop desperately searching for someone to complete you
- You stop anxiously performing to prove your worth
- You stop obsessively trying to control outcomes
- You stop restlessly moving from one relationship crisis to another

Instead:

- You're anchored, stable, at peace
- You can be present without being enmeshed
- You can love without losing yourself
- You can let go without feeling destroyed
- You can press forward without being haunted by the past

The restlessness that drives co-dependency is ultimately spiritual—a soul that hasn't found its rest in God trying to find rest in others. But people can't bear that weight. Relationships aren't designed to give ultimate rest. Only God can.

So the path forward from co-dependency isn't just about changing relational patterns—though that matters. It's about finding rest in God so that your relationships flow from fullness rather than from restless need.

Pressing On Together

One final note: Paul says "let us" multiple times in this passage. Pressing on isn't solitary. You need community, accountability, fellow travelers on the journey.

Find people who are also:

- Letting go of the past and pressing forward
- Refusing to be defined by old wounds or old identities
- Setting their minds on things above, not on earthly securities
- Remembering their citizenship is in heaven
- Waiting for the Savior rather than trying to be or find one

These are the people who will encourage you when you want to look back, who will speak truth when you're slipping into old patterns, who will celebrate your progress and extend grace when you stumble.

You can't press on toward wholeness while remaining isolated. But you also can't press on while remaining enmeshed in co-dependent relationships. You need Christ-centered community—people who love you for who you are in Christ, not for what you do for them.

The Daily Choice

Pressing on toward wholeness in Christ is a daily choice. Sometimes it's an hourly choice. Sometimes it's a moment-by-moment choice.

Every day, you wake up and face the decision:

- Will I look back or press forward?
- Will I let the past define me or let Christ transform me?
- Will I cling to old wounds or reach for new healing?
- Will I stay in comfortable dysfunction or pursue uncomfortable growth?
- Will I find rest in others or rest in God?

The choice is yours. The power to follow through is God's. The promise is certain: He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

You're not stuck. You're not defined by yesterday. You're not condemned to repeat old patterns forever.

You're in process. And in Christ, that process is moving you from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from co-dependency to wholeness.

So forget what lies behind—not by denying it, but by refusing to let it control you.

Reach forward to what lies ahead—the person God is making you, the freedom He's giving you, the wholeness He's securing for you.

And press on toward the goal—the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Your citizenship is in heaven. Your heart can rest in Him. Your past doesn't have the final word.

Christ does.

And He says: **Press on. I'm making you whole.**

Reflect and Respond:

1. What from your past are you still carrying that God is asking you to release? Be specific. Is it a relationship that ended? A wound you've let define you? An old identity you need to lay down? Write it out, then pray: "God, I release this to You. I'm pressing forward."
2. What does "healthy detachment" look like in your most challenging relationship? How can you practice redemptive letting go without unhealthy rejection or continued enmeshment?
3. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Where are you seeking rest outside of God? In what relationship, role, or achievement are you looking for the peace only He can give?

4. Memorize Philippians 3:13-14 this week. When you're tempted to live in the past, return to these verses. Practice the discipline of "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead."
5. Paul said "one thing I do"—he simplified his whole life to pressing toward Christ. What's your "one thing" right now? What's the single focus God is asking you to pursue as you press on toward wholeness?

Chapter 8: Joy and Gentleness — Living Secure in Christ's Nearness

Philippians 4:1–9

The Tyranny of Anxiety

If you could map the emotional landscape of co-dependency, anxiety would be the dominant feature. Not the rolling hills of occasional worry, but towering mountains of constant dread, deep valleys of paralyzing fear, and treacherous terrain where every step forward feels like it might trigger an avalanche of rejection.

The co-dependent heart lives in perpetual anxiety:

- Anxiety about others' opinions: *What do they think of me?*
- Anxiety about relationships: *What if they leave?*
- Anxiety about performance: *Have I done enough?*
- Anxiety about outcomes: *What if it all falls apart?*
- Anxiety about conflict: *What if they're upset with me?*
- Anxiety about the future: *How will I survive without them?*
- Anxiety about the present: *Am I failing right now?*

This anxiety isn't occasional or situation-specific. It's the baseline, the constant hum beneath every interaction, the relentless static that never quite goes away. You wake up anxious. You go to bed anxious. You check your phone anxiously. You interpret every text, every silence, every facial expression through the lens of anxiety.

Co-dependency breeds anxiety because it's built on a foundation of fear—fear of abandonment, fear of rejection, fear of being exposed as inadequate, fear of losing control, fear that without this person or this role or this relationship, you'll cease to exist.

And the cruel irony is that the strategies we use to manage this anxiety actually create more of it. We try to control outcomes, which makes us more

anxious about what we can't control. We perform perfectly, which makes us more anxious about inevitable imperfection. We cling to relationships, which makes us more anxious about losing them. We obsessively monitor others' moods, which makes us more anxious about their unpredictability.

The co-dependent is exhausted—not just from serving others, but from carrying the crushing weight of anxiety that never relents.

But Paul offers something radically different: **Christ-centered life brings peace.**

Not the absence of challenges. Not the guarantee that relationships will be easy. Not the promise that nothing will go wrong. But genuine peace—a deep, abiding, supernatural peace that guards your heart even in the midst of chaos. Peace that makes joy possible. Peace that makes gentleness accessible. Peace that comes from knowing, deeply and unshakably, that **the Lord is near.**

Stand Firm, My Beloved

"Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved" (Philippians 4:1 NASB).

Notice the warmth of Paul's address: "my beloved brethren," "my joy and crown," "my beloved." Twice in one verse he calls them beloved. This isn't manipulation or performance-based affection. This is genuine love flowing from a secure heart.

And his instruction? **"Stand firm in the Lord."**

Not "stand firm in the relationship." Not "stand firm in your performance." Not "stand firm in your ability to be needed." Stand firm **in the Lord.**

This is crucial for the co-dependent. We try to stand firm in relationships, gripping so tightly that we crush what we're trying to hold. We try to stand firm in our role, terrified that if we're not needed, we have no value. We try to stand firm in our performance, believing that if we just maintain the image, we'll maintain the approval.

But all of these foundations are shifting sand. Relationships change. Roles end. Performance fluctuates. You cannot stand firm on these because they're fundamentally unstable.

The only place you can stand firm is in the Lord. He doesn't change. He doesn't leave. He doesn't base His love on your performance. When you're standing firm in Him, you have an anchor that holds regardless of what's happening around you.

And here's what's remarkable: **when you stand firm in the Lord, you can actually release your death grip on everything else.** You don't have to cling to people because you're held by God. You don't have to control outcomes because you trust the One who controls all things. You don't have to anxiously perform because your acceptance is already secure.

Standing firm in the Lord isn't rigid, anxious clinging. It's rooted, peaceful stability. It's the difference between a person desperately clinging to a life raft in a storm (co-dependency) and a person standing on solid ground while storms rage around them (Christ-centered security).

Rejoice in the Lord Always

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4 NASB).

"Rejoice in the Lord always." Not "rejoice when things go well." Not "rejoice when people affirm you." Not "rejoice when your anxiety finally goes away." **Always.** Even in prison. Even when betrayed. Even when misunderstood. Even when anxious. Always.

This sounds impossible to the anxious heart. How can I rejoice when I'm terrified? How can I experience joy when I'm consumed with worry about this relationship, this person, this outcome?

The key is in the qualifier: **"Rejoice in the Lord."**

Co-dependency tries to rejoice in circumstances: "I'm happy when they're happy." "I'm okay when they need me." "I'm joyful when everything's under

control." But circumstantial joy is fragile, fleeting, and fundamentally dependent on things you can't control.

Joy in the Lord is different. It's rooted in unchanging realities:

- God loves you—nothing can change that
- Christ has saved you—nothing can undo that
- The Spirit indwells you—nothing can remove that
- You belong to God—nothing can separate you from Him
- Your citizenship is in heaven—nothing can revoke that
- God is working all things for your good—nothing can thwart His purposes

These truths remain constant whether the relationship is thriving or failing, whether you're being affirmed or criticized, whether you're in control or everything's falling apart. And when you root your joy in these unchanging realities rather than in shifting circumstances, you discover that joy *is* possible. Always.

This doesn't mean you deny pain. Paul isn't advocating for toxic positivity or spiritual bypassing. You can grieve and rejoice simultaneously. You can struggle and still find joy in the Lord. The joy isn't dependent on the absence of difficulty; it's rooted in the presence of God.

For the co-dependent, this is transformative. You've spent years believing that your emotional state depends entirely on external factors—on others' moods, on relationships' stability, on outcomes you can control. But Paul says: there's a joy that transcends circumstances, a joy rooted in the Lord Himself. **You can be anxious about a relationship and still rejoice in the Lord. You can be struggling with co-dependent patterns and still find joy in Christ's faithfulness.**

The circumstances don't determine the joy. The Lord does.

Let Your Gentleness Be Known to All

"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is near" (Philippians 4:5 NASB).

This verse is the hinge between joy and peace, and it's profoundly relevant to overcoming co-dependency.

"Let your gentleness be known to all." The Greek word *epieikēs* means gentleness, forbearance, reasonableness, moderation, graciousness. It's the opposite of harshness, rigidity, demanding perfectionism, or anxious control.

This is a call to **choose gentleness and trust over control**.

Think about how co-dependency manifests:

- **With others:** We're demanding, even when we seem accommodating. Underneath the people-pleasing is an unspoken demand: "You must validate me. You must need me. You must not leave me." We control through manipulation, through guilt, through making ourselves indispensable.
- **With ourselves:** We're harsh, critical, perfectionistic. We demand flawless performance, beat ourselves up for every perceived failure, and show ourselves no grace.
- **With God:** We're anxious, questioning whether He's really taking care of things, trying to do His job for Him, unable to rest in His sovereignty.

Gentleness is the antidote. But gentleness doesn't come naturally to the anxious, controlling heart. How do we become gentle?

The answer is in the next phrase: **"The Lord is near."**

The Lord Is Near: Security That Frees

"The Lord is near." Four words that change everything.

This phrase has two meanings in Greek, both true:

1. **Temporally near:** The Lord's return is imminent. He's coming back soon. This is not the final state of things.
2. **Spatially near:** The Lord is close, present, with you right now. You're not alone. You're not abandoned. He's near.

Both meanings provide security that frees us from anxiety and enables gentleness.

The Lord Is Near (He's Coming Back)

When you remember that Jesus is returning, that this is temporary, that eternity awaits—it puts present anxieties in perspective. The relationship crisis that feels like the end of the world? Temporary. The approval you're desperately seeking? It won't matter in light of eternity. The control you're anxiously grasping? Unnecessary, because the Lord is coming back to make all things right.

This isn't escapism. It's perspective. It's remembering that what feels ultimate right now is actually penultimate. God will have the final word, not your circumstances.

The Lord Is Near (He's With You Now)

When you remember that Jesus is present with you right now, that He sees you, knows you, loves you, and hasn't abandoned you—it provides the security you've been desperately seeking from others.

The co-dependent heart is constantly asking: "Are they still there? Do they still like me? Will they leave?" There's no security, no rest, because human presence is uncertain.

But the Lord's presence is certain. **He is near.** Not might be. Not could be if you perform well enough. **Is.** Present tense. Constant reality.

When you're secure in His nearness:

- You don't need to anxiously control others to keep them close—God is already close

- You don't need to perform to maintain approval—God's presence isn't based on performance
- You don't need to make yourself indispensable—God is the only truly indispensable presence
- You don't need to obsessively monitor relationships—God is monitoring you with perfect love
- You can be gentle with others because you're secure in God's nearness

This is the security that frees us to be gentle. When you're terrified of abandonment, you can't be gentle—you're too busy grasping, controlling, demanding. But when you know the Lord is near, you can open your hands. You can let go. You can be gentle, forbearing, reasonable—because your security isn't in others; it's in Him.

Be Anxious for Nothing

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6 NASB).

"Be anxious for nothing." This is a command, not a suggestion. And for the co-dependent, it feels impossible.

How can I not be anxious? Have you seen my life? Have you seen this relationship? Have you seen how much could go wrong?

But notice: Paul doesn't say "don't feel anxiety." He says "be anxious for nothing." There's a difference between experiencing anxious feelings and living in an anxious state. The command isn't about suppressing emotion; it's about refusing to let anxiety rule your life.

"For nothing." Not "for most things" or "for the little things." **Nothing.** No relationship. No outcome. No future scenario. No person's opinion. No potential disaster. Nothing.

Why? Because anxiety is fundamentally about trusting yourself to manage things instead of trusting God. Anxiety says, "If I don't control this, it will fall apart." But Paul says: there's another way.

"But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

The alternative to anxiety isn't pretending you have no concerns. It's bringing those concerns to God in prayer. This is the practical pathway from anxiety to peace.

Let's break it down:

"In Everything"

Everything you're anxious about can be brought to God in prayer. No concern is too small, too shameful, too co-dependent. Bring it all. The relationship you're obsessing over. The person whose opinion you're desperate for. The outcome you're trying to control. The fear that keeps you awake at night. Everything.

"By Prayer and Supplication"

Prayer is general communion with God. **Supplication** is specific requests. You're invited to be specific with God about what you need, what you're worried about, what you want Him to do.

This is crucial for the co-dependent: you don't have to pretend you're fine. You can tell God exactly what you're anxious about. "God, I'm terrified they'll leave. God, I'm obsessing over their text message. God, I don't know how to stop trying to control this. God, I'm anxious about setting this boundary."

Specific. Honest. Real.

"With Thanksgiving"

This is the key that transforms prayer from anxious venting to worship. **With thanksgiving.** Even as you bring your anxious requests, you thank God.

Thank Him for what? For His faithfulness. For His love. For His sovereignty. For what He's already done. For what He's currently doing. For what He will do.

Thanksgiving reorients your perspective. When you're thanking God for His character and His faithfulness, you're reminded that He's trustworthy. That He's good. That He's sovereign. That He hasn't abandoned you. That He's working all things together for your good.

This is the practice: Replace worry with worship. Surrender people and outcomes in prayer.

The Practice of Replacing Worry with Worship

Here's what this looks like practically:

Step 1: Identify the Anxiety

What specifically are you anxious about right now? Name it. Don't just say "I'm anxious." Say "I'm anxious that [person] is upset with me" or "I'm anxious about how [situation] will turn out" or "I'm anxious that I won't be able to maintain this boundary."

Step 2: Bring It to God in Specific Prayer

"God, I'm anxious about _____. Here's what I'm afraid will happen: _____. Here's what I want: _____. Here's what I need from You: _____. "

Don't sanitize it. Don't make it sound spiritual. Just tell Him.

Step 3: Thank God for His Character and Faithfulness

"God, I thank You that You are _____. I thank You for the times You've _____. I thank You that even in this anxiety, You are _____. "

Thank Him for being sovereign, loving, faithful, near, good, wise, powerful. Thank Him for specific ways He's come through in the past. Thank Him for what He's doing right now that you can't see.

Step 4: Surrender the Outcome

"God, I release _____ to You. I can't control this. I'm choosing to trust You with it. Not my will, but Yours."

This is where gentleness meets trust. You're releasing your anxious grip. You're choosing to trust God instead of trying to play God.

Step 5: Return to Thanksgiving

Anxiety will likely resurface. It's a habit, a pattern, a default mode. When it does, don't condemn yourself. Just return to thanksgiving. "God, I'm anxious again about _____. But I thank You that You're still _____. I surrender this again to You."

As many times as necessary. Hour by hour if needed.

This is how you replace worry with worship. You don't suppress the worry. You bring it to God, thank Him for His character, and surrender the outcome. Again and again and again until the pattern of anxiety is replaced by a pattern of trust.

The Peace of God Which Surpasses Comprehension

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 NASB).

This is the promise: **peace**.

Not the absence of difficulty. Not the guarantee that all your anxieties will be resolved the way you hope. But **the peace of God**—a peace that transcends circumstances, that doesn't make logical sense given the situation, that surpasses comprehension.

"Which surpasses all comprehension." You can't manufacture this peace. You can't think your way into it. You can't achieve it through perfect circumstances. It surpasses comprehension because it's supernatural. It's God's peace—the peace Christ has, the peace He promised, the peace that comes from being secure in the Father's love even while facing the cross.

"Will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The word "guard" is *phrourēsei*—a military term meaning to garrison, to protect, to keep watch over. God's peace acts like a soldier guarding your heart and mind, keeping anxiety from overtaking you, protecting you from the tyranny of fear.

Notice: it guards your **heart** (emotions, affections, feelings) and your **mind** (thoughts, reasoning, mental processes). Both are protected. You're not left vulnerable to every anxious thought and feeling. You're guarded.

And where does this guarding happen? **In Christ Jesus.** Not in perfect circumstances. Not in controlled outcomes. Not in others' approval. In Christ. When you're in Christ—standing firm in Him, rooted in Him, secure in Him—His peace guards you.

This is the antidote to co-dependency's anxiety. **Christ-centered life brings peace** because it relocates your security from things you can't control (others' responses, relationships' outcomes, circumstances) to the One who controls all things and whose love for you never fails.

Think on These Things

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8 NASB).

After addressing anxiety and peace, Paul turns to the mind. This isn't a random shift—it's deeply connected. **How you think determines how you feel and how you act.**

Co-dependency is sustained by distorted thinking:

- **False beliefs:** "My worth depends on their approval." "If they leave, I'll be destroyed." "I'm responsible for their emotions." "I can't survive without this relationship."
- **Catastrophic thinking:** "If this goes wrong, everything is ruined." "This small conflict means the relationship is over."

- **Mind reading:** "They're definitely upset with me." "I know what they're thinking."
- **All-or-nothing thinking:** "If I'm not perfect, I'm worthless." "If they don't need me, I have no value."
- **Obsessive rumination:** Replaying conversations endlessly, analyzing every interaction, unable to stop thinking about the relationship.

Paul says: **dwell on these things instead.**

Whatever is true: Not your anxious assumptions, not your worst-case scenarios, not your distorted interpretations—what's actually true? Truth about God (He loves you, He's sovereign, He's near). Truth about yourself (you're His beloved, you're secure in Christ, you have value apart from others' opinions). Truth about the situation (the facts, not your fears).

Whatever is honorable: What's worthy of respect, dignified, noble? Not the petty anxieties, not the obsessive thoughts about others' opinions, not the schemes to maintain control—but what's honorable?

Whatever is right: What aligns with God's character and His will? Not your co-dependent patterns, not your manipulation strategies, not your people-pleasing compromises—but what's actually right?

Whatever is pure: What's uncontaminated by self-interest, free from mixed motives, genuinely good? Not service that's secretly about earning approval, not love that's actually about getting your needs met—but what's pure?

Whatever is lovely: What's beautiful, attractive, worth admiring? The goodness of God, the beauty of creation, the grace in your life, genuine expressions of love—dwell on these.

Whatever is of good repute: What's worthy of praise, excellent, commendable? Celebrate the good. Notice God's faithfulness. Acknowledge growth. Don't just obsess over problems.

"Dwell on these things." The word *logizomai* means to think about, consider, ponder, keep account of. It's active, intentional focus. You're not passive in what captures your mind. You choose.

This is cognitive warfare against anxiety. When anxious thoughts arise—and they will—you don't have to let them dominate. You can choose what you dwell on. You can redirect your mind to what's true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise.

Practical Application: Renewing Your Mind

1. **Catch the thought:** Notice when you're spiraling into anxious, co-dependent thinking.
2. **Evaluate it:** Is this true? Is it honorable? Right? Pure? Or is it fear-based, distorted, obsessive?
3. **Replace it:** Consciously choose to dwell on something that fits Paul's criteria. "I'm obsessing over whether they're upset with me—that's not pure or lovely. What's true? God is near. I'm secure in His love. I can trust Him with this relationship."
4. **Return to it:** When the anxious thought resurfaces, repeat the process. This is retraining your brain, creating new neural pathways, renewing your mind (Romans 12:2).

Practice What You've Learned

"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9 NASB).

"Practice these things." Not just hear them. Not just agree with them intellectually. **Practice.** Do them. Live them out.

Moving from co-dependency to Christ-centered peace isn't merely about understanding concepts. It's about practicing new patterns:

- **Practice** standing firm in the Lord instead of clinging to people

- **Practice** rejoicing in the Lord instead of rejoicing only when circumstances are good
- **Practice** gentleness instead of anxious control
- **Practice** bringing everything to God in prayer instead of obsessing alone
- **Practice** thanksgiving instead of anxious demanding
- **Practice** dwelling on what's true instead of catastrophizing

Paul says: "**The God of peace will be with you.**" Not "the peace of God" this time, but "the God of peace Himself." When you practice these things, you don't just experience His peace—you experience His presence. The God who is peace is with you.

This is the ultimate security: not just having peace about a situation, but having the God of peace **with you** in every situation. Whether the relationship works out or not, whether the anxiety resolves or not, whether the outcome is what you hoped for or not—the God of peace is with you.

And if God is with you, you have everything you need.

The Serious Business of Joy

C.S. Lewis wrote: "**Joy is the serious business of heaven.**"

This statement reframes everything. We think joy is frivolous, a luxury we'll experience once all the serious problems are solved. We think we'll rejoice when the anxiety finally goes away, when the relationships finally stabilize, when we finally overcome co-dependency completely.

But Paul—and Lewis—say the opposite: **Joy is the serious work.** Joy is the business we're called to engage in, the practice that transforms us, the discipline that rewires our anxious hearts.

Why is joy serious business?

1. Joy Is Warfare Against Anxiety

When you choose to rejoice in the Lord even when circumstances are difficult, you're declaring that God is good, that His promises are true, that His presence is sufficient. This is warfare against the lies that fuel anxiety.

2. Joy Is Witness to a Watching World

People notice joy that doesn't make sense given the circumstances. When you're anxious and controlling, you look like everyone else. When you're joyful and at peace in the midst of difficulty, you point to something beyond yourself—to the God who is your source.

3. Joy Sustains Long-Term Transformation

The journey from co-dependency to freedom is long. If you're waiting until you've "arrived" to experience joy, you'll be miserable for years. But if you practice joy now—rejoicing in the Lord always, even in the midst of struggle—you'll have the strength to persevere.

4. Joy Is the Fruit of Security in Christ

When you're secure in Christ's nearness, His love, His sovereignty—joy is the natural fruit. Not forced happiness, not denial of difficulty, but deep, abiding joy rooted in unchanging realities.

The co-dependent has believed that joy depends on external circumstances—on relationships working out, on people's approval, on outcomes being controlled. But Paul says: joy depends on the Lord. And the Lord is near. Always.

So make joy your serious business. Practice it. Choose it. Return to it when anxiety threatens. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, rejoice.

From Anxiety to Peace: The Journey

Let's bring it all together. How do you move from the anxiety of co-dependency to the peace of Christ-centered living?

1. Stand Firm in the Lord, Not in Relationships

Recognize that people, roles, and circumstances are shifting sand. Only the Lord provides a firm foundation. Daily remind yourself: "I stand firm in Christ. My security is in Him, not in others' approval or presence."

2. Choose to Rejoice in the Lord Always

Practice joy as a discipline. Even when anxious, even when struggling, even when relationships are difficult—find reasons to rejoice in who God is and what He's done. Start each day listing reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

3. Let Your Gentleness Be Known

Release the anxious control. Be gentle with others, with yourself, with God. Remember: the Lord is near. You don't have to grip so tightly because He's holding you.

4. Replace Worry with Worship

When anxiety arises, bring it to God immediately. Specific prayer. Honest supplication. Genuine thanksgiving. Surrender the outcome. As many times as necessary.

5. Guard Your Mind

Pay attention to what you dwell on. When anxious, distorted thinking takes over, consciously choose to dwell on what's true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute.

6. Practice, Practice, Practice

These aren't one-time fixes. They're daily practices, moment-by-moment choices. Be patient with yourself. Celebrate progress. Return to these truths when you slip into old patterns.

7. Trust in the God of Peace

Remember: it's not up to you to generate peace through perfect practice. The God of peace is with you. He's the One who guards your heart and mind. He's the One who gives you His peace that surpasses comprehension. Trust Him.

The Nearness That Changes Everything

We return to the phrase that unlocks this entire passage: "**The Lord is near.**"

This is the truth that makes everything else possible. You can be gentle because He's near. You can stop being anxious because He's near. You can pray with thanksgiving because He's near. You can experience peace because He's near. You can rejoice always because He's near.

The Lord is near. Not far off, waiting for you to get your act together. Not distant, disappointed in your struggle with co-dependency. Not absent, leaving you to figure it out alone.

Near. Close. Present. With you.

When a child is secure in their parent's nearness, they can play freely, explore boldly, rest peacefully. When they're unsure if the parent is there, they're anxious, clinging, unable to venture far.

You've been living like an anxious child, unsure if you're truly secure, desperately trying to create your own security through control and performance. But the Lord is near. He's right here. He sees you. He loves you. He hasn't left you.

And when you believe that—when you really, deeply know that the Lord is near—the anxiety begins to loosen its grip. The need to control starts to relax. The desperate performance begins to cease. Because you're secure. Not in others. Not in outcomes. But in Him.

The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing.

Not because there's nothing to be concerned about, but because the One who handles all things is right here with you.

And His peace—the peace that surpasses all comprehension—will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

That's not just a nice promise. That's reality. For everyone who stands firm in the Lord, who rejoices in Him always, who brings everything to Him in prayer with thanksgiving.

The serious business of heaven is joy. And it's available to you. Now. Today. Even in the midst of your struggle with co-dependency, anxiety, and control.

Because the Lord is near.

And where He is, there is peace.

Reflect and Respond:

1. What are you most anxious about right now? Be specific. Then practice the pattern: bring it to God in specific prayer, thank Him for His character and faithfulness, surrender the outcome to Him. Write out this prayer.
2. Paul commands us to "be anxious for nothing." What would change in your life if you truly believed that the Lord's nearness is security enough? How would you relate to others differently?
3. Examine your thought patterns this week using Philippians 4:8. What are you dwelling on? Is it true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, worthy of praise? When you catch yourself in anxious, distorted thinking, what will you replace it with?
4. Where do you need to choose gentleness over control? Identify one specific relationship or situation where you're trying to control the outcome. What would gentleness look like instead? Practice it this week.
5. C.S. Lewis said joy is "the serious business of heaven." Make joy your practice this week. Each morning, write down three specific reasons to

rejoice in the Lord (not in circumstances, but in Him). Return to this list when anxiety threatens. Let joy be your serious work.

Chapter 9: The Secret of Contentment

Philippians 4:10–13

The Lie of Indispensability

"I can't live without you."

These five words might sound romantic in a love song, but they reveal the heart of co-dependency's deepest lie. Not "I love you deeply." Not "I'm committed to you completely." But "I can't live without you"—a statement that elevates another person to the position only God should occupy, that makes a human being responsible for your very existence, that turns relationship into a life-support system.

And it goes both directions. The co-dependent doesn't just think "*I can't live without you*"—they also need to be the person about whom someone else says, "I can't live without you." Because if no one needs you to survive, what's your purpose? If you're not indispensable to someone, do you have value?

This is the exhausting equation of co-dependency:

- **Your contentment** = Their presence + Their approval + Their need for you
- **Your security** = Being needed + Being indispensable + Being irreplaceable
- **Your worth** = What you provide + Who depends on you + How much you're missed when absent

The formula is simple, but the result is devastating: **You're never content.** Never. Because the equation depends on variables you can't control. Their presence isn't guaranteed. Their approval fluctuates. Their need for you changes. And so your contentment, security, and worth are in constant flux—rising and falling with circumstances beyond your control, leaving you perpetually anxious, perpetually grasping, perpetually empty.

Co-dependency promises that if you can just make yourself indispensable enough, if you can just be needed enough, if you can just maintain the relationship perfectly enough—then you'll finally be content. But it's a lie. The more you need to be needed, the less content you become. The more indispensable you make yourself, the more enslaved you are to maintaining that position. The harder you work to be someone's everything, the emptier you feel inside.

Into this exhausting, futile pursuit of contentment through human relationships, Paul speaks a word that sounds impossible at first: "**I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am**" (Philippians 4:11 NASB).

Content? In *whatever* circumstances? Even in lack? Even in abundance? Even when people disappoint? Even when relationships fail? Even when you're not needed?

Yes. Paul has discovered a secret—and it's a secret that demolishes the entire foundation of co-dependency.

The Secret Revealed

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:10–13 NASB).

Let's unpack this carefully, because Paul is teaching us something revolutionary about contentment—something that directly addresses the core of co-dependency.

Rejoicing in Others' Care Without Depending on It

"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me." Paul is genuinely glad that the Philippians have sent support. He's not stoic, not cold, not pretending he doesn't care about their gift or their relationship. He rejoices in their concern.

But notice the qualifier: "**I rejoiced in the Lord greatly.**" His joy is *in the Lord*, not in their provision. The gift brings him joy, but it's not the source of his joy. The Lord is the source; the gift is an occasion for gratitude.

This is crucial for the co-dependent to understand: **You can appreciate people's love and care without making it your life source.** You can be genuinely grateful for relationships without being dependent on them for your identity, security, or contentment.

Paul continues: "Indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." The Philippians always cared about Paul; they just couldn't send help until now. A co-dependent would spiral in this gap: *Why didn't they send help sooner? Don't they care about me? Have I become less important to them? Am I being forgotten?*

But Paul doesn't do this. He assumes the best, acknowledges the reality (they lacked opportunity), and remains secure. Why? Because his contentment isn't based on the timing or consistency of their support.

Not Speaking from Want

"Not that I speak from want..." This phrase is loaded with meaning. Paul isn't writing to manipulate them into sending more. He's not hinting at his need to guilt them. He's not positioning himself as desperate so they'll feel obligated to help. **He's not speaking from a place of lack because his contentment isn't dependent on what they provide.**

This is the opposite of co-dependency, which always speaks from want—from need, from desperation, from lack. The co-dependent's communication is saturated with unspoken messages:

- "I need you to validate me"
- "I need you to need me"
- "I need you to make me feel valuable"
- "I need you to fix my emptiness"

But Paul speaks from a different place entirely—a place of fullness in Christ that allows him to genuinely appreciate what others give without desperately needing it.

The Learned Secret

"For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

"I have learned." This is crucial. Contentment wasn't automatic for Paul. It wasn't his natural disposition. It wasn't a personality trait he was born with.

He learned it. The Greek word *emathon* implies a process of learning through experience, through practice, through trial and error.

This is profoundly hopeful for those struggling with co-dependency. You're not stuck. Contentment is learnable. It's not about changing your personality or suddenly becoming emotionally detached. It's about learning—through practice, through experience, through repeatedly returning to Christ—to be content regardless of circumstances.

"To be content." The word *autarkēs* means self-sufficient, independent, needing no assistance. But Paul isn't advocating for pride or isolation. He's describing a sufficiency that comes from being in Christ—a completeness that doesn't depend on external circumstances or others' behavior.

"In whatever circumstances I am." Not "in good circumstances" or "when things go my way" or "when relationships are healthy." **Whatever circumstances.** This is radical, unconditional contentment—the kind that doesn't fluctuate with changing situations because it's rooted in something unchanging.

Learning to Be Content in Relational Lack or Abundance

"I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need"
(Philippians 4:12 NASB).

Paul is talking about material circumstances—having money or not having it, having food or going hungry. But the principle applies directly to relationships. **Learning to be content in relational lack or abundance** is essential for breaking free from co-dependency.

Contentment in Relational Lack

Co-dependency says: "If I'm alone, I'm incomplete. If this relationship ends, I'm destroyed. If they don't need me, I have no value. If I'm not in a relationship, I'm half a person."

But Paul's contentment in humble means translates to: **You can be whole, complete, and content even when relationships are lacking, even when you're alone, even when you're not needed by anyone.**

This doesn't mean loneliness doesn't hurt. It doesn't mean you shouldn't desire relationship. It doesn't mean isolation is ideal. It means **your contentment isn't contingent on having relationships that meet your needs.**

Consider these scenarios:

- **You're in a season of singleness.** Co-dependency says you're incomplete until you find someone. Contentment in Christ says you're already whole, and any relationship will be an addition to completeness, not the source of it.
- **A friendship has ended.** Co-dependency says you're destroyed, lost, abandoned. Contentment in Christ says you grieve the loss genuinely while remaining secure in God's presence and provision.

- **No one seems to need your help right now.** Co-dependency says you're worthless without a role. Contentment in Christ says your worth isn't based on being needed but on being God's beloved.
- **You're setting boundaries and people are pulling away.** Co-dependency panics at the distance. Contentment in Christ trusts that God's approval is enough, and the right relationships will respect healthy boundaries.

You can survive—and even thrive—in relational lack because Christ is sufficient.

Contentment in Relational Abundance

Interestingly, Paul also had to learn contentment in prosperity. This reveals something often overlooked: **abundance can be as spiritually dangerous as lack.**

For the co-dependent, relational abundance—being surrounded by people who need you, being in relationships where you're valued, having a full social calendar—can be equally disruptive to contentment. Why?

Because you start to depend on the abundance. You begin to believe your contentment comes from having these relationships rather than from Christ. You become anxious about maintaining the abundance. You work harder and harder to keep everyone happy, to remain needed, to preserve the relational prosperity.

And then, when seasons change—as they inevitably do—and the abundance decreases, you're devastated. You weren't content in the abundance; you were addicted to it.

True contentment remains stable whether relationships are abundant or scarce because it's rooted in something constant: Christ's presence, Christ's love, Christ's sufficiency.

In Any and Every Circumstance

"In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret..." Paul isn't describing occasional contentment or situational contentment. He's describing a way of being that transcends circumstances entirely.

- **Any circumstance:** There's no situation that disqualifies contentment.
- **Every circumstance:** There's no exception where contentment becomes impossible.

This is the freedom co-dependency can never offer. Co-dependency says contentment is available only under specific conditions: when you're needed, when you're valued, when relationships are stable, when people affirm you. Take away those conditions, and contentment evaporates.

But Paul's secret makes contentment available **always**—in every relational situation, in every season, in every circumstance. Because the secret isn't about manipulating circumstances; it's about knowing the One who never changes regardless of circumstances.

The Secret Itself

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13 NASB).

This is one of the most quoted verses in Scripture—and one of the most misunderstood. It's not a blank check for achieving whatever you want. It's not a promise that you can accomplish any goal through positive thinking and divine empowerment.

In context, Paul is revealing the secret of contentment: **"I can do all things"—including being content in lack, being content in abundance, getting along with humble means, living in prosperity, being filled, going hungry—"through Him who strengthens me."**

The secret of contentment is this: **Christ is enough. And because Christ strengthens you, you can handle any circumstance—not by your own power, but by His.**

Christ as the Source, Not People

Co-dependency says: "I can't live without you."

Paul says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

See the fundamental difference? Co-dependency looks to people for strength, sufficiency, and survival. Paul looks to Christ.

When your strength comes from Christ:

- You don't need to manipulate others to stay connected because your connection to Christ is secure
- You don't need to make yourself indispensable because your purpose comes from God, not from being needed
- You don't need to control outcomes because you trust the One who controls all things
- You don't need to panic when relationships change because your source of strength doesn't change

This is the secret: Christ is sufficient for whatever you face. Including being alone. Including being rejected. Including not being needed. Including setting boundaries that disappoint others. Including losing relationships. Including facing your fears.

You can do all these things—these hard, scary, countercultural things that co-dependency says will destroy you—through Christ who strengthens you.

What "All Things" Includes

In the context of overcoming co-dependency, "I can do all things through Christ" means:

I can:

- Set healthy boundaries, even when others are upset
- Say no, even when I fear rejection

- Be alone, even when loneliness is painful
- Let go of toxic relationships, even when I'm afraid
- Stop performing, even when I fear losing approval
- Allow others to face consequences, even when I want to rescue them
- Be myself, even when others prefer the old, compliant me
- Rest, even when I feel guilty for not constantly serving
- Grieve losses, even when I'm tempted to deny or minimize them
- Trust God with people I can't control

Through Christ who strengthens me.

Not through willpower. Not through determination. Not through trying harder. But through Christ—His strength, His power, His sufficiency operating in and through me.

This is transformative. You're not strong enough to overcome co-dependency on your own. You never will be. But Christ is strong enough. And He offers His strength to you.

The Rhythm of Gratitude

One of the most practical ways to cultivate contentment is through gratitude. Notice how Paul frames his contentment: "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly" (v. 10). "I have learned to be content" (v. 11). Rejoicing and contentment are connected through gratitude.

Contentment comes when Christ is enough. And you recognize that Christ is enough by cultivating gratitude for who He is and what He's already provided.

The co-dependent heart is characterized by perpetual dissatisfaction:

- "This relationship isn't enough"
- "I need them to need me more"

- "If only they would change"
- "I'll be content when..."

But gratitude shifts the focus from what's lacking to what's present:

- "Christ is with me"
- "God has provided for me in the past and will do so again"
- "I have more than I deserve through grace"
- "Even in this difficult season, God is faithful"

Practicing the Rhythm of Gratitude

Here's how to build a rhythm of gratitude that fosters contentment:

1. Begin Each Day with Gratitude for Christ

Before you think about what's wrong, what you need, or what you're anxious about, thank God for who He is and what He's done. Not generic thanks, but specific gratitude:

- "Thank You that You're with me today"
- "Thank You that I'm secure in Your love"
- "Thank You that my worth doesn't depend on anyone else"
- "Thank You for specific ways You've provided"

2. Throughout the Day, Notice and Name Blessings

Train yourself to see what's present, not just what's absent. When you catch yourself focusing on what you lack (in relationships, in validation, in contentment), consciously redirect: "What do I have? What has God provided?"

3. In Difficult Moments, Thank God for His Sufficiency

When co-dependent patterns are triggered—when you're anxious about a relationship, tempted to control, desperate for approval—pause and thank God that He's sufficient for this moment:

- "Thank You that You're enough for me right now"
- "Thank You that I don't have to have this person's approval to be okay"
- "Thank You that You're strengthening me to set this boundary"

4. End Each Day with Gratitude Review

Before sleep, list specific things you're grateful for from the day. Include challenges you faced where Christ proved sufficient. Over time, this practice rewires your brain from anxiety and dissatisfaction to gratitude and contentment.

5. Express Gratitude to Others Without Dependence

Like Paul thanking the Philippians, you can genuinely appreciate what others give you without making them your source. "Thank you for being there for me" is different from "I can't live without you." The first is gratitude; the second is dependence.

You Will Never Be Satisfied Until God Is Enough

A.W. Tozer wrote: "**You will never be satisfied until you realize that God is enough.**"

This is the core issue beneath co-dependency: **God isn't enough for us.** We don't trust Him to satisfy, so we demand that people do it. We don't believe His love is sufficient, so we desperately seek it from others. We don't rest in His provision, so we anxiously try to make ourselves indispensable.

But here's the truth co-dependency won't tell you: **Nothing and no one is enough except God.** People will fail you. Relationships will disappoint. Being needed will exhaust you. Performance will leave you empty. Control will enslave you.

Only God is enough. Only Christ can satisfy the deepest hunger of your soul. Only the Spirit can fill the void you've been trying to fill with human approval and relationship.

And until you realize this—until you genuinely, deeply believe that God is enough—you'll never be satisfied. You'll move from relationship to relationship, role to role, seeking what only God can provide, exhausted and disappointed every time.

But when you finally realize—when you truly grasp—that God is enough?

Everything changes.

When God Is Enough

Your relationships improve because you're no longer using people to meet needs only God can meet. You can love them freely because you're not desperately extracting from them.

Your anxiety decreases because you're not terrified of losing what you were never meant to cling to. You can hold relationships with open hands because your security is in God.

Your contentment stabilizes because it's rooted in something constant rather than something constantly changing. Whether in lack or abundance, you're content because God is enough.

Your identity becomes secure because it's based on who God says you are, not on who others think you are or how much they need you.

Your service becomes sustainable because you're giving from fullness rather than desperately serving to earn worth or maintain connection.

Your joy becomes real because it's not dependent on circumstances aligning perfectly but on knowing the One who's with you in every circumstance.

Your boundaries become healthy because you don't need to say yes to everything to prove your value—your value is already established in Christ.

Contentment Is Not Complacency

Before we go further, we need to address a potential misunderstanding:

Contentment is not the same as complacency, passivity, or accepting dysfunction.

Co-dependent "contentment" is actually resignation:

- "I guess this toxic relationship is just my lot in life"
- "I'll never be able to set boundaries, so I might as well accept it"
- "This is just how I am—I can't change"

This isn't biblical contentment. This is fatalistic surrender to patterns that God wants to break.

True contentment in Christ:

- Recognizes God is enough while actively cooperating with His transformation
- Rests in His sufficiency while pursuing growth and health
- Accepts current circumstances without settling for sin patterns
- Is peaceful about what can't be changed while actively changing what can be

Paul's contentment didn't make him passive. He still worked, still planted churches, still discipled believers, still wrote letters. But his contentment meant his peace wasn't dependent on the outcomes of those efforts. He could work diligently while resting in God's sovereignty.

Similarly, contentment in Christ doesn't mean you stay in toxic relationships, refuse to set boundaries, or accept co-dependent patterns as unchangeable. It means you have peace in the process of transformation. You rest in God's sufficiency even as you actively pursue health. You trust Him with outcomes even as you make wise choices.

Contentment is peace in the present while moving toward God's purposes. It's not settling; it's trusting.

The Philippians' Partnership in Giving and Receiving

"Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs" (Philippians 4:14–16 NASB).

Notice the balance Paul strikes: He's content in Christ, not dependent on the Philippians' gifts. Yet he genuinely appreciates and acknowledges what they've given. He's not so "independent" that he refuses help or fails to recognize partnership.

This is the model for healthy relationships:

- **Contentment that isn't dependent** (I'm okay whether you give or not, because Christ is enough)
- **Gratitude that's genuine** (But I genuinely appreciate your gift and recognize it as God's provision through you)
- **Partnership that's mutual** (We're in this together, giving and receiving, serving one another)

Co-dependency creates imbalanced relationships: one person always gives, the other always takes. Or one person gives to earn approval, and the other receives out of obligation. There's no genuine mutuality, no healthy reciprocity.

But Paul models something better: contentment in Christ that allows for genuine partnership with others. He doesn't need their gifts to be okay, but he welcomes them gratefully. He's not using them, manipulating them, or making them responsible for his well-being. And yet he's not isolated, refusing all help in the name of independence.

This is the goal: To be so content in Christ that you can receive from others without dependence and give to others without expectation.

Not That I Seek the Gift

"Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (Philippians 4:17 NASB).

This is a stunning statement. Paul clarifies his motivation: he's not writing to get more stuff. He's not manipulating them to send more support. His concern is actually for them—for the spiritual profit that accrues to their account when they give generously.

This is the opposite of the co-dependent motivation. The co-dependent serves others to get something in return—approval, affirmation, security, being needed. Service is transactional, a means to an end.

But Paul demonstrates genuinely others-centered love: he's concerned for their spiritual growth, their reward, their faithfulness to God. He receives their gift, not primarily for his benefit (he's content either way), but for theirs—knowing that generous giving grows them spiritually.

This is what it looks like to be so content in Christ that you're freed to genuinely care about others' good rather than your own need.

I Have Received Everything in Full

"But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18 NASB).

"I have received everything in full." Not "I need more." Not "I'm still lacking." Not "If you could just send a bit more, then I'd be content." **Everything in full.**

This is the language of contentment. Paul has everything he needs. Not because the Philippians sent everything he could possibly want, but because with Christ and what God has provided, he's complete.

And notice how he describes their gift: "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." Their gift isn't primarily about meeting Paul's needs. It's worship. It's an offering to God. It rises to Him as a pleasing sacrifice.

This reframes relationships entirely. When you're content in Christ, when Christ is enough, your interactions with others become acts of worship rather than desperate attempts to get your needs met. You give to please God, not to earn approval. You receive gratefully as God's provision, not as your life source.

My God Will Supply All Your Needs

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19 NASB).

This promise is often quoted out of context, but notice what Paul is actually saying: Because the Philippians have given generously to meet his needs, God will supply all their needs.

But the principle applies universally: **God supplies needs.** Not people. Not relationships. Not being needed. Not performance. Not control. **God.**

"All your needs." Not some. Not most. All. Every legitimate need you have, God will supply.

Notice what Paul doesn't promise: "And my God will supply all your wants." "And my God will make sure you're never lonely." "And my God will keep this specific relationship intact." He promises God will supply *needs*—and God knows better than we do what we truly need.

Co-dependency confuses wants with needs:

- "I need this person to validate me" (Actually, you want it; you need God's validation)
- "I need this relationship to work out" (Actually, you want it; you need God's will to be done)

- "I need to be needed" (Actually, you want it; you need to be secure in Christ)

When you're content in Christ, you can trust God to supply actual needs while surrendering wants to His wisdom.

"According to His riches in glory." The measure of God's provision isn't your poverty; it's His wealth. He doesn't supply out of limited resources. He supplies according to His infinite riches. In Christ Jesus, you have access to everything God has. Not because you've earned it, but because you're in Christ.

This means: You don't need to make yourself indispensable to people to ensure your needs are met. You don't need to anxiously secure relationships to have provision. You don't need to perform perfectly to earn God's supply. **Your needs are met according to God's riches, not according to your performance or relationships.**

Learning the Secret: Practical Steps

So how do you move from "I can't live without you" to "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"? How do you learn the secret of contentment? Here are practical steps:

1. Identify What You're Actually Depending On

Make a list: What am I counting on for contentment? Be honest:

- This person's approval
- Being needed in this role
- This relationship staying intact
- My performance being recognized
- Having people around me

Then ask: What happens to my contentment if I lose these things? If your contentment would be devastated, you're depending on them instead of on Christ.

2. Practice Contentment in Small Lacks

Don't wait for major relational loss to learn contentment. Practice in small ways:

- When someone doesn't text back immediately, practice contentment: "I'm okay even if they don't respond right now. Christ is enough."
- When you're not invited to something, practice contentment: "My worth doesn't depend on inclusion. Christ is enough."
- When someone seems distant, practice contentment: "I don't need to control their feelings toward me. Christ is enough."

These small practices build the muscle of contentment for bigger challenges.

3. Practice Contentment in Small Abundances

Also practice contentment when things are good:

- When a relationship is thriving, remind yourself: "I'm grateful for this, but my contentment is still in Christ, not in this relationship's current state."
- When you're appreciated, remember: "This affirmation is nice, but my worth was already secure in Christ."
- When you're needed, acknowledge: "I'm glad to serve, but I don't need to be needed to have value."

This prevents addiction to relational abundance.

4. Replace "I Can't" with "Christ Can"

When you catch yourself thinking or saying co-dependent statements, replace them:

- "I can't live without you" → "Christ is my life. I can do all things through Him."
- "I can't set this boundary" → "I can set healthy boundaries through Christ who strengthens me."
- "I can't be alone" → "I'm never truly alone; Christ is with me, and He is enough."

5. Daily Declare Christ's Sufficiency

Start each day by declaring: "Christ is enough for me today. Whatever happens, whatever lacks or abundances I face, He is sufficient. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

6. Build a "Christ Is Enough" List

Keep a running list of times when Christ proved sufficient in the absence of what you thought you needed. Review it regularly to reinforce the truth.

7. Seek Community That Reinforces Contentment

Surround yourself with people who are also learning contentment in Christ, who won't enable co-dependent patterns, and who will speak truth when you're depending on people instead of God.

The Freedom of "I Can Do All Things"

Imagine living with the confidence that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Not that you'll do all things perfectly, not that all things will turn out how you hope, but that you can face all things with Christ's strength.

You can:

- Face rejection without being destroyed
- Be alone without feeling worthless
- Set boundaries without crippling guilt

- Let go of toxic relationships without losing your identity
- Stop performing without anxiety about approval
- Serve without being enslaved
- Love without losing yourself
- Grieve without despairing
- Change without being overwhelmed
- Grow without being paralyzed by fear

Through Christ who strengthens you.

This isn't arrogance. It's confidence rooted in Christ. It's not self-sufficiency. It's Christ-sufficiency. It's not independence from others. It's dependence on God that frees you for healthy interdependence with others.

The Contentment That Glorifies God

The chapter ends with: "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Philippians 4:20 NASB).

Contentment ultimately glorifies God. Why?

Because contentment declares: "**God is enough. Christ is sufficient. I don't need anything else to be okay.**"

And in a world that constantly preaches that you need more—more stuff, more success, more affirmation, more relationships, more control—contentment in Christ is a radical witness.

When people see you content in lack, they wonder what you have that they don't. When they see you content in abundance without clinging to it, they're intrigued. When they see you grieving loss without being destroyed, they want to know your secret.

And the secret is simple: **Christ is enough.**

Not a trite saying. Not a platitude. But a lived reality—learned through practice, proven through trials, sustained by His strength.

You will never be satisfied until you realize that God is enough. But when you do realize it—when Christ becomes your sufficiency, your source, your strength—you discover the secret of contentment.

And you're free.

Free from the tyranny of needing to be needed.

Free from the prison of performance-based worth.

Free from the exhaustion of making yourself indispensable.

Free to be yourself, to love genuinely, to serve joyfully, to live abundantly.

Because Christ is enough.

And He always has been.

Reflect and Respond:

1. Complete this sentence honestly: "I can't live without _____." What or who have you made indispensable that only Christ should be? Confess this to God and ask Him to help you learn contentment in Christ alone.
2. Paul said, "I have learned to be content." What are you learning about contentment right now? In what specific situation is God teaching you that Christ is enough? Journal about this learning process.
3. Make a list: "I can _____ through Christ who strengthens me." Fill in the things you've been afraid to do—set boundaries, be alone, say no, let go. Then practice doing one of them this week, relying on Christ's strength.
4. Practice the rhythm of gratitude this week. Begin and end each day thanking God specifically for His sufficiency. Notice when you're

depending on people instead of Christ, and redirect your trust back to Him.

5. A.W. Tozer said, "You will never be satisfied until you realize that God is enough." Is God enough for you right now? Not theoretically, but actually? What would change in your life if you truly believed and lived as if God is enough?

Chapter 10: Living Generously, Loving Freely

Philippians 4:14–23

The Gift That Revealed Everything

"Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction" (Philippians 4:14 NASB).

The Philippian church sent Paul a financial gift. On the surface, it's a simple transaction—a church supporting their missionary. But Paul's response to this gift reveals something profound about the nature of true generosity and genuine love. And in examining this exchange, we discover what it looks like to live and love beyond co-dependency.

The Philippians gave Paul a gift. But notice what's absent from Paul's response:

- No manipulation: "You should have sent more" or "I was disappointed it took so long"
- No guilt-tripping: "I've done so much for you, and this is all I get?"
- No strings attached: "Now you owe me" or "I expect this to continue"
- No desperate need: "I was dying without this—thank you for saving me"
- No performance review: "Your giving proves you really care about me"

Instead, Paul receives their gift with gratitude, acknowledges their partnership, and immediately redirects attention to God's provision and their spiritual growth. **This is what generosity looks like when it flows from freedom rather than fear, from fullness rather than emptiness.**

And it reveals the final frontier in our journey beyond co-dependency: **learning to give and receive freely, to love without strings, to be generous without expectation, to serve without scorekeeping—because we're so secure in Christ's provision that we no longer need to extract our security from others.**

The Co-Dependent's Gift

Before we explore what true generosity looks like, we need to understand what it isn't. Co-dependency creates a particular kind of giving—one that looks generous on the surface but is actually transactional, manipulative, and burdensome.

The co-dependent gives:

- **To earn approval:** "If I give enough, they'll love me"
- **To create obligation:** "If I give to them, they'll owe me"
- **To be needed:** "If I'm indispensable, they won't leave me"
- **To control:** "If I give strategically, I can influence outcomes"
- **To avoid rejection:** "If I give constantly, they can't say I'm selfish"
- **To feel valuable:** "I matter because I give so much"
- **Out of guilt:** "If I don't give, I'm a bad person"
- **Out of fear:** "If I don't meet their needs, something terrible will happen"

This kind of giving is exhausting for everyone involved:

- **For the giver:** It's depleting, resentful, and never enough. You give and give and give, but you're still anxious, still insecure, still convinced you need to give more to maintain your position.
- **For the receiver:** It's suffocating, obligating, and manipulative. They feel the strings attached, the unspoken expectations, the guilt of receiving "generosity" that's actually a form of control.

Co-dependent giving isn't really giving at all—it's a transaction disguised as generosity. And both parties know it, even if neither names it.

This is why co-dependent relationships are so exhausting. Every gift, every act of service, every expression of love carries hidden weight—an unspoken contract, an invisible price tag, a subtle manipulation. You can never simply

receive because you know there's an expectation attached. You can never simply give because you know you're doing it for the wrong reasons.

True Generosity Flows from Fullness

But Paul describes a radically different kind of giving: "**You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs**" (Philippians 4:15–16 NASB).

The Philippians gave repeatedly. They gave when other churches didn't. They gave sacrificially (we know from 2 Corinthians 8 that they gave "beyond their ability" out of "deep poverty"). They gave consistently—not just once, but multiple times.

But here's what's crucial: **they gave out of joy, not guilt.**

How do we know? Because Paul describes their giving as "sharing with me" in partnership (v. 14), as something that brings them spiritual profit (v. 17), and as "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (v. 18). This isn't guilt-driven obligation. This is joyful worship expressed through generous giving.

What made the difference?

The Philippians gave from fullness, not from emptiness. They gave because they had received so much—not material wealth (they were poor), but spiritual riches in Christ. They gave because they were secure in God's love, not anxious about earning approval. They gave because they wanted to participate in God's mission, not because they needed to prove their worth through performance.

True generosity flows from fullness, not fear of abandonment.

When you're empty—emotionally, spiritually, relationally—you can't truly give. Everything you offer is actually an attempt to get something back. Your

"generosity" is an investment you expect to return dividends in the form of approval, security, or being needed.

But when you're full—satisfied in Christ, secure in God's love, content in His sufficiency—you can give freely. You're not trying to earn anything. You're not creating obligations. You're not manipulating outcomes. You're simply overflowing with what you've received, sharing the abundance of Christ's love with others.

Consider the metaphor: **An empty cup can't pour out to others without being depleted. But a cup that's constantly being filled by a spring overflows naturally, continuously, without running dry.**

Co-dependent giving is the empty cup trying desperately to pour out, hoping that if it gives enough, someone will fill it in return. But the cup just gets emptier, more cracked, more depleted—and increasingly resentful that despite all its pouring, it remains dry.

Christ-centered generosity is the overflowing cup. It's being so filled by God's love, so satisfied in His sufficiency, so secure in His provision that love, service, and generosity naturally overflow to others—not to get filled up, but because you already are.

The Freedom to Love Without Strings

"Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (Philippians 4:17 NASB).

Here's Paul's stunning statement: He's not after their gift for his own sake. He's concerned about their spiritual growth, their eternal reward, the profit that accrues to them when they give generously.

This is love without strings attached.

Paul isn't manipulating them to give more. He's not using their generosity to fill his own need for validation or security. He's not keeping score or creating obligation. He genuinely wants their good—even more than he wants their gifts.

Freedom from co-dependency means we can love without strings.

Without strings means:

- **No hidden expectations:** You don't give in order to get something specific back
- **No emotional manipulation:** You don't guilt people into reciprocating
- **No scorekeeping:** You don't track who's given more or who owes whom
- **No obligation-creating:** Your giving doesn't bind others to you
- **No control agenda:** You're not using generosity to manage others' behavior
- **No resentment when unreciprocated:** You can give without demanding that others give back

This kind of love is only possible when you're secure in Christ. **When Christ is your source, you don't need to extract from others.** When God's love fills you, you don't need to manipulate others' love toward you. When His approval satisfies you, you don't need to earn approval through strategic giving.

And here's the paradox: **When you love without strings, you actually build healthier, deeper, more genuine relationships than co-dependency ever could.**

Why? Because people can finally trust your love. They're not waiting for the other shoe to drop, wondering when you'll call in the debt, anxious about disappointing you. They can receive your love, service, and generosity as actual gifts—not as investments that require returns.

And they're free to give back—not out of obligation, but out of genuine gratitude and love. The relationship becomes mutually life-giving instead of mutually draining.

A Fragrant Aroma, Well-Pleasing to God

"But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18 NASB).

Notice how Paul describes the Philippians' gift: "**A fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.**"

This language echoes Old Testament sacrificial offerings. When worshipers brought their best animals to the temple, the smoke rising from the altar was described as "a soothing aroma to the LORD" (Leviticus 1:9). It was pleasing to God—not because God needed the meat, but because the sacrifice represented the worshiper's heart of devotion, gratitude, and surrender.

Paul is saying: **Your gift to me is actually worship offered to God.** The primary recipient isn't Paul; it's God. The Philippians are using their resources to honor God by supporting His mission. Their generosity is an act of worship.

This completely reframes giving and serving.

When your giving is ultimately directed to God rather than to people:

- **You're freed from needing human approval:** God sees, and His approval is enough
- **You can give secretly:** You don't need public recognition because you're giving to an audience of One
- **You're protected from resentment:** If people don't appreciate it, that's okay—you weren't giving primarily for them anyway
- **You find joy in the act itself:** The giving is its own reward because it's worship
- **You're motivated by love for God:** Not by fear, guilt, or need to be needed

Co-dependency makes giving about the human relationship—about being appreciated, needed, validated by the other person. But Christ-centered

generosity makes giving an act of worship—about honoring God, participating in His purposes, expressing gratitude for His grace.

And this frees both the giver and the receiver.

My God Will Supply All Your Needs

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19 NASB).

This is one of the most beloved promises in Scripture, and it's directly connected to the Philippians' generosity. Because they gave sacrificially, Paul assures them: **God will supply all your needs.**

But there's a deeper principle here that speaks directly to overcoming co-dependency: **When you trust God to supply your needs, you're freed to give generously without fear.**

The co-dependent is terrified of giving too much, of not having enough, of being depleted. So even when they give, it's with anxiety:

- "What if I need this later?"
- "What if they don't give back?"
- "What if I run out?"
- "What if I'm left with nothing?"

But when you believe—really believe—that God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory, you can give freely:

- You can set aside time for yourself without guilt because God will help you serve others in appropriate ways
- You can share your resources without anxiety because God owns it all and provides for you
- You can invest in others without fear because your security isn't in what you keep but in God's faithfulness

- You can love sacrificially without terror because God Himself sustains you

Notice the measure of God's provision: "**According to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**" Not according to your resources. Not according to what you've managed to secure through co-dependent patterns. According to His riches—which are infinite, inexhaustible, more than enough.

This is the final piece of freedom from co-dependency: trusting that God will supply your needs, so you don't have to manipulate others into supplying them. Believing that God's resources are sufficient, so you don't have to cling anxiously to human resources. Resting in His provision, so you can give generously without fear of running out.

What God Supplies

It's important to clarify what this promise means and doesn't mean.

God promises to supply needs, not wants. He doesn't promise you'll have everything you desire. He promises you'll have everything you need.

God supplies according to His wisdom, not your preferences. Sometimes what you think you need isn't actually what you need. God, who sees everything, supplies according to His perfect knowledge of your true needs.

God supplies in His timing, not yours. Sometimes the provision comes before the need. Sometimes it comes just in time. Sometimes it comes after you've walked through a season of trust. But it always comes.

God supplies through various means. Sometimes directly. Sometimes through other people. Sometimes through unexpected sources. Sometimes in ways you didn't recognize as provision until later.

For the co-dependent, the biggest application is this: **God will supply your relational and emotional needs.** Not necessarily by giving you the specific relationship you want or making someone love you the way you demand. But by being present with you, comforting you, strengthening you, satisfying your soul with His love.

You don't need that person to complete you—God completes you in Christ. You don't need to be needed to have value—God assigns your value. You don't need human approval to be secure—God's approval never wavers.

"My God will supply all your needs." Present tense promise. God who has supplied in the past, who is supplying right now, who will continue to supply in the future. Your needs—all of them—will be met according to His riches.

Not according to your performance. Not according to how indispensable you make yourself. Not according to how well you manage co-dependent relationships. But according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The Fellowship of Giving and Receiving

Look again at how Paul describes the Philippians' relationship with him: **"No church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone"** (Philippians 4:15 NASB).

"Giving and receiving." This phrase is crucial. The relationship isn't one-directional. It's not just the Philippians giving to Paul. It's mutual fellowship—giving and receiving on both sides.

This is what healthy relationships look like beyond co-dependency: **mutual giving and receiving, with both parties offering and both parties receiving, neither manipulating nor obligating the other.**

Consider the contrast:

Co-dependent relationships:

- One person always gives, the other always takes
- Or both give, but neither can receive without guilt
- Or both take, each trying to extract what they need from the other
- Giving creates obligation
- Receiving creates debt
- The relationship is transactional, unbalanced, exhausting

Christ-centered relationships:

- Both people give and receive freely
- Giving is joyful, not obligatory
- Receiving is grateful, not guilty
- There's mutuality, reciprocity without scorekeeping
- The relationship is graced, balanced, life-giving

Paul could receive the Philippians' gift without losing his dignity or independence because he wasn't codependent on them. The Philippians could give generously without creating obligation because they weren't trying to control Paul through their generosity. Both gave and received in the context of partnership in the gospel, motivated by love for Christ and each other.

This is the vision for your relationships beyond co-dependency: mutual fellowship where both parties are free to give and free to receive, where no one is keeping score, where generosity flows from fullness, and where love has no strings attached.

Living Generously in Every Relationship

So what does generous, string-free living look like practically? How do you move from co-dependent transactions to Christ-centered generosity?

In Romantic Relationships

Co-dependent giving: "I'll give up everything I am to keep you happy so you won't leave me."

Generous loving: "I'll give from the fullness of who I am in Christ, honoring both you and myself, trusting God with the outcome of this relationship."

Practically:

- Serve your partner joyfully, but maintain boundaries
- Give without keeping score

- Receive without guilt
- Don't sacrifice your identity to maintain the relationship
- Trust God to sustain you whether this relationship continues or not

In Friendships

Co-dependent giving: "I'll be whatever you need me to be so you'll want to stay friends with me."

Generous loving: "I'll be authentically myself and serve you from that place, trusting that genuine friendship is built on honesty, not performance."

Practically:

- Be yourself, not who you think they want
- Give time and energy freely, but not anxiously
- Set boundaries without guilt
- Let the friendship be reciprocal
- Trust that real friends will appreciate the real you

In Family

Co-dependent giving: "I'll take responsibility for everyone's emotions and problems because that's what family does."

Generous loving: "I'll love my family members and support them appropriately while recognizing that each person is responsible for their own choices and emotions."

Practically:

- Help when appropriate, but don't enable
- Give without taking responsibility for their responses
- Set boundaries even when it's uncomfortable
- Love them without losing yourself in their issues

- Trust God to work in their lives in ways you can't

In Ministry/Service

Co-dependent giving: "I'll serve until I'm completely depleted because saying no makes me selfish."

Generous loving: "I'll serve where God calls me, from the strength He provides, trusting Him to raise up others to meet needs I can't or shouldn't meet."

Practically:

- Serve joyfully within healthy limits
- Say no when necessary without guilt
- Trust God to provide for needs beyond your capacity
- Give from overflow, not from empty
- Remember you're not the savior—Christ is

Greet Every Saint in Christ Jesus

"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:21–22 NASB).

As Paul closes his letter, he sends greetings. This might seem like a mundane conclusion, but notice the phrase: **"Every saint in Christ Jesus."**

Not "every person who needs you." Not "everyone you're trying to impress." Not "all those whose approval you're seeking." **Every saint in Christ Jesus.**

Your relationships are meant to be **in Christ Jesus.** He's the context, the foundation, the atmosphere. You don't relate to people as a co-dependent relates—desperate, needy, manipulative. You relate to them as a saint in Christ relates—secure, loved, free.

"The brethren who are with me greet you." Paul isn't alone. He's surrounded by community. He values relationships. But his relationships are healthy—characterized by partnership in the gospel, mutual encouragement, shared mission. Not characterized by co-dependence, emotional enmeshment, or desperate attachment.

"All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." Even in Caesar's household—the heart of the Roman Empire, the center of power and potential danger—there are believers. The gospel has reached everywhere. God's family spans all contexts.

You're part of this family. This global, eternal family of God. And in this family, you're known, loved, valued—not for what you do for others, but for who you are in Christ. This is your true community. This is where you belong.

And from this secure place of belonging in God's family, you're freed to love others generously, give freely, serve joyfully—without strings, without manipulation, without co-dependence.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Philippians 4:23 NASB).

Paul's final word is grace. Not "Try harder." Not "Perform better." Not "Don't let me down." **Grace.**

Grace is the antidote to co-dependency. Grace is unearned, unmerited, unmanipulated favor and love. Grace is God giving what we don't deserve and can't earn. Grace is the foundation of everything—our salvation, our standing, our security, our transformation.

And Paul prays that this grace would be "**with your spirit**"—the core of who you are, the deepest part of your being. Not just intellectually understood, but deeply experienced. Not just believed theoretically, but lived practically.

When grace is with your spirit:

- You don't have to earn approval—it's already given
- You don't have to perform for acceptance—you're already accepted
- You don't have to manipulate for security—you're already secure
- You don't have to make yourself indispensable—you're already valued
- You don't have to give to get—you've already received everything in Christ

Grace frees you to live generously and love freely because you're no longer operating from scarcity but from abundance. You're not desperate, depleted, or demanding. You're satisfied, secure, and able to give from fullness.

This is where we end—where Paul ends—with grace. The grace that saved you also transforms you. The grace that justified you also sanctifies you. The grace that brought you into God's family also frees you to love that family well.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

May you receive it deeply. May you rest in it completely. May you live from it abundantly. May you extend it generously.

The Final Call: Life Anchored in Christ's Sufficiency

We've journeyed through Philippians together, examining how Paul's words dismantle co-dependency and reveal a better way—life anchored in Christ's sufficiency.

We've learned:

- **Our identity is in Christ, not in others' approval** (Chapter 1)
- **Our joy is in God's sovereignty, not in controlled outcomes** (Chapter 2)
- **Our humility is Christ-centered wholeness, not self-erasure** (Chapter 3)

- **Our transformation is God's work in us, not our performance** (Chapter 4)
- **Our relationships are gospel partnerships, not codependent entanglements** (Chapter 5)
- **Our worth is Christ's righteousness, not our achievements** (Chapter 6)
- **Our future is pressing forward, not staying bound to the past** (Chapter 7)
- **Our peace is in Christ's nearness, not in anxious control** (Chapter 8)
- **Our contentment is in Christ's sufficiency, not in being needed** (Chapter 9)
- **Our generosity flows from fullness, not from fear** (Chapter 10)

All of these truths converge on one reality: **Beyond co-dependency lies a life anchored in Christ's sufficiency—joy that no human approval can give or take away.**

This isn't theoretical. This isn't just nice theology to know. This is **how you're meant to live:**

- Secure in Christ's love, not anxious about others' opinions
- Content in His sufficiency, not desperate for human validation
- Generous from His fullness, not manipulative from your emptiness
- Free to love without strings, not bound by fear of abandonment
- Able to serve without losing yourself, not depleted by performance
- Confident in His provision, not terrified of relational loss

This is life beyond co-dependency. And it's not just about what you're freed from (anxiety, people-pleasing, controlling, enabling). It's about what you're

freed for (genuine love, joyful service, peaceful relationships, Christ-centered community, generous living).

The Journey Continues

But let's be honest: You won't master this overnight. You'll slip back into old patterns. You'll catch yourself people-pleasing, anxiously controlling, desperately seeking approval. You'll have days when you forget that Christ is enough and act like you need that person, that relationship, that affirmation to survive.

This is normal. This is part of the journey.

The difference now is that you know a better way. You've seen what it looks like to stand firm in the Lord, to rejoice always, to be content in all circumstances, to love without strings. You've been given the tools, the truths, the practices that lead to freedom.

So when you stumble—and you will—don't despair. **Return to grace.** Remember who you are in Christ. Recall that your worth isn't based on perfect performance. Come back to the truths you've learned. Practice the disciplines you've discovered. Reach out to the community walking this journey with you.

Transformation is a process, not an event. God is faithful. He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. Your job isn't to be perfect; it's to keep pressing forward, keep standing firm, keep returning to Christ when you drift.

The Invitation Extended

If you've read this entire book, you've been confronted with difficult truths. You've had to face patterns you may not have wanted to see. You've been challenged to change in ways that feel risky, uncomfortable, even terrifying.

But you've also been offered something beautiful: **freedom in Christ.**

The question now is: **Will you step into it?**

Will you choose to stand firm in the Lord rather than cling to people? Will you choose to rejoice in God rather than depend on circumstances? Will you choose contentment in Christ over desperation for approval? Will you choose to love generously rather than manipulate anxiously?

The invitation is extended. The way is clear. The truth has been laid out. Christ is sufficient. His grace is enough. His strength is available. His love is unshakeable.

Now it's your choice.

Will you continue in co-dependent patterns that exhaust and enslave you? Or will you step into the freedom Christ offers—the freedom to be yourself, to love genuinely, to serve joyfully, to live abundantly?

He Who Has God and Everything Else

C.S. Lewis wrote: "**He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.**"

Let that sink in. If you have God plus relationships, success, approval, being needed, wealth, health, and everything else you could want—you have no more than the person who has only God and nothing else.

Why? Because having God is having everything.

God is enough. God is sufficient. God is all you truly need. Everything else—relationships, roles, achievements, approval—these are wonderful gifts when rightly ordered, but they're not necessary for your completeness, security, or joy.

You have God. In Christ, you have been given everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). You have access to the Father. You have the indwelling Spirit. You have the righteousness of Christ. You have eternal life. You have a secure identity. You have unfailing love. You have unlimited grace. You have strength for every situation. You have peace that surpasses understanding. You have joy that isn't based on circumstances.

You have God. And therefore, you have everything you need.

So stop acting like you need more. Stop desperately grasping for human approval as if it could complete you. Stop performing for validation as if it could secure you. Stop making yourself indispensable as if being needed could give you worth. Stop trying to control relationships as if your wellbeing depends on them.

You have God. And He is enough.

When you truly believe this—when you live from this reality rather than from the lie of co-dependency—everything changes. You're free. Free to love without fear. Free to give without expectation. Free to serve without scorekeeping. Free to set boundaries without guilt. Free to be yourself without performing. Free to rest without anxiety.

This is the life you were meant for. Not the exhausting treadmill of co-dependency, but the spacious place of Christ-centered freedom.

My God Will Supply

As we close, return one more time to this promise: "**My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus**" (Philippians 4:19 NASB).

Your relational needs: God will meet them—sometimes through healthy relationships, sometimes through His own presence, always according to His wisdom.

Your emotional needs: God will meet them—not always removing the pain, but always providing comfort, strength, and His abiding presence.

Your need for security: God will meet it—not through making people permanent or predictable, but through being your unchanging anchor.

Your need for identity: God will meet it—not through others' approval, but through declaring who you are in Christ.

Your need for purpose: God will meet it—not through making yourself indispensable to people, but through inviting you into His eternal purposes.

Your need for love: God will meet it—He already has, at the cross, with love that will never fail, never fade, never be withdrawn.

All your needs. According to His riches. In Christ Jesus.

You don't have to earn it. You don't have to manipulate for it. You don't have to perform for it. You don't have to make yourself indispensable to secure it.

It's already yours. In Christ.

Beyond Co-Dependency: The Promise and the Call

Beyond co-dependency lies:

- **Joy** that doesn't depend on others' moods or opinions
- **Peace** that guards your heart even in relational turmoil
- **Love** that gives freely without demanding returns
- **Service** that flows from fullness without depleting you
- **Boundaries** that protect without guilt
- **Identity** that's secure regardless of relationships
- **Contentment** that remains stable in lack or abundance
- **Generosity** that overflows without fear
- **Freedom** to be fully yourself without performing
- **Rest** in God's sufficiency

This is what awaits you. This is the promise.

But there's also a call:

- **Stand firm in the Lord** daily
- **Rejoice always**, even when it's hard

- **Let your gentleness be known** instead of your anxiety
- **Be anxious for nothing** as you bring everything to God in prayer
- **Dwell on what's true**, not on anxious distortions
- **Press forward** rather than stay bound to the past
- **Be content** in whatever circumstances you face
- **Live generously**, trusting God to supply your needs
- **Love freely**, without strings or manipulation
- **Rest in Christ's sufficiency** as your only true source

This is your calling. This is your invitation. This is your inheritance in Christ.

Will you answer the call? Will you step into the promise? Will you choose, day by day, to live beyond co-dependency and into the freedom Christ offers?

The Grace That Sustains

I want to leave you with this: **You can do this.** Not in your own strength—you've tried that, and it hasn't worked. But in Christ's strength. Through His grace. By His power working in you.

Remember Paul's words: "**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me**" (Philippians 4:13 NASB). Including overcome co-dependency. Including set healthy boundaries. Including love without losing yourself. Including be content when not needed. Including live generously without fear.

You can do all these things—not because you're strong enough, but because Christ strengthens you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

May this grace empower you to stand firm when you're tempted to cling anxiously. May it free you to love genuinely when fear whispers you should manipulate. May it anchor you in security when relationships shift. May it fill

you with contentment when circumstances lack. May it enable you to give generously when scarcity threatens.

Grace upon grace. More than enough for every moment, every challenge, every temptation to return to old patterns.

You are loved—completely, unconditionally, eternally. You are secure—in Christ, in the Father's hands, in the Spirit's keeping. You are sufficient—not in yourself, but in the One who lives in you.

Beyond co-dependency, there is life. Abundant life. Free life. Christ-centered life. Life anchored in sufficiency that can never be shaken.

This is your inheritance. Step into it. Live from it. Rest in it.

And when you do, you'll discover what Paul discovered, what the Philippians discovered, what countless believers throughout history have discovered:

Christ is enough. And having Him, you have everything.

Final Reflection and Commitment:

1. Look back over your journey through this book. What has God revealed to you about your co-dependent patterns? Write down the three most significant insights you've gained.
2. What is God calling you to do differently? Be specific. What boundary do you need to set? What pattern do you need to break? What truth do you need to believe? What practice do you need to establish?
3. Who will walk this journey with you? Identify at least one person (or a group) who will provide accountability, encouragement, and truth-telling as you move beyond co-dependency.
4. Write your own declaration of freedom. Complete these sentences:
 - I am no longer _____ (old co-dependent identity).
 - I am now _____ (new identity in Christ).

- Because Christ is sufficient, I can _____.
- My joy no longer depends on _____.
- My security is in _____.
- I choose to _____.

5. Commit Philippians 4:19 to memory: "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Return to this promise whenever you're tempted to go back to co-dependent patterns.

6. Write a prayer of surrender and trust:

- Surrender to God the people, relationships, and outcomes you've been trying to control
- Thank Him for His sufficiency and faithfulness
- Ask for His strength to live in freedom
- Commit to standing firm in Him, rejoicing always, and pressing forward

The journey continues. Grace sustains. Christ is enough.

Go now in the freedom for which Christ has set you free (Galatians 5:1). Stand firm. Rejoice always. Love freely. Live generously. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Beyond co-dependency lies life. Real, abundant, Christ-centered life.

It's yours. Step into it.

Epilogue: Life Beyond Co-dependency — Christ, My All in All

The Path We've Traveled

Do you remember where we started?

We began in a prison with no visible bars—the hidden bondage of co-dependency, where needing others becomes needing too much, where the fear of rejection dictates every decision, where the self slowly disappears into the expectations and demands of others. We acknowledged the exhaustion of living for approval, the terror of abandonment, the crushing weight of trying to earn what can only be received.

And we introduced a revolutionary truth: "**For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain**" (Philippians 1:21 NASB). Paul's secret. The key that unlocks every chain. The foundation for a completely different way of living.

Now, ten chapters later, we arrive at the end of our journey through Philippians—but really, it's just the beginning of yours. The beginning of living beyond co-dependency and into the freedom Christ offers. The beginning of discovering that **Christ is your all in all**.

Let's look back at the path we've traveled, not to dwell on the past, but to see how far God has brought you and to remember the truths that will sustain you going forward.

From Bondage to Freedom: The Journey Revisited

Chapter 1: From Pleasing People to Pursuing Christ

We started by examining Paul's identity as a "bond-servant of Christ Jesus"—free from the need for others' validation because he belonged completely to Christ. We confronted the core lie of co-dependency: "**I need others to validate my worth.**" And we embraced the gospel truth: "**I am already loved, chosen, and complete in Him.**"

You learned that God who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it—not because of your performance, but because of His

faithfulness. The question shifted from "Have I done enough to be loved?" to "How do I cooperate with what God is already doing in me?"

The transformation began: from seeking affirmation from everyone to resting in the One who began the good work.

Chapter 2: Redefining Relationships Through the Gospel

We discovered that Paul's imprisonment didn't rob him of joy because his identity wasn't tied to others' approval. While others preached Christ from envy, Paul rejoiced—because his joy was anchored in something unchanging. We learned the difference between co-dependency's fixation on control and Paul's relinquishment of control to Christ.

The distinction became clear: attachment (fear-based clinging) versus abiding (security-rooted connection). You began to understand that relationships could be altars where Christ is exalted rather than stages where you perform for love.

The transformation continued: from desperate attachment to restful abiding, from control to trust.

Chapter 3: The Mind of Christ

We tackled the great fear: "I'll lose myself if I stop pleasing others." And Christ's paradoxical answer: "Lose yourself in Me, and you will find life." We saw how Jesus modeled self-giving love—not self-losing love. He emptied Himself from a position of fullness, security, and clear identity.

The crucial distinction emerged: serving from emptiness (co-dependency) versus serving from fullness (Christ-likeness). And you learned to pray the prayer that transforms: "Not my will, but Yours."

The transformation deepened: from self-erasure to Christ-centered wholeness, from performing to surrendering.

Chapter 4: Working Out What God Has Already Worked In

We confronted the exhaustion of trying to earn through performance what can only be received through grace. Paul revealed that God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. You don't have to be the savior of others—God is already working in them too.

The shift was profound: from "working for approval" to "working out what God is working in." From anxiety in performance to joy in obedience. From desperately trying to fix everyone to trusting God with outcomes you can't control.

The transformation took root: from striving to resting, from controlling to releasing.

Chapter 5: True Companionship

We examined Paul's relationships with Timothy and Epaphroditus—models of self-giving love rather than self-losing love. We learned to discern healthy versus unhealthy spiritual attachment, discovering that Christ-centered relationships are characterized by mutual encouragement, shared mission, and emotional boundaries grounded in truth.

The vision became clear: relationships can be gospel partnerships rather than codependent entanglements. The most loving thing we can do is live wholeheartedly for God—and from that wholeness, love others genuinely.

The transformation reshaped relationships: from enmeshment to healthy interdependence, from using others to genuinely loving them.

Chapter 6: Letting Go of Performance-Based Worth

We witnessed Paul's radical reorientation—counting all his impressive credentials as loss compared to knowing Christ. We recognized that co-dependency is a form of spiritual legalism: earning love through performance. And we embraced the surpassing value of knowing Christ, which sets us free from striving.

The language changed: from "I have to" (obligation) to "I get to" (grace). From working to earn to working from gratitude. From desperate performance to delighted relationship.

The transformation revolutionized worth: from self-generated righteousness to Christ's perfect righteousness, from earning to receiving.

Chapter 7: Pressing On Toward Wholeness

We confronted the danger of living in the past—through regret, guilt, or nostalgia. Paul's instruction was clear: forget what lies behind, reach forward to what lies ahead, press on toward Christ. We learned that healthy detachment isn't rejection; it's redemption.

The shift was liberating: from being bound by past wounds to being freed for future wholeness. From attachment to the past to advancement toward Christ. From restless searching to resting in God.

The transformation moved us forward: from being haunted by yesterday to being freed for tomorrow, from stuck to pressing on.

Chapter 8: Joy and Gentleness

We discovered the secret of peace: the Lord is near. This nearness enables us to choose gentleness and trust over anxious control. We learned to replace worry with worship, to bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving, and to experience His peace that guards our hearts and minds.

The practice became clear: be anxious for nothing, pray about everything, thank God always, dwell on what's true. Joy became not a feeling dependent on circumstances, but a choice rooted in the unchanging reality of God's character.

The transformation brought peace: from chronic anxiety to guarded peace, from control to gentleness, from worry to worship.

Chapter 9: The Secret of Contentment

We learned Paul's secret: contentment in whatever circumstances. Not "I can't live without you," but "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We discovered how to be content in relational lack or abundance, understanding that contentment comes when Christ is enough.

The rhythm of gratitude replaced the anxiety of scarcity. God's promise anchored us: He will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The transformation established contentment: from "I need you to survive" to "Christ is sufficient," from desperation to satisfaction.

Chapter 10: Living Generously, Loving Freely

We saw how true generosity flows from fullness, not fear of abandonment. The Philippians gave out of joy, not guilt. We learned that freedom from co-dependency means we can love without strings attached, give without expecting returns, serve without scorekeeping.

The final vision emerged: life beyond co-dependency is life anchored in Christ's sufficiency—joy that no human approval can give or take away.

The transformation culminated in freedom: from transactional giving to generous loving, from strings attached to love freely given.

The Recurring Theme: Joy in Christ, Regardless of Circumstance

Now, having traveled this entire journey, step back and look at the landscape of Philippians as a whole. What dominates the terrain?

Joy.

Not happiness dependent on circumstances. Not positivity ignoring reality. Not denial pretending everything's fine. But **joy**—deep, resilient, Christ-rooted joy that transcends circumstances.

Count how many times Paul uses words related to joy and rejoicing in this short letter:

- "My joy and crown" (1:4)

- "I will rejoice" (1:18)
- "Your progress and joy in the faith" (1:25)
- "Make my joy complete" (2:2)
- "I rejoice and share my joy with you all" (2:17-18)
- "Rejoice in the Lord" (3:1)
- "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (4:4)
- "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly" (4:10)

Over and over, joy. And this from a man in prison, uncertain of his future, facing potential execution, betrayed by some, separated from those he loves.

How?

Because Paul's joy isn't rooted in circumstances. It's rooted in Christ. His joy doesn't depend on:

- Whether he's imprisoned or free
- Whether people affirm him or criticize him
- Whether his circumstances are comfortable or difficult
- Whether relationships are thriving or failing
- Whether he's needed or not
- Whether outcomes align with his preferences

His joy depends only on Christ. And Christ never changes. Christ is always near. Christ is always faithful. Christ is always sufficient.

This is the joy available to you beyond co-dependency.

When you were trapped in co-dependent patterns, your emotional state was a roller coaster—soaring when people affirmed you, crashing when they seemed distant. Your happiness depended entirely on variables you couldn't

control: others' moods, relationships' stability, your performance quality, circumstances' alignment.

But **joy in Christ is steady**. Not emotionless—Paul experienced genuine grief, longing, and disappointment. But underneath every circumstance, there was an unshakeable foundation: Christ. And that foundation produced a joy that circumstances couldn't create or destroy.

This is your inheritance. Joy regardless of:

- Whether that relationship works out
- Whether you're needed or not
- Whether people approve of your boundaries
- Whether you're in relational abundance or lack
- Whether you're praised or criticized
- Whether you succeed or fail at overcoming co-dependency perfectly

Your joy is in Christ. And that's enough.

Living From Overflow, Not From Need

This is perhaps the most fundamental shift in moving beyond co-dependency: **learning to live from overflow rather than from need**.

The Co-Dependent Lives From Need

The co-dependent operates from a posture of deficit:

- "I need your approval to feel okay"
- "I need you to need me to have value"
- "I need to control this outcome to feel secure"
- "I need to perform perfectly to be accepted"
- "I need this relationship to survive"

Every interaction is an attempt to fill the void. Every act of service is secretly an extraction. Every word is calculated to get something back. Living from need is exhausting because the need is infinite and the sources are finite. No amount of approval fills the void. No relationship satisfies the hunger. No performance earns enough security. You're endlessly taking from people what only God can provide.

The Christ-Centered Believer Lives From Overflow

But when Christ becomes your sufficiency, everything changes. You operate from fullness:

- "I'm already approved in Christ; I can love you freely"
- "I'm already valuable to God; I don't need you to need me"
- "I'm already secure in His sovereignty; I can release control"
- "I'm already accepted by grace; I don't have to perform"
- "My life is hidden with Christ in God; I'm complete whether this relationship continues or not"

Every interaction becomes an opportunity to give what you've received. Every act of service flows from gratitude, not desperation. Every word comes from a place of peace, not panic. Living from overflow is sustainable because the source is infinite. God's love never runs dry. His grace is always sufficient. His presence never leaves.

This is the difference between a life of chronic depletion and a life of constant renewal.

Picture two wells:

The co-dependent well has no underground spring feeding it. It depends entirely on what others pour in. When people are generous, the well has water. When they're not, it runs dry. The well-keeper becomes desperate, anxious, manipulative—trying to ensure that people keep filling it, terrified of the drought that's always threatening.

The Christ-centered well is fed by an underground spring—a constant, inexhaustible source. Others may add to it, and that's wonderful. Others may draw from it, and that's its purpose. But the well never runs dry because the source isn't human generosity; it's divine abundance. The well-keeper is at peace, generous, free—knowing the spring will never fail.

You were created to be the second kind of well. Fed by the underground spring of God's love, His grace, His presence. Always full. Always overflowing. Always able to give because you're always receiving.

Co-dependency is trying to be a well with no spring. Life in Christ is discovering the spring has been there all along—you just needed to stop looking to people to fill what God was meant to supply.

What Overflows

When you live from the overflow of Christ's sufficiency, what pours out of you?

Love—genuine, unconditional, not dependent on receiving love back

Joy—rooted in God's character, not in circumstances

Peace—guarding your heart, not dependent on controlling outcomes

Patience—with yourself, with others, with God's timing

Kindness—flowing from fullness, not strategically given to earn approval

Goodness—doing what's right because of who God is, not to impress people

Faithfulness—consistent, trustworthy, not performing when it benefits you

Gentleness—secure enough to be tender, not harsh from anxiety

Self-control—free to choose, not enslaved to compulsion

These are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). They don't come from human effort. They overflow from a life connected to the Vine (John 15:5). When you abide in Christ, when He is your source, when you're living from His overflow—this is what naturally flows from you.

This is life beyond co-dependency. Not trying desperately to produce fruit through performance, but simply remaining connected to the source and letting the fruit naturally grow.

Christ, My All in All

We arrive at the conclusion—the destination toward which every chapter has been pointing: **Christ, my all in all.**

Not Christ plus something else. Not Christ and also needing human approval. Not Christ but also requiring that relationship to complete you. **Christ. All in all.**

What This Means Practically

Christ is your identity: Not "helper" or "rescuer" or "the one everyone needs." You are God's beloved child, complete in Christ, secure in His love.

Christ is your security: Not others' approval, not being needed, not controlled outcomes. Your security is in God's unchanging character and unbreakable promises.

Christ is your purpose: Not making yourself indispensable to people, but glorifying God and participating in His mission.

Christ is your sufficiency: Not "Christ plus this relationship" or "Christ plus being needed." Christ. Sufficient. Complete.

Christ is your joy: Not dependent on circumstances aligning, but rooted in His presence, character, and promises.

Christ is your peace: Not the absence of problems, but His guarding presence in the midst of them.

Christ is your strength: For setting boundaries, for saying no, for being yourself, for overcoming co-dependency—"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Christ is your source: Of love, worth, validation, purpose, identity, security. Everything flows from Him.

When Christ is truly your all in all, you're free:

- Free to love without needing anything back
- Free to serve without becoming enslaved
- Free to give without keeping score
- Free to receive without guilt
- Free to set boundaries without fear
- Free to be yourself without performing
- Free to let go without being destroyed
- Free to trust God with outcomes you can't control
- Free to live in the present without being haunted by the past
- Free to press forward without anxiety about the future

This is the freedom for which Christ has set you free (Galatians 5:1).

The Rest of Your Story

This book ends here. But your story continues.

You'll face temptations to return to co-dependent patterns. Old fears will resurface. Situations will arise where it feels easier to people-please than to stand firm. Relationships will test your boundaries. Circumstances will challenge your contentment.

This is normal. Expected. Part of the journey.

But now you have something you didn't have before:

- **Truth:** You know the lies of co-dependency and the realities of Christ-centered living
- **Tools:** You have practices, prayers, and patterns that lead to freedom
- **Community:** You're not alone—others are walking this path, and God Himself walks with you

- **Hope:** You've seen the vision of what's possible—life beyond co-dependency, anchored in Christ

And most importantly, you have **Christ Himself**. Not just information about Him, but actual relationship with Him. His presence. His power. His sufficiency.

The rest of your story is being written. Not by you alone, but by God who is faithful. He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. Your job isn't to be perfect. It's to keep returning to Him, keep standing firm in Him, keep pressing forward toward Him.

Some days will be victories—you'll set a healthy boundary, you'll choose contentment over anxiety, you'll love without strings, you'll rest in God's sufficiency. Celebrate these. Thank God for them. Let them encourage you.

Some days will be defeats—you'll slip back into people-pleasing, you'll try to control an outcome, you'll say yes out of fear, you'll depend on someone's approval. Don't despair. Return to grace. Remember who you are in Christ. Get back up and keep walking.

The direction matters more than the speed. As long as you're moving toward Christ, pressing forward, standing firm in Him—you're on the right path. Progress, not perfection, is the goal.

A Vision of Your Future

Imagine a day—maybe tomorrow, maybe months from now, maybe years—when you wake up and realize:

- You're not anxious about someone's opinion of you
- You're content whether that relationship continues or not
- You can set a boundary without crippling guilt
- You're secure in who you are in Christ
- You love people genuinely, not because you need something from them

- You serve joyfully, not out of compulsion
- You rest peacefully, trusting God with outcomes
- You're free to be yourself without performing

This day is coming. Not through your willpower, but through God's faithfulness. Not because you've earned it, but because Christ has secured it.

And on that day, you'll look back at where you started—trapped in the prison of co-dependency, exhausted from performing, terrified of abandonment—and you'll marvel at how far God has brought you.

That future is real. It's promised. It's yours in Christ.

Closing Prayer

As we close this book, let's pray together—a prayer that can become your daily surrender, your moment-by-moment return to truth, your anchor in storms:

Lord Jesus,

Be my sufficiency. When I'm tempted to find my completeness in others' approval, remind me that I'm complete in You. When I'm anxious about being needed, help me rest in being loved by You. When I'm desperate for validation, anchor me in the truth that I'm already valued—chosen before the foundation of the world, adopted as Your beloved child, secure in grace I didn't earn and can't lose.

Be my center. When relationships threaten to become my everything, bring me back to You as my ultimate reality. When circumstances shift and I lose my bearings, remind me that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. When I'm pulled in a hundred directions by demands and expectations, help me return to the one thing needful—sitting at Your feet, learning from You, abiding in You.

Be my source. When I'm depleted and empty, fill me with Your Spirit. When I'm trying to generate love from my own resources, remind me that love flows from You. When I'm exhausted from performing, teach me to receive from You and give from overflow. When I'm desperate for what only You can provide, show me again that You are the spring of living water—whatever drinks of You will never thirst.

Let every relationship in my life flow from Your love in me. Not from my need, but from Your fullness. Not from my anxiety, but from Your peace. Not from my grasping, but from Your generosity. Not from my performance, but from Your grace.

Help me to:

- **Stand firm** in You when I'm tempted to cling to people
- **Rejoice always** in You when circumstances are difficult
- **Be gentle** rather than controlling, trusting You are near
- **Be anxious for nothing** as I bring everything to You in prayer
- **Press forward** rather than stay bound to the past
- **Be content** in whatever circumstances, because You are enough
- **Give generously** and love freely, trusting You to supply my needs
- **Live from overflow** rather than from desperate need

Transform me from co-dependent to Christ-dependent. From people-pleaser to God-pursuer. From approval-seeker to grace-receiver. From exhausted performer to resting beloved.

Guard my heart with Your peace that surpasses understanding. **Renew my mind** with truth that destroys lies. **Strengthen my spirit** with power that comes only from You.

And when I fall—because I will—when I slip back into old patterns, when I forget these truths, when anxiety overwhelms me and I try to control what only

You can control—extend Your grace. Remind me that I'm not defined by my failures but by Your faithfulness. Help me get back up, return to You, and keep pressing forward.

You are my all in all. My identity, my security, my purpose, my sufficiency, my joy, my peace, my strength, my source. Not Christ plus anything. Not Christ and also something else. **Christ. All. In all.**

I belong to You. Forever. Completely. Irrevocably. And in belonging to You, I'm finally free—free to be myself, free to love genuinely, free to live abundantly.

Thank You for beginning this good work in me. Thank You for being faithful to complete it. Thank You for the freedom You've secured at infinite cost. Thank You that Your grace is sufficient for every moment, every challenge, every temptation.

Be glorified in my life—in my relationships, in my service, in my rest, in my growth, in my journey beyond co-dependency and into the freedom You offer.

To You be the glory, forever and ever.

Amen.

The Grace That Carries You Forward

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Philippians 4:23 NASB).

This is how Paul ends his letter. This is how we end this book. Not with a list of things to do, not with a burden of expectations, not with anxiety about whether you'll succeed.

But with **grace**.

Grace for today. Grace for tomorrow. Grace for the hard moments. Grace for the victories. Grace for the failures. Grace for the journey. Grace for the destination.

Grace that saves you from the penalty of sin.

Grace that sustains you through the process of transformation.

Grace that will complete what God has begun in you.

This grace isn't earned by overcoming co-dependency perfectly. It isn't maintained by flawless performance. It isn't increased by trying harder. **It simply is.** Given freely. Available constantly. Sufficient completely.

Beyond co-dependency lies life. Real, abundant, Christ-centered life. Life anchored not in others' opinions but in God's character. Life flowing not from desperate need but from divine overflow. Life characterized not by anxious performing but by joyful becoming.

This life is yours. Not because you've earned it, but because Christ has secured it. Not because you're strong enough, but because He is. Not because you have it all figured out, but because He is faithful.

Christ, Your All in All

So we return to where we began, but now with eyes opened to see what was always true:

Christ is enough.

Not Christ plus perfect relationships. Not Christ plus being needed. Not Christ plus others' approval. Not Christ plus controlled outcomes.

Christ.

All.

In all.

And having Christ, you have everything you truly need. Everything else—relationships, roles, achievements, approval—these are gifts to be enjoyed but not gods to be worshiped. They're blessings to be received but not sources to depend on. They add to your joy but don't create it. They enrich your life but don't define it.

You are complete in Him. (Colossians 2:10)

You are hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)

You are loved with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)

You are more than a conqueror through Him who loved you. (Romans 8:37)

Nothing can separate you from His love. (Romans 8:38-39)

He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

(Philippians 1:6)

These aren't just nice sentiments. They're reality. **Your reality.** In Christ.

Now go. Live in this reality. Stand firm in this truth. Press forward with this hope. Rejoice always in this joy. Be content in this sufficiency. Give generously from this fullness. Love freely with this security.

Beyond co-dependency, there is Christ.

And Christ is all you need.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Amen.