

# TAKE CONTROL *of* YOUR LIFE

ESCAPE *the* GRIP  
*of* CODEPENDENCY

NATIONAL BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

DR. JAMES B. RICHARDS

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True Potential Publishing

REACH THE WORLD

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## **Take Control of Your Life: Escape the Grip of Codependency**

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# READ THIS FIRST!

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To be dependent on someone else means I am not depending on me. If I am not depending on me, I have no true control. After all, the only thing I can actually control is me! Therefore, depending on you means I am out of control! There are few things that make an individual feel as helpless, defenseless, afraid, frustrated, stressed and angry as feeling out of control!

Through centuries of systematic programming, the masses of the world have been made to feel powerless. By creating dependence on outside sources we have succumbed to the illusion of no control! Corrupt governments leave the individual feeling his or her voice and vote cannot really change anything. In the recent banking scandal that ripped over a trillion dollars from the individual taxpayer, the logic was “they are too big to allow them to fail,” thus creating the illusion that we had no choice; that somehow the needs of the corporations were greater than the needs of the individuals. Good parents lose custody of their children by the decision of judges—taking away any sense of rights or control by those parents. This ideology of disempowerment even permeated religion—making the individual believer feel he or she has no voice with God!

It seems that government, business and controlling individuals deceive us into giving them our power. The momentary false sense of security we received in exchange is soon swallowed up in a vague, nebulous, yet all-consuming sense of having no control. We all find ways to manage this desperate feeling. Some just give up and give in to the controller in the situation. Others become angry and lash out. Because they have been so conditioned to control, they didn't think rationally enough to identify the true culprit. Paradoxically, they tend to allow the controllers to tell them with whom they should be angry. Some come together and picket the “straw man” created by the lies of their controllers. Some riot in the streets, burning buildings and attacking people. In a marriage some commit adultery, while others attack their spouse. All of this acting out is a vain attempt to create the feeling of having some control. Contrary to the emotional impetus driving this illogical behavior, it actually causes the problems to grow worse, not better.



It is such an irony. As some people lose self-control, they tend to want to take more control of others. The most insecure people with the strongest propensity toward narcissism need to control others to feel safe. They proclaim themselves to be leaders. The syndrome only grows more diabolical as others who feel out of control give away more of their personal choices and freedoms to someone who offers to “fix things.” How did we get here? Why do the majority tend to consistently make the wrong choices? How did the world get so out of control and what can we do about it?

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### **It All Started in the Garden**

The more “normal” is defined by the secular world, the less normal we experience in the world. Through intimidation and seduction our spiritual values have been minimized while secular ideas have been exalted as the ultimate solution to the world's problems. It all started in the garden of Eden when the very first temptation was embedded in the idea, “You are not who God says you are and you don't have what God says is yours.” Humanism<sup>1</sup> was born in the garden and was expressed in the first murder. Cain decided that his way of sacrificing to God was more appropriate than what God said to do. The way he solved the problem was by killing the evidence of God's disapproval: Abel!

The next quantum leap in the logic of disempowerment took place at the tower of Babel with the birth of socialism. Instead of following God's inspirational directive to fill the earth and become who you want to be, Nimrod, the first dictator, deceived and ultimately forced people to give up their choices and follow him. Through fear and intimidation Nimrod presented the idea that we could throw away God's wisdom, band together and have a better life. We can all be like bricks...we'll all be equal!

Although there have always been oppressive ideologies and religions, there also have always been those who have advanced this lie in significant ways. The birth of communism, socialism and then progressivism are the ideas that have grown to fill the earth. They take away individual freedom of choice. They thrive on disempowering the masses. Oddly enough, they do so under the banner of power to the people. Capitalism, on the other hand, when taken to extremes, becomes the straightforward oppression of the rich over the poor. But at least it doesn't seek to rob you of opportunity and choice. Then there is the church that may package it in any of various ways—i.e., the sovereignty of God or the elevation of the priests over the people—but in the end it still leaves the people powerless.

## Where Is the War?

If you seek help through almost any of the commonly known channels, you will lose even more of your power to choose. Modern godless, humanistic thought, while sounding compassionate and loving, destroys those who seek help by the very treatment it gives. The educational system, many substance abuse programs, government agencies and even many churches blame society for our problems. Society no doubt contributed to our problems, but if society is the problem, then that is too big to solve. So in the end we are still left feeling powerless and out of control.

There is a war eternal. The war is not between God and the devil in the sense that we have understood. That war was won when Jesus was raised from the dead. But there is a war, according to the New Testament, that takes place in the mind, heart and beliefs of mankind. Our enemy is the devil. Yes, he is defeated and virtually powerless. But he is still an incredible liar. In fact, he is the father of all lies. His names *devil* and *Satan* mean slanderer and accuser. A slanderer puts people down, makes them feel insignificant. An accuser points out their faults and shows them what they have done wrong. Regardless of what you believe about the devil, you must believe that he wants you to be aware of your faults and that he wants you to feel less than God says you are.

There is an interesting word in the Greek New Testament. If it was translated literally it would probably be *demonized*! To be demonized seems to indicate being

influenced. The Apostle Paul said that all people who walked in opposition to God's wisdom were under the influence of the prince of the power of the air. In other words, they are demonized! Any person, doctrine, philosophy or policy that attempts to make you feel less than what God says about you is seeking to take your

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power away from you. Once you surrender the sense of who you are in relation to God, you lose your sense of dignity and worth. You start looking to destructive sources to make you feel as you should. You go out of control!

The feeling of having no control manifests itself through what is called codependency. The ultimate codependency is the attempt to meet a need through an external source that can only be met in your heart with God! Everything in the world's system is designed to take away your control and make you codependent. The world is out of control and codependent!

### ***Change Can Happen!***

Is there any hope for a world so far out of control? Yes! But the solution may not be what you think. The world is out of control because people are out of control. Once a

person loses consciousness of and confidence in the fact that he or she is created in the likeness and image of God, that person loses his or her sense of dignity and worth. God crowned mankind with dignity and worth and gave him dominion over planet Earth. That dominion, which should produce a world of peace and order, degenerates when man loses his sense of identity with his Creator and surrenders his power of choice. When individuals believe the lie that they are not created in the likeness and image of God, they have no sense of control.

If we attempt to fix the world, the problem immediately becomes too overwhelming to consider. However, if we seek to solve our personal problems, then nothing is too big or beyond immediate solutions. In fact, it will only

be when each individual says “I will take control of my own life” that we will actually see solutions. This book is about regaining the control of your life by identifying and overcoming all tendencies toward codependency. As you shed the layers of emotional addiction you will find a freedom you have never before known. You will become the light in a dark world.

People change one at a time. The world changes when people change. When people change, they discover a new realm called the Kingdom of God, a place where righteousness, peace and joy reign. This realm is in your heart. As you free yourself from looking out there, you can look “in there” and discover the world you’ve always desired.

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## Endnote

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1. A system of thought that is based on the values, characteristics and behavior that are believed to be best in human beings, rather than on any supernatural authority, per Microsoft’s *Encarta Dictionary*.

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## SECTION 1

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# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

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# CODEPENDENCY: WHAT IS IT?

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It seems that as every year goes by, new diseases of the mind and body emerge. Medical science is working day and night trying to develop cures for new viruses that threaten the very existence of humanity. Likewise, those professionals who address emotional pain and conflict continually seek new answers to the problems that plague the emotional lives of the human race.

There seems to be a million different kinds of emotional problems out there. Some sectors of society try to deny their existence, but the effects of emotional dysfunction abound despite whether or not we can define them. There are experts in the medical, social and religious fields who try to explain away problems as if society had willfully conjured them up for some selfish reason. Such denials reflect a lack of realism, concern and understanding. In fact, such attitudes reflect a part of the problem.

There are others, however, who recognize the legitimacy of the seemingly new flood of complex emotional conflicts. However, because they do not understand the concept of “fruit and root,” or behavior and beliefs, they are seeking a thousand different answers for the thousand different problems that exist. The



attempt to find this multitude of individual answers is quite overwhelming for both the patient and the practitioner. It puts the ability to solve the problem out of the reach of those in need. It causes them to place their hope in the *expert* who sometimes becomes an extension of the problem.

## A Multitude of Problems...a Handful of Answers

Although there are hundreds, if not thousands, of different emotional disorders, there are only a few solutions. A healthy emotional life functions around some very basic and somewhat simple realities. Thus the principle of the

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THE ROOT IS  
A BELIEF THAT  
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SYMPTOM.

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fruit and root! One tree can grow an unlimited amount of fruit. Regardless of how often we pick the fruit, it grows back. Why? *The source of its growth is in the root.* Thus we must solve the problem at the root. By dealing with root or core issues, we can often eliminate many problems that seem unrelated!

Identifying and understanding the root issues will facilitate the freedom that is never found by picking through fruit. Root is the cause; fruit is a symptom. Fruit is what we see. It is the dysfunctional behavior. It is what we present to the world around us. The root is a belief that empowers the symptom. The root feeds the symptom just like it feeds the fruit on a tree. Without the root, the fruit dies by itself!

Regardless of a person's particular beliefs, society itself bears witness that there are certain immutable truths that will cause one to experience peace of mind, a sense of well-being and healthy relationships. When these truths are violated, just the opposite occurs. When beliefs that promote destructive behavior are embraced, everyone suffers—the individual as well as all the people in relationship with him or her. People around that individual are affected and society as a whole suffers. Violence, domestic instability, substance abuse and many physical sicknesses are the result of people abandoning these immutable, unchangeable truths.

The medical profession is very quick to admit that a large percentage of physical illness is stress-related. Some sources believe that all sickness—unless genetic or structural—are the product of stress! Stress is a non-measurable phenomenon created from a non-physical source that manifests in both behavior and physical health. In other words, stress is the product of our emotional life. It is created from thoughts, beliefs and opinions. It is negative emotional energy that can ultimately manifest in the physical body.

Stress in the body can turn into a destructive energy that causes high blood pressure, migraines, cancer and all manner of immunosuppressant diseases. Stress, because it is an energy, will always be expressed somewhere. In the emotions, stress can be expressed as anger, hatred, worry or fear. These emotions can turn into violence and other acts of aggression that destroy relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbors.

Stress is a subjective, individualized reaction to stimuli. It is the way we react to any given circumstance based on our beliefs and perceptions. That which stresses one person can stimulate another. It is the individual beliefs of people that form the *root* of their reaction to the world around them. Therefore, emotional conflicts can never be resolved by dealing with behavior. Behavior is a symptom, a fruit. A change in behavior may benefit society, but a change in behavior never resolves the inner struggle of tormenting emotions.

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It is time the human race begins to observe the truth that has been proven for thousands of years in every culture. We must manage our life and emotions in a different way if we expect to see different results. If we are in emotional pain, we cannot continue to think and believe the way we always have and expect anything to change. Psychiatric drugs will numb the pain, but they will not solve

the problem. Learning to cope will cause us to shut our eyes while the problem grows. Trying to change others will create a pressure cooker that will explode into more problems. We must face the only sure source of peace and relief. We must deal with the root, our own beliefs!

## Codependency: The New Catch Phrase

In the 1980s a terminology began to emerge describing what seemed to be a new emotional problem: codependency. At first this terminology was used to describe people who were dependent upon someone else who was dependent upon some destructive substance like alcohol or drugs. Even though the codependent was not a substance abuser, he (or she)<sup>1</sup> was dependent upon someone who was. Therefore, he was “codependent.” It was as if he joined in and participated in the addiction through a relationship with the person who was addicted. Over the years, the concept of codependency has developed and expanded. It now takes several pages to describe the tendencies that have been labeled as codependency.

A simple root definition of codependency would be this: “to look to someone or something outside of ourselves to meet a need that can only be met in ourselves.” In relation to people, the codependent tends to depend on others for something he has no right to expect. For example, the codependent often seeks the approval of others as a substitute for self-worth. He may depend on others to make his decisions. He may expect others to make him happy. Whatever the need, the key is he looks to others for something that they cannot truly give.

Melody Beattie does a great job of identifying codependent tendencies in her book, *Codependent No More*.<sup>2</sup> As you peruse her list, you will certainly find some codependent tendency of your own. No one is free from every codependent tendency. Any time our behavior is driven by insecurity or the feeling of lack, that behavior is a codependent expression. Sadly, codependency is actually encouraged and nurtured in many relationships. Codependent behavior calls for codependent responses. These codependent responses often become the false security around which a relationship is built.

For example, a controlling person may need others to agree and submit as a way to boost his struggling self-worth. He will instinctively seek out a relationship

with someone whose insecurities drive her to give in to his control. They are both driven by insecurity. Their individual behavior calls for a codependent response from the other. He wants to control someone to boost his ego. She wants to be controlled to avoid responsibility. They may both complain and criticize one another. But, the truth is, they both deeply need the codependent responses that are inspired by their own behavior.

Codependency is not a new thing. Only the name is new. This is a 1980s and '90s terminology for an age-old problem. Actually, it is one of the oldest problems found in the Bible. It is at the root of every interrelational conflict. It is the underlying and often unseen force that works behind every addiction. It is the cause of aggressive behavior. It can lead one person into total aggression and another into total passivity. It is deceitful; it changes form so as not to be easily detected. In some circles it is rewarded because it can disguise itself as commitment, dedication and loyalty. It can appear as love, and it is rarely identified even as its toxicity erodes a marriage. It can make a man faithful to one woman, even though he hates her. It can make another man unfaithful to his wife, even though he loves her.

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CODEPENDENCY  
IS ONE OF  
THE OLDEST  
PROBLEMS  
FOUND IN THE  
BIBLE.

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Codependency can work its way into every good thing and destroy it. It can become the leaven that permeates and spoils the entire loaf. It can become the strange quirk that causes a good business to fail. It can be the unpredictable factor that eventually makes a good relationship go bad. It can be the unseen "demon" that seems to follow you through life to destroy every good thing that happens. It is the root of why you lose control in certain settings. When the beliefs that empower codependent behavior are present, it will grow as fruit in every area of your life. Yet, because its form changes from situation to situation, you and I are deceived into picking the fruit but never identifying the one root that connects all the various manifestations! In other words, we may deal with some of our behavior, but we very seldom identify and address the true root issue.

Whether you are a classic codependent or not, you will find that it is when you give in to codependent tendencies that destruction and pain come into your life. By identifying the root and establishing new beliefs, the fruit will fall from the tree and you will find a new quality of life filled with peace, joy and meaningful relationships!

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### Endnotes

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1. In order to simplify this writing, I am going to primarily use “he” rather than the politically correct “he or she.” Of course, this in no way limits codependency to the male species! Every human being is susceptible, regardless of gender.
2. Meolody Beattie, *Codependent No More*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Hazelden Publishing, 1986).