

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Kaley:

Hi, everyone. Thanks for tuning into the *Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast*, where we share biblical Truth for any girl in any season. My name is Kaley Olson, and I'm here with my cohost, Meredith Brock.

Meredith:

Well, hello, Kaley. It's good to be back. We are here with our final installment of "Therapy and Theology." In this series, Lysa TerKeurst, along with her director of theological research, Joel Muddamalle, and her licensed professional counselor, Jim Cress, talk through the hard realities of life through the lens of therapy and theology. Now, today's episode is a buzzword, folks.

Kaley:

Yes, it is.

Meredith:

We will be addressing codependency, and we're thankful for the understanding that Lysa, Joel, and Jim bring to this really hard, often misunderstood topic.

Kaley:

Yes, absolutely. This "Therapy and Theology" series has been a nice break from our regular programming, Meredith. Don't you agree? Listeners, we pray that this has been a blessing to you. I am so thankful for Lysa's leadership of Proverbs 31 and the wisdom she brings to all areas of ministry, especially to this idea to start the "Therapy and Theology" series. It's so unique, and I just love that we get to do this.

Kaley:

It reminds me of what we do every day. We help everyone know the Truth and live the Truth because we believe that it changes everything. If the ministry of Proverbs 31 has been a blessing to you, maybe it's helped you in a significant way, maybe this series has been helpful to you, would you consider financially partnering with us so that we can reach even more women just like you with biblical resources that help them grow closer to the Lord? You can make a donation today if you feel led to do so by visiting Proverbs31.org/donate.

Meredith:

Thanks so much for that, Kaley. I think most people don't recognize that we are a nonprofit, and we function off of generous donations. We would love for you to consider giving if you are able to. Now, like always, before we jump into the conversation, we want to remind you that if you're a parent, some of the content in this series might be a little too mature for those young years. If you're in the car with the kiddos, we suggest waiting to listen and process this on your own. All right, friends. Here's Lysa, Jim, and Joel.

Lysa:

Forgiveness is a regular part of relationships, but what do we do when our relationship has gotten to the place where we are recognizing pretty extreme, unhealthy patterns? Maybe even to the point where we are enabling behavior in other people that goes beyond the work of forgiveness.

Lysa:

I'm joined today for this session on "Therapy and Theology" with two of my great friends in ministry, Joel Muddamalle. He's the Director of Theology at Proverbs 31 Ministries. No stranger to this podcast and also no stranger is Jim Cress, my personal counselor, and the perfect voice to speak into today's topic. Some people call it—

Jim:

Because I struggle with it so much?

Lysa:

Well, I was not going to place that on you, Jim.

Jim:

They say if you spot it, you got it, so okay. I'm all in.

Lysa:

I'm going to let you own whatever you feel like you need to own in this but I'm certainly not placing that on you.

Jim:

Thank you.

Lysa:

In all seriousness, I think I've used the term, "What do we do when we enable others to continue [inaudible] toxic behaviors that's no longer healthy for the relationship?" I think because we've spent so much time talking about forgiveness, I want to be super clear. Forgiveness is not giving people permission to treat us in any way that they want to treat us. I thought it would be important to talk about this term "codependency."

Jim:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lysa:

But I do want to — right off the bat — say, when I hear the term “codependency,” I start to get very afraid of what you're going to say and maybe because inadvertently or maybe because I didn't even recognize it; I've put on display some codependent behaviors, and it feels offensive for you to tell me that behavior is evidence of codependency, when in reality maybe I just don't really understand what that term means.

Jim:

Yeah.

Lysa:

I don't know, Joel, have you ever felt that way?

Joel:

Oh yeah, all the time.

Lysa:

Even doing this episode today, I just thought, "Whoa. Is the fact that I'm interested in codependency..."

Joel:

Am I guilty?

Lysa:

"...evidence that I very much do that?" But do you find, Jim, that most relationships have maybe a healthy dependency? We don't want to confuse that healthy quality with something that is then deemed unhealthy in codependency, right?

Jim:

Exactly. Very well put. If you have a belly button, you have codependency. It really is true. It's just true, it's universal, it's global, and quite frankly, codependency has gotten far too bad of a rap if you want to know my opinion on it. Because there is a sense that ... And I have this little coin in my office I will spin in my hand. One side of it is compassion. Starts with C-O, and as I'm into compassion for another person often, I might carry it too far, and then I'm into codependency.

Jim:

Sometimes I might start out in codependency [inaudible] of someone judging me for that is no, I really am compassionate, and I really do care. Codependency comes out in the 1980s around someone who is in a relationship with an addict or an alcoholic, or it can even be in parenting, enabling your kids over and over again. “Co” means “with.” Dependency. They're dependent on some agent or some addiction, and you're kind of dependent on them, and there's a sense of that almost external identity, like with codependency. I'm okay if you're okay. If you're okay, then I'm okay. Are you okay? Are you okay? Back and forth, back and forth, trying to regulate my emotions with people-pleasing.

Jim:

That's going to end up in a cul-de-sac eventually, but I think ... Let me say one other thing because I don't want to forget this. Being a certified partner trauma therapist, I do a lot of work with partners.

That means someone who's been betrayed by a spouse or someone they're in a relationship with, especially sexual betrayal. Our field has nuanced and changed that we're now not stereotyping people. Labels are for jars and cans, they're not for people anyhow, and to say, "You're just codependent" when they're in betrayal trauma, and we've had this conversation. They're being labeled, which can quite frankly, be abusive. I just wanted to put my disclaimer out as we start that.

Lysa:

Yeah, I think that's important because again, there seems to be a lot of misunderstanding —

Jim:

Very much.

Lysa:

— around codependency. What is your best definition of what codependency is?

Jim:

Two things I will say. One is when I'm working harder on another person than they're working harder on themselves. If I'm really trying to do their work. And the other would be if there's a sense that, and I alluded to that a moment ago, I'm trying to get emotionally regulated ... We even talk about emotional sobriety, that I'm sober emotionally. I'm not really okay in and of myself if you're not okay with me. If you're mad at me or you're not approving of what I'm doing, I will hustle for my worthiness with you in codependency to try to feel like I'm okay.

Jim:

It's you, and it's the next person behind you that's always going to be the person holding the ultimate scepter saying, "Jim, you are blessed. You are okay. You're not okay." It's basically going to be hustling for my worthiness.

Lysa:

Mm-hmm. That's what I might be doing, and then what is the other person doing in a codependent relationship? If I'm hustling for my worthiness, what are they doing?

Jim:

Well, if it's the other person in the classic instance with the addiction, they are enjoying you enabling them. They're enjoying, they're getting a free ride to some degree that they can continue to harm you or to push on your boundaries, cross your boundaries.

Lysa:

Use you.

Jim:

Use you, and there is no consequence. It's almost defying God's Word that you reap what you sow. Relationally, they have someone carry their water for them, as we like to say. Someone else does their work for them. They literally are enabling them, not holding them accountable for anything, so they're

getting this free ride, which, that's terrible to do with someone, either with sin, which is the ultimate addiction, or any type of addiction. I'm not held accountable for what I'm doing.

Lysa:

Let me throw out a couple scenarios and Joel, maybe you'll have a scenario you want to throw out because I just love this. I feel like we're getting free counseling, right?

Joel:

This is so good.

Lysa:

This is amazing. Okay, let's say you're in a relationship where you recognize it is important to want ... That you recognize in yourself, I'll say to myself, "It really is important that this other person is pleased with me." Okay, so healthy, not healthy?

Jim:

I have to investigate that. The purposes in a person's heart are deep waters. We got to go down deep. I want to know a little bit about your family of origin, what role did you play there? In other words, was there a sense that you were hustling for your worthiness or trying to please to win mom or dad or somebody else's approval? I'd like to always know ... We say if it's hysterical, it's historical. How far back does this go?

Lysa:

Why does that matter? Why does it matter how far back it goes?

Jim:

Because there's a lot around, and we've got five shows to do on this that we can't do today, but you study attachment in childhood.

Lysa:

Okay.

Jim:

The mirroring especially of a mother and a baby, to look, am I okay? Am I safe? Do you like me? And someone just averts their face, and I'm trying to get mom [inaudible]. I need you to focus on me. We may find out that this is a long runway they used instead of thinking ... I don't believe there's really an adult onset of codependency.

Lysa:

Okay.

Jim:

I think it's happened a lot back here in childhood, so to understand how deep does this go, and am I desiring? I do. I'm an Enneagram 7, and I'm just me. I want people to like me. I really do. That's the truth.

Is that a desire I have? Or is it a demand, and it's life giving? At least I'd like you to approve of me, but if you don't, I'm okay. If you don't approve of me with codependency, I feel like I'm just all dysregulated and like our intensive, we've called "You, Me, We," the codependency person often does not have a "me." It's you-we or we-you, and I don't have that, and a codependent person also does not have a no, which is I say "no" and I feel like I'm going to lose this relationship.

Jim:

See how it's engulfing of the other person? It's not like if you're disappointed, "Okay, you're disappointed." I feel like, no, I'm in trouble here if you are disappointed with me.

Lysa:

It's almost when the pleasing of another person, there's a history there. I get that, but also I think what I hear you saying is it's when you feel like if the other person is not pleased with me, it almost feels like DEFCON5. I am not-

Jim:

Totally.

Lysa:

... going to be okay until they are once again happy with me.

Jim:

And two other people behind them because I want to please two other... It's this endless, for some people, sense that I am not going to be able to be content and self-regulated. It's all an extra [inaudible] of control.

Lysa:

Because I do agree with you. I think to some extent, most of us want the people we're in relationship to —

Jim:

I think so.

Lysa:

— like us and to be happy with us and all of that. But it's when it crosses that line where we're no longer able to say, "I'm still okay even if you're not okay with me."

Jim:

And believe it. I love that. Say it and believe it, and I ponder why God put mathematically, you have to check this out in your Bible software, but Psalm 118:8 is the apex with the verses in the Bible. It's the middle verse of the Bible, Psalm 118:8, end of all things, it's better to put your trust in the Lord than your confidence in a person.

Joel:

Huh.

Jim:

So, I just think that's ... The Bible also talks about fear of man, fear of people, so there's a sense there that I'm really putting my trust in you. Anxiety. I can breathe. Everything's okay if you're okay, and we have the classic book that came out, what, in the '70s or '80s, *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. It's the codependent person putting the "if" in there. I'm okay if you're okay with me.

Lysa:

Part of the reason this feels so toxic is it's hard to get that regulating worth statement from someone who themselves is dysregulated.

Jim:

You've got it.

Lysa:

Either because of unhealth in their own life or addictions or chaotic behaviors or toxic thinking. You're going to someone who they themselves are not regulated and you're asking them to regulate you.

Jim:

You're going to an empty well.

Lysa:

Right.

Jim:

There's no water there.

Lysa:

That's good. Joel, okay, what is your thinking around this? Question, example.

Joel:

I do have a question for Jim.

Jim:

You guys didn't tell me this was going to be all about me answering questions here.

Joel:

It's so good. I'm so excited right now. You know, Jim, you said that with a codependent relationship, and you used the "You, Me, We," this thing we're going to do here shortly. There's a loss of the me. It's a you and a we. I'm curious, it sounds like there is a loss of identity.

Jim:

You hit it.

Joel:

Where does identity play into the reality of this codependent relationship? Then I'm curious how that fleshes out with how do we rightly see ourselves?

Jim:

Well, I think the question of tying into this and answering that, who am I? If I look in the mirror, think of going into great fairytale classics; Disney's done that. "Mirror mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" We're looking, saying, "Tell me who I am." There is some wiring in that, that we're wired to be able to look off of another person and try to find out, maybe you can help me in a healthy relationship more reflect who I really am.

Jim:

But that piece that we've talked about, *the imago dei*, the image of God, or going vertical and saying, "God..." Think about how many. I quit counting how many "I am" statements of who we are in Christ and who God has said I would be and who I am. That piece is I'm struggling with a level of believing that when it's already been spoken of me and to me, that I'm looking for another person to tell me who I am. You better find the right person to tell you who you are because you get someone who says, "I'll tell you exactly who you are. You're my servant, you will let me get by with this. You will do this for me." That's where it gets really dangerous.

Lysa:

Joel, I think there's a good definition to add to what you're saying, Jim, because I think it is really important. It's not just the identity but the role that you are expected to play in the relationship.

Jim:

Big time. Yeah.

Lysa:

I think it's the loss — that I am an individual and that I have needs that matter, and maybe it's the fear that if I communicate my needs, they will no longer help make me feel okay, and I run the risk of losing the relationship. But also, I'm expected to play a role that I may or may not have ever agreed to play. It's almost like you kind of get sucked into a situation, and before you've given it any rational, logical thought, you get into these relational patterns that become very one-sided.

Lysa:

I think the one-sided part of this is really important to pay attention to. Darlene Lancer has this quote. She said, "Codependency is characterized by a person belonging to a dysfunctional, one-sided relationship where one person relies on the other for meeting nearly all of their emotional and self-esteem needs. It also describes a relationship that enables another person to maintain their irresponsible, addictive, or under-achieving behavior."

Lysa:

I think when I read that definition, I start to see the unhealthy relational dynamics that are feeding into this, that it doesn't serve either person well.

Jim:

True.

Lysa:

I think what's been complicated for me is feeling like if I break this toxic pattern, and I am writing this book on forgiveness, and I've studied, and I feel such a sense of wanting to be a forgiving person, somehow it feels like breaking the toxic behavior can almost feel unforgiving in a sense. Or if I'm having to break this toxic behavior by putting some safe boundaries in place, which again I've stated many times, I know you have too, Jim, boundaries aren't to shove the other person away or to push the other person out of my life. Boundaries are to hold myself together.

Lysa:

But sometimes, this dynamic of fixing the codependency can make me feel like I'm doing the unkind thing, which almost feels like the unforgiving thing.

Jim:

I love how you put that because that is going to be one of the core issues for one struggling with codependency — instead of saying the codependent person. The one struggling with codependency, with some external [locus] of control of their own identity — I'm okay if you're okay, are you okay and then I can be okay, and then I put a boundary up and the boundary doesn't need to be explained, a codependent person often, I just said the name again, will often put the word "okay" question mark at the end of the boundary.

Jim:

This is not what I'm going to do or this is what I'm going to do, okay? Are you okay? But when they begin to take the "okay question mark" off and say, "That doesn't work for me. This is what I'm going to do and this is what I'm not going to do." Children explain, adults inform. Sometimes codependent people will explain. Then I'm going to have to fear the loss of being stonewalled, something else coming on, that if I do this, I might lose the relationship.

Jim:

Well, here's the newsflash. You might lose the relationship. You really might. You're changing the contract because that dependent person who's been dependent on you to carry their firewood for them, carry their water, do all their work, enable them, not require them to show up, really not to require them to show up like an adult, you're changing the contract and most won't like it. So, there's going to be this fear of abandonment. Yeah, it's going to be there.

Lysa:

In reality, if the relationship is built on an unhealthy or an uneven or even a toxic contract, the loss of that relationship might not be a bad thing for you.

Jim:

You said it, sister. That is exactly right.

Lysa:

I think as a Christian who has felt a great responsibility to bring peace into every situation, I'm a natural peacemaker anyways, but I think I have for so long thought if I don't make this relationship work, it speaks ill of me as a person. I think doing the counseling work that you and I have done, Jim, I am finally okay if you're not okay.

Jim:

Notice what you did there, to borrow a word. You are a peacemaker because blessed are the peacemakers. That's good and healthy and biblical — and the codependent, struggling person will be a peacekeeper. Different word than a peacemaker. I've got to keep the peace at all costs. Sometimes you can flow in and out of being a peacemaker and then be the peacekeeper. I got to keep everything settled here when you have no control over these people.

Lysa:

Right. When I say I've had to learn to finally be okay if you're not okay, what I mean by that, it may still make me sad.

Jim:

Of course.

Lysa:

It may still affect my emotions, but I am no longer willing to step into that situation and work harder on you than you are willing to work on yourself. Okay? Joel, thoughts?

Jim:

Come on now.

Joel:

Oh gosh, I think there's a few. One is the boundaries thing, because I think that when I hear boundaries, particularly from a biblical standpoint, there can be a hesitation of, "Wait a minute. We're supposed to be all things to all people." "Wait a minute, we're supposed to love people the way that Jesus loved people." It could seem like there is this hesitancy to put up boundaries because if you put up boundaries, you're being such an unloving person.

Jim:

People have called, believe it or not, I know you know this, they've called Jesus codependent because greater love hath no man. He laid his life down. He said, "I have the power to do all this. I'll just let you beat me to death and do all that."

Joel:

Yeah.

Jim:

It's crazy.

Joel:

Yeah, and think about this. We find the first instance of a boundary placed by God on Adam and Eve. All of the trees, they're all good and pleasing to the eye, but yet this one tree, do not eat—aka, boundary.

Lysa:

Right.

Joel:

The boundary was for their benefit. It is for their good, and so often we think of boundaries as something that deprive us of something, and yet the biblical picture of boundaries are actually something that sets us free to experience goodness in its greatest scenario and its greatest pleasure.

Joel:

I think of also the ten commandments and the law, the Torah. The Hebrew word Torah is law, but it's also instruction. We're being instructed on how to live. Boundaries actually are both instructive for myself and actually for the people that are going to experience those boundaries externally. There's something that's really important. Lysa, you were talking about peace, and I think there's a couple caveats of peace that we should think of.

Joel:

John Calvin, he says it really well. He gives two caveats for peace. He says, one, we should not seek peace so much that we refuse to undergo hatred for Christ.

Jim:

Wow.

Joel:

That's a boundary, right? Our allegiance to Christ is superior to everything else.

Lysa:

Wow.

Joel:

And the second one he says is courtesy ... I love this. Courtesy should not dissent to compliance, leaving us to flatter the vices of men for the sake of preserving peace.

Jim:

That's codependency if I ever heard it.

Lysa:

That's so good.

Jim:

Wow, thank you for that.

Lysa:

If the problem is codependency and part of the solution is to learn how to draw appropriate boundaries, I've listed out here some good questions to consider as we're toggling through this because different relationship dynamics are going to require different types of boundaries.

Jim:

That's right.

Lysa:

And also, different degrees of boundary. Here's some questions to consider that have been really helpful for me. What kind of person do I want to be? Not just in this relationship, but consistently in all of my relationships. This question has helped me a lot because I've started to recognize no one is going to help me be a better me. I have to put in place what is necessary so that I can stay consistent in who I've determined I want to be.

Jim:

Yeah.

Lysa:

A classic statement that I used to say, and I think either maturity is helping me or counseling is helping me, I'm not sure, but I would say, "You make me so frustrated. You make me so angry. You make me feel so depleted." Okay, so what I'm really saying is I have given you the power —

Jim:

You bet.

Lysa:

— to do something that is affecting me on a level where I can't be what I really want to be. What I started to finally recognize is another person obviously affects you, but they can't make you be something unless you give them enough power to do that.

Jim:

That's right.

Lysa:

So, that is an indication of a script. When I hear myself starting to say that or think that, then I recognize there is a boundary that's not in place here that needs to be in place. Obviously, we're not robotic, obviously other people affect us.

Jim:

That's right.

Lysa:

Obviously we're going to step into pitfalls in our relationship, we're going to trip over things, so we're going to have moments where we don't do all of this relational stuff perfectly, but when it's a pretty consistent cycle that we're in of as long as I make this person happy, they make me feel this way but when I make them not happy, either directly or indirectly —

Jim:

Yeah, that's good.

Lysa:

— then they have the power to make me feel this way, there's a boundary that's missing. Here's another question. What do I need to do in this relationship to stay consistent in my character, conduct, and communication? Those three Cs are really important for me to pay attention to. In my character, in my conduct, how I act and react, and in my conversation, what I say and what I don't say. I think I can quickly recognize I'm getting pulled into a toxic situation when I am saying things that long term, I normally wouldn't say.

Jim:

That's good.

Lysa:

But in the short-term, if I get kicked into the limbic system where I'm in almost panic mode of fight, flight, freeze, or I also say “freak out.”

Jim:

You do.

Lysa:

Right? Then I'm going to say words that a regulated Lysa is not apt to say. What are your thoughts?

Jim:

Well, you go to the limbic brain piece. If I'm fighting, that's where I'm going to probably debate people back and forth. If I'm flighting, I'm just going to run away and get away and probably run away from who I am [inaudible]. If I freeze, that's the worst one of all of them. I don't even know what to say or like you said, “freak out.” Something's going on in your body, your brain and your true identity even in Christ is saying, “Alert, there's a problem. You don't feel safe here.”

Jim:

First, pay attention to it and then think of, “Wonder what doesn't feel safe here?” Often what it is is I am feeling manipulated or controlled by this person or I think the bigger one around codependency is I am afraid again if I put this boundary down ... People do this in marriage. If I say “no” to this ... Do you think you should say no? Well, yeah, I should. If I say no, it's going to cost me. I go, “And your second point is?” It is going to cost you.

Jim:

The boundaries thing, or I should say even the codependency and blaming part, think of this as we all have back in Genesis 3. The whole thing goes down, and God says after Eve, he says, "Adam, what up? What's happened?" And he blamed God, he blamed Him. "It's that woman you gave me." Blamed God and we've been doing that ever since. Blame. And if blame is an attempt to discharge pain and discomfort, look underneath with someone struggling with codependency, what are you afraid of?

Jim:

If someone uses the victim language, "You made me mad," you're giving your power [inaudible] to stop and say, "You do this, and I'm not comfortable, and I'm angry with this, or that hurts me." It's that language of since Adam, we've been blaming ever since, blaming somebody else for us and our own issue.

Lysa:

What do you do ... Jim and Joel, I'm going to ask you both this from a theological standpoint and a therapeutic standpoint. This is one of my greatest moments. I get both of you at the same time.

Jim:

Tag team. We've got to do it, man.

Joel:

Let's go.

Lysa:

What do you do when you do draw that boundary, and you hope that the person will respect it, but they refuse to respect it and then your greatest fear does come true? You draw that boundary, you stay consistent with the boundary, and you communicate what I do have to give, what I don't have to give, the other person has such a severe reaction that if you're on the phone, they slam down the phone or they ghost you and just stop talking to you altogether but in some way, they communicate, "I'm done with you." End of story.

Lysa:

Now, from a theological standpoint and the therapeutic standpoint, what do you do at that moment?

Joel:

I think it's complex because there's a lot of other factors that we're asking questions of. Are they believers? Are they non-believers? Have they submitted themselves to a local church? Is there discipleship that's taking place in their lives? Those are all aspects of it, but I turn back to Romans 12:18 and we talked about this in the very first episode that we discussed. This is what Paul says. "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*"

Joel:

So, the responsibility of the pursuit of peace is on us if it's possible. In that instance, it seems like what Paul is getting at is while that other person may not be willing to respect the boundaries that you've put up and while they may actually in fact cause chaos in your life, you actually have a responsibility for internal peace and peace with others.

Jim:

Yes.

Joel:

If that means that you have to make a hard decision in order to assure the greater peace is being observed and maintained for yourself and for others, you actually have a biblical responsibility to pursue that and yet still maintain a posture of love, care, concern for the other person without inviting them in to disrupt what the Lord is actually calling you to do, which is maintain peace.

Lysa:

I think that's an excellent point that you're making, Joel, especially when we have a responsibility to the people that we are doing everyday life with, the people that are in our immediate family, the people that we work with, and we have a responsibility to not let this other situation tear us down so much to the point where we have nothing left to give because we're so spent in an uneven relationship where we're giving, giving, giving and the other person is consuming, consuming, consuming.

Lysa:

I guess what I hear you say is if you know that you have given what you can and that you're not carrying a burden of unforgiveness toward this person, you still are carrying a soft heart, maybe you do the work of forgiveness just between you and God, forgiving that person but making peace with the fact ... The most peaceful thing might be to not allow that relationship to continue in the same way. That's not you being unkind to them. That's actually living out that verse of "as far as it depends on you, bring peace." The most peaceful thing might be to not continue to engage with something that feels quite toxic.

Joel:

I think there is something spectacular about our obedience in that scenario that is a means of grace for the other person.

Jim:

Totally.

Joel:

Imagine if we don't do that, and imagine if we continue to invite that person in to continue to do that, and yet the intention that the Lord has is actually when we set up the boundary and that barrier, it is going to set that other person down a trajectory towards the possibility of their personal healing and their personal growth. Actually, we have a part to play in that. It just looks a little bit different.

Lysa:

Yeah.

Jim:

I'd like to speak to that and kind of follow up with that. In part of the therapy world, we have what we call the "Can't Won't" principle and often we're saying, "I just can't do that," or, "I can't" and we really mean won't. You know you're moving out of some codependency when you move "can't" to "won't." I won't do that. I won't have this conversation, nor will I say, "Are you okay with that?" I won't do this.

Jim:

The other piece around this is, and I'm springing off of what you just said, with *agape* love, hopefully, clearly being able to see the other person's highest good, have a vision of the other person's highest good. To use some language here, if you're sinning against me in this relationship and I cosign it, addicts, people who are in sin, they're wanting you to cosign their behavior. If I do that, I'm not practicing *agape* love.

Jim:

Let's kick this up higher. What I'm doing in that moment is I'm actually helping you sin against me, which means I'm sinning against you. Not a pretty picture. Then I think of Jesus when He said, "*O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, I'm weeping over you. O, how I would gather you like a mother hen gathers its chicks, but you would not.*" There's a sense and to your original question, I'm going to go off what do you do, mental and spiritual health is a commitment to reality at all costs.

Jim:

It is not just a commitment to reality. It's a commitment to reality at all costs and therefore, what I want to do is want to grieve the loss of that relationship. It hurts mom, dad, family member, friend says, "Fine." Mute and do not disturb. I will not call you, I'll ghost you and grieve that. Get you an Aaron and a [inaudible] like Moses had to hold you, get some friends to say, "Hey, can I share with you I'm in pain?" That's fine, but you're going to have to grieve.

Jim:

Boundaries always require grief. You're going to have to grieve [inaudible] at least the loss of relationship. They might peace out on you and take off and you go, "Well, that cost me a lot." Yeah, sure did.

Lysa:

Okay, here's another one of my questions. What are their most realistic and unrealistic expectations or desires of me, and what are my most realistic and unrealistic expectations or desires of them? The reason I think this is important, we've talked before Jim, expectations that are placed on us can often be premeditated resentments.

Jim:

That's right.

Lysa:

You've taught me that in every relationship, we have a contract where I have something that I'm bringing to the table, you have something you're bringing to the table, but if our desires in that relationship are not together and communicated in one agreement, then we don't even realize there's a contract, but you will realize it when you break —

Jim:

Oh yeah.

Lysa:

... your side of the contract. That's often when, just like James... I believe it's James Chapter 4, verse 1.

Jim:

[crosstalk]

Lysa:

Yeah, "*what causes the fights and the quarrels among you?*" Is it not these desires, these longings that you're bringing that you fully expected that they would get met and they're not met? I think taking an honest assessment of is this relationship set up for failure right in the very process of the contract that we have because you're expecting something from me that I am either now, because I've gotten healthy, no longer willing to give you or it's just so unrealistic it becomes impossible. I think that's an important thing to think about.

Jim:

Sometimes yes, it can be like a tick on the dog mentality. A tick gets on the dog to suck the life out and often in codependent relationships, there can be two ticks and no dog or one tick, and I just want to suck the life out of you. With that, I think that piece of expectations being premeditated resentments, we're talking about unhealthy expectations, whatever they may be.

Jim:

But healthy expectations that say "if we're going to be in a relationship, let's go real simple here, I will not be verbally abused. You don't get to name call me, you don't get to use..." You're so creative, you use similar metaphor. You're like a jerk or like a blank, some ugly name and you called me that, so I have boundaries that say I won't be around you or I won't talk with you if you're going to talk that way because I have an expectation in my self-care that I'm not going to allow someone to treat me that way.

Jim:

Then again, I don't say, "Okay. You okay if I..." My boundary is here. I do have some healthy expectations.

Lysa:

I think that's really good.

Joel:

I got a question.

Jim:

Fire away.

Joel:

I got to ask it. I am not the one in the codependent relationship, but I am watching two people that I care about deeply, and they are in a codependent relationship, and I am stuck, Jim, because I don't know what is an appropriate place for me to interact with or if I set up boundaries with those people because their codependency has this waterfall effect, right?

Jim:

Yeah.

Joel:

People around them are getting splashed by it but then if I put up boundaries, then I don't have the opportunity to be a witness for something. What do we do in that situation?

Jim:

You ever try to separate two cats in a cat fight?

Joel:

I don't like cats at all.

Jim:

Okay, [crosstalk].

Joel:

Yeah, it's rough.

Lysa:

It's dangerous.

Jim:

[crosstalk] Right. I like that you said, "What can I do?" Two people are over here fighting or in a codependent or a toxic relationship. I'd step back with you as my buddy and say, "Well dude, let's just talk for a moment. What's the pull on you?" That's what it's called, it's a pull. The pull on you to do anything. We're not going to doubt your motives, just your modus operandi, the method of operating. Your motive is you're a lover of people and God. That's a fact we know about you. What's the pull on you to get involved at all? Anybody want to answer that?

Joel:

I want to say peace. Yeah, no, you're right. I'm rooted down. [crosstalk] I want peace for them.

Jim:

Yes, you do.

Joel:

I want peace for me.

Jim:

Yes.

Joel:

I want peace for our family, and I want them to live in what I know is so much better of a reality [crosstalk].

Jim:

You have a vision for them, don't you?

Joel:

I have a vision for them.

Jim:

Totally.

Joel:

And it pains me every time I have to face the reality that that vision is unmet.

Lysa:

Is it okay for Joel to communicate that vision to the two people that he sees in this unhealthy relationship without labeling it, without calling it anything, without adding to the drama? Just saying ... One of my other questions here is how am I suffering the consequences of their choices more than they are?

Jim:

This is right what you were alluding to.

Joel:

Yes, yes.

Jim:

Perfect.

Lysa:

I think if you have a conversation and explain the consequences that you are suffering because of this behavior pattern that you see without naming, shaming, blaming or any of that, just speak to it from experience and then what would you say, Jim?

Jim:

I would say what he said. Jesus did it. I have some water here for you. It's refreshing. Are you open to a dialogue? I would like to offer this to you. My fingerprints are still on it, but my hand backs off and I'm not going to be like, "Are you going to drink it?" It's like Jesus, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." I don't think he's just peeking all over. Give them the space.

Jim:

I have a vision. First, I always start with, "Are you open to me?" Whoever these people are, to share a thought. If their brain can buy in and go, "Yeah," because no one wants unsolicited advice. That's classic

in codependency. Codependent people will always be giving unsolicited advice because they feel good if you take their advice but you say, "I have some..." They say, "Yeah, I'm open to it." "Here's something here. I have some wisdom. I have a thought," and then take your hands off, as Cory [inaudible] said. Hold things loosely so God doesn't have to pry your fingers off things like relationships.

Jim:

If they drink it, they do. If they don't, I sit back here and call a friend and say, "I wish they would drink it." Of course you do, but sometimes what we're doing, "You drink it yet? You've done that yet?" Or we just barge in with advice and they're not ready to hear it. Does that make sense?

Joel:

Totally.

Jim:

You offer your wisdom and your heart and so much what Jesus did. I mean, this is not new, folks. Jesus said, "*I stand at the door and knock. I weep over you.*" The gospel came first to the Jew, then to the Greek, and He's going to continue, but to them who did believe. Jesus has set the path out to say... Jesus was a 100% non-codependent. 100% not codependent. He says, "I offer this to you, and if you don't take it, you get to choose that, and I get to grieve over that."

Lysa:

I'll say just speaking from experiential wisdom as we wrap up this conversation, which again could be many sessions, maybe we'll do-

Jim:

Absolutely.

Lysa:

... part two, part three, whatever it takes, right? But for today, we're going to land it here.

Jim:

Yeah.

Lysa:

I think what I will say is in doing the counseling work that we did in the marriage trauma that Art and I walked through, one of the most important actions that I took, I did probably many things wrong, but I would say this was finally a moment where I knew, as hard as it was, I was doing the right thing. I decided I was no longer willing to work harder on Art than Art was willing to work on himself. I very much recognize in drawing some of the boundaries that I had to draw that I grieved the possibility of losing him.

Jim:

Yeah.

Lysa:

In reality, as I look back on it now, when I stopped trying to be his savior, it freed me up to be his wife. It allowed him space to make the decision if he was willing to work on himself or not, and in our case, he did decide to work on himself. As a matter of fact, he will often say now, "Lysa, that is yours to work on on your side of the street, and this is mine to work on on my side of the street." As we do our own work, then we can come back together and after, and only after we worked on it on our own sides of the street, then we can come back together and work on it together.

Lysa:

I think it was miraculous to watch what God did. I knew I ran the risk of losing the relationship but it's only when I did what you just did, I set before him the possibility that could be but I removed my hand off and said, "I have to let you choose. I cannot choose this for you."

Jim:

What you described, may I just say quickly, is how beautiful of a description. Not codependent, or I just won't be codependent anymore, not independent. I'll just be over here, I don't need you. But healthy, inter- and intra-dependence where we're depending on each other. There are quite a few one another commands in the Scripture. You're on your side of the street, you're on your side of the street and then we come with that healthy...

Jim:

Because some people will pole vault right out of codependency, and I'll just be ruggedly independent, I don't need anybody. But that healthy, you talk about you and Art, interdependence there, that's what it's all about.

Lysa:

Well, thank you. I don't know that we ever did it perfectly, we may still not —

Jim:

Hope not.

Lysa:

— do it perfectly, but the very thing that I feared would cause me to lose the relationship was the only shot I had at continuing a relationship that was true and healthy and that both of us could function in a healthy way inside that relationship. Again, I recognize what we're talking about today. It is messy and certainly one episode of "Therapy and Theology" probably is not going to fix all the situations that you're facing today. Please don't hesitate to reach out to your pastor or you can also reach out to the American Association of Christian Counselors or to Focus on the Family. Find out about a counselor that can help you that is in your area.

Lysa:

I always want to encourage you to do that. Sometimes I think what we do here with these "Therapy and Theology" episodes is bringing together the biblical truth and the principles needed for emotional healing, but please know that this is just the start of a conversation. If you need to do deeper work around this, please do. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you guys for being here, thank you for the process —

Jim:

Thank you.

Lysa:

— that you both walked me through, not only in the living of this forgiveness message, but also as you have read every word and helped me navigate the whole writing process of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. Thank you for joining us today. God bless you.

Kaley:

Well Meredith, I'm not sure if Lysa, Joel, and Jim are listening to their own [inaudible] team right now but friends, if you're listening, thank you so much for bringing your "Therapy and Theology" expertise to what we've learned over the past four weeks. Guys, if this series has been helpful to you, we want you to share it with a friend. You can also find videos on the same podcast episodes on your YouTube channel if you just search Proverbs 31 Ministries.

Meredith:

Well, and let's not forget some of the resources we want to point you to from this incredible series and that is Lysa's book that was recently released, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget: Discover How to Move On, Make Peace with Painful Memories, and Create a Life That's Beautiful Again*. It is available right now and in this book, Lysa shares a lot of her personal journey with forgiveness. We believe it's going to be a powerful tool for you as you walk through your own forgiveness journey.

Meredith:

Second, you can also get a companion to the book called *The Forgiveness Journal*. This journal includes short prayers, key scriptures, and it's all related back to the book as well as some journaling prompts for personal processing and some really beautiful photography from Lysa's home where she processed forgiveness herself.

Kaley:

Yes.

Meredith:

Both of these resources are available at p31bookstore.com.

Kaley:

Lastly, at Proverbs 31, we are big fans of counseling and processing what you're going through with a trusted guide. We talk about this every week, but we really do take counseling seriously, and we recommend it, so if you'd like to get connected to a counselor, we like to recommend the American Association of Christian Counselors, and you can find more information at their website at aacc.org. All right, Meredith, this is it. This is the end of "Therapy and Theology" series.

Meredith:

So sad.

Kaley:

I'm sad too. But guys, if this has been helpful to you, like we said at the beginning, please share this with a friend or friends who need this and come back and listen to it whenever you need it. At Proverbs 31, we believe when you know the Truth of God's Word and live out that Truth, it changes everything.