

Dependent/Codependent vs. Independent/Interdependent. (May 29, 2025)

When talking about marriage, Jesus repeated the instruction from Genesis, “and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’” (Matthew 19:5) As we have noted many times in our studies, Jesus makes it clear that the first step towards adulthood and marriage is achieving independence from our families of origin. However, for many people that is easier said than done.

In our current generation of helicopter-, lawnmower-, and bulldozer-parents, children can remain dependents of their parents until the age of 26. For adult children, striking out on their own can be strange and difficult after years of coddling and support. Oddly enough, it seems just as difficult on parents that have gained significant satisfaction and identity in the success of their children, to release them into the wild world with a beat up car, an overpriced rent, and an immature faith. But Biblically, Jesus seems to imply that the rewards outweigh the risks when it comes to independence.

One common misconception about independence that seems to be used as a reason not to pursue it, is that independence is portrayed as the equivalent of being alone. However, the Work and Family Researchers Network defines independence this way: “Adult independence is the term used commonly to refer to the transition to adulthood when young people are no longer wholly dependent on parents (financially, socially or psychologically) but would more usefully be defined in terms of a relation of interdependence.”

Independence does not mean that a person is self-sufficient, isolated, or alone. It simply means that they are not reliant or dependent on any single person, family, group, or institution. If a person remains dependent, their adult relationships will become codependent. If a person establishes adult independence, then their adult relationships can be mutually interdependent...which is how God designed marriage to work.

I believe Dr. Henry Cloud summarizes the difference between independence and dependence perfectly in this one quote:

“A mature person meets the demands of life,
while an immature person demands that life meets her demands.”
(Dr. Henry Cloud)