

LIVE OUT OF CONTROL

“The LORD sat enthroned at the flood, and the LORD sits as King forever.” (Psalm 29:10)

Where some dances are quiet and filled with grace and beauty, others consist of lumbering steps and unfamiliar rhythms. Sometimes you can hardly hear the music and are forced to dance a dance that’s not of your choosing. Who can you trust to lead the way when the steps are completely out of your control? The King who extends His hand and invites you to trust the One who holds you.

Psalm 29 abounds with imagery of God’s glory and sovereignty. The above verse reminds us that when the greatest world-wide natural disaster in history occurred, God was in control. And now, He still sits as King over every flood, our floods of personal disaster included. Before reading on, I urge you to stop and read the entire Psalm for yourself as a reminder that God is in control and can be trusted to bless His people with peace (vs. 11).

For us as believers, control is an illusion. Why then do we fight for control in an out-of-control world? Isn’t the basis of sin exactly that, the desire to be our own god and control our lives?

The root of my own need for control is easily traced back to feeling a lack of control when I was a little girl. That led to a woman whose goal in life is to control her surroundings and even the people she loves—for their own good, of course (wink).

It has taken me decades to discover this one unchangeable fact: Control is an illusion. We grip those closest to us and cling to the premise that if we love them deeply enough, if we give all that they need, they will be okay and life will turn out right. Come to find out, that’s not how it works at all. The more tightly you grip someone, the more they squirm to get away.

There’s an innate desire in humanity for justice, well, in much of humanity. It begins in childhood as we cry out, “That’s not fair!” Ultimately, life isn’t fair. Circumstances don’t turn out as we hope, as we pray. Early in my walk of faith, I held the belief that if I just prayed hard enough over something, God would answer as I wanted. Sometimes that has been the case, but some of my most desperate pleas weren’t answered as I had hoped. In many cases, when looking back with hindsight, I can see God’s better plan than what I had asked for. In others, however, I still can’t see the good in the outcome.

I was recently on what I felt to be a mountaintop, then next thing I knew, there I was flat on my back in the valley. I’ve struggled to climb the walls and get myself out of this dark place. Each day I tell myself that the next day will get better, that I will handle this all better, but I’m lying to myself. Nothing is better. I’m not better.

There are areas in my life that are totally out of my control. No matter how much I fret or worry, I can’t do one thing to change them. Something hovers overhead, constantly threatening to crush me. So what do I do? I put my trust in God. Not in a lip-service way but in a heart-wrenching, help-me-take-the-next-breath kind of way. At times, when looking at this situation, I don’t see how a Sovereign God could be in control and not do something to change it. He hasn’t yet. He may never.

All I can do is glance back at how He has always come through, even when all hope seemed lost. There have been plenty of times when He didn’t show up like I had hoped or prayed for, but my backward glance assures me He was still in control, and I can see how He has made beauty come from the ash heaps of my own past. He will do the same thing in the situation I’m hurting over. I trust that, but I also have to acknowledge that the beauty may not be seen until heaven.

Ever the optimist, I have to wonder if my current fall from the mountain is so that I can write this chapter with true, up-to-the-moment raw emotion. Many times, when writing about spiritual truths, I can look back at my history with God and how He taught me personally and then explain those principles objectively. But when I find myself living in the throes of those hard truths, I’m all over the place emotionally. I’m up one day and in a pit the next. But “in the throes” is exactly where I’m writing from now. To try and pour out truth when I’m barely surviving “the throes” is one of the most difficult tasks I’ve ever undertaken as a writer.

I woke this morning somewhere in the middle of my emotional roller coaster, neither at the top or bottom. What I am doing is choosing to live out of what I *know* today rather than what I feel. That's the only solution when things are most difficult and God seems less than in control. I have a choice to make: Do I doubt Him and try to take over the situation in which He seems absent, or do I be still and know that He is God? Each day I get that same choice. So far, I have remained still. Don't get me wrong, I have opened my mouth or started typing a message that would prompt a conversation that I wasn't sure I should have. Each time the reminder came that, because I still didn't know the right course, I was to do nothing.

The old me tries to convince the redeemed me that if I can just say enough or do enough, then I can get things back on track. The truth is, there doesn't seem to be a "back on track" in this situation. It's a new normal that I will have to learn to live with. Maybe that's why I'm so stuck. I don't want this. I can't process it clearly. It is out of my control. For me that's simply unthinkable.

Enter God, a sovereign God who's been on His throne from the very beginning. He has had and still does have a plan, and His plan is better than my own, even when I can't see it now, even when the situation is too painful for words to express.

There is a word in the Christian faith that's underutilized, undervalued, and often underspoken with sincerity: Lord. Sure, we consider Him our God and Savior, our Shepherd and King, but Jesus as Lord isn't something we want to live with. What if His plans don't match up with ours? When we are told to confess Jesus as Lord, that's not just some one-time proclamation as found in Romans 10:9. It is a life confession as found between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 16:13-18, where Peter declares that he knows Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is either our Lord and we follow and believe, or we take a step away in order to be our own (little g) god.

I choose Him as Lord over this situation that is so out of my control. I do not choose out of blind obedience, though that would be enough. I call Him Lord because of all I have experienced in the past. I have a history with Him that defines my present and future. Why would He fail me now? I can see the consistent pattern of His goodness, even amidst my worst tragedies. Why would He give up and walk away now?

Please hear me. Hear my heart. This situation I'm going through is the exact thing that I've dreaded for several years now and built up in my mind as the worst that could happen. I've waited for it, prayed against it, and now here it is. At times I refuse to think about it at all and simply walk in denial. Other times it's so prevalent that nothing else can penetrate my mind because it's filled with fear and grief and disappointment. Some days I'm stuck. Some days I have enough faith to keep me going. Right now, this very second as I write, I'm sitting in bed with my comfy pink robe on simply because I don't want to do anything else. It would be easier today to pull the covers up over my head and allow depression and heartbreak to chart my course. Instead, I have chosen to pour out my sincerest thoughts here. Next, I will choose to hit the shower and go to church. I need corporate worship today. I need a man of God to pour truth into my grief-filled spirit. I need Jesus today.

Earlier I said I choose to allow Jesus to be Lord over this situation. We all get that choice. You, right now as you're reading this, may have that "worst that could happen" situation glaring at you. You get to choose. Is He your Lord? Or will you cast Him aside, take the reins, and drive over a cliff?

If you choose to allow Him to be Lord over your storm, what do you do? What are your next steps? Since I am watching flood waters rising in my very own life, I will share with you three things that are helping me hold on to the hope that He is God over the flood: Be still. Be honest. Believe.

Be Still

In one particular aspect of my situation, my brain says to move, but I still have a check in my spirit. Usually when I have a sense of restraint, I know it's God saying not to move. I'm not so sure this time. The steps I'm considering are ones I don't want to take. Sure, I'm willing if that's what obedience requires of me, but I just don't know. I keep doubting myself, thinking maybe the hesitation I feel is fear holding me back rather than spiritual restraint. I have to clarify before I act: Is my stillness fear, or is this faith?

I know this isn't just a me thing. No matter how many years any of us walk with God, we all bump into this roadblock. At times His leading isn't clear. What most would advise me to do just doesn't feel right deep down. So what do we do when common sense collides with what our spirit feels led to do? Do we take a step forward in uncertainty?

I say we pause and trust Him to confirm when the time is right. In my case I have listened and believed the Spirit has been holding me back. For weeks I did nothing until the whisper came that maybe it was fear creating my hesitation. I was suddenly in a tailspin. Was I just too scared to act?

Then, one morning this past week, when I was to the point of desperation, I told God that I didn't trust myself to believe that I had heard Him tell me to wait, so I was going to take the steps that seemed to make the most sense.

Within moments of that prayer, I opened my Bible to the place where I had left off the morning before. Of course it was Psalm 46:10 that told me to be still and know that He is God. He knew where I would be mentally that morning and that I would need His written reminder to wait, to be still.

I'm not sure if this will help anyone but me today, but as I recount this story, it serves as my reminder that I am fully prepared to be obedient. If that means proceed, I will proceed. If that means wait, I will wait. Since everything points to the wait, even when conventional wisdom says proceed, I will wait. I will do nothing and say nothing. If I'm wrong, if I discover I have handled this badly in the long run, I have to stand on the principle of faith that I have done what I believe God is calling me to do in the moment. I pray that my faith will be credited to me as righteousness (Romans 4:3).

This walk of faith isn't easy. It's rarely black and white, especially when the crazed world around you hits you with shades of gray. When all you see around you seems out of control, you are left with this: God is in control and sits as King forever.

Be Real

In your prayer life, decide to be real. Discuss how you feel with God. Express your disappointment. Share if you feel hurt. Ask Him to give you scriptures to lean on, ones that will bring you peace. Shallow prayers will keep you wading in the shallows. Plumb the depths with the Lord.

Recently, I've come to a place with Him that leaves me saying, "I don't understand why You haven't intervened, but I trust You anyway." If it were anyone else going through this, I would have an objective answer to give them: For God to intervene in this situation, He would have to negate the will of another. Hasn't that been the theme all along, even before Adam and Eve made the choice to sin? God gives man free will. Love demands nothing less. God isn't a caring Father if He ties his children up as puppets and dances them around in accordance with His will. We, as His children, get to choose our own path, even when it's in error, even when our actions toss others into a valley.

Again, if I were ministering to another, I would remind them that God is still in control, even when He isn't answering as they want. When we pray for someone and instead they choose to live life their own way, apart from God's best for them, we can still know with certainty that God loves them and that only love will win them back. Good can still come from what seems most hopeless. I'm proof of that in many ways. Some of the worst choices I've made in life have ultimately made me into the woman I am today. Shouldn't I believe God will make good come of this situation too?

I once again lean on history to prop me up in my despair today, and I lean on truth as revealed in Scripture.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

I keep fact-checking the verse above, specifically the phrase "the called" as it is written in my version of God's Word. Other versions I've read just say "called," and to us that sounds better rolling from our lips. I have to believe the word *the* is there for a reason or else it wouldn't have been added to this particular translation. I don't know the Spirit's intention for anyone else, but He is using this for me today as my reminder that the issues I'm facing, the ones that are so crippling for me, are meant for me. I am *the* called one for this trial for His purpose. Maybe I am called to this season in order to grow me. Or maybe my account of what I'm dealing with may minister to some who will read this section on living out of control. Maybe it's for you.

It could be used for those reasons and many more that may never come to mind. I just know that God is sovereign, and whatever He allows into my life will be used for my good and His glory.

You know how people tell you that God will never give you more than you can handle? Yeah, that's not a thing. It's not a verse, and it sure isn't how God operates. He gives you things all the time that you can't handle or bear up under so that you will turn to Him and allow Him to be your burden-bearer.

Just so you know, the verse people are misquoting is about God not allowing us to be tempted beyond what we can bear without providing a way out. That's 1 Corinthians 10:13. Look it up.

In my situation I don't want to be the person who has to bear this. Fact is, I am the weak person whose lap this has landed on. Thankfully, I have a strong Savior, One I can be honest with and cast every care upon.

Personalize this. Know that God will never allow anything into your life that He doesn't intend to work together for good for you, *the called*, according to His purpose.

Believe

Believe that God has a plan, even when it isn't evident. If you have studied Scripture at all, you have found a long and patient plan of redemption unfold over the history of humanity after the fall of Adam and Eve. God always had a plan to restore the relationship between Himself and mankind.

I'm a pretty simple-minded girl and honestly don't get what took so long. Why allow the story to unfold over time? Why not just send Jesus the day after the fall? I have no clue what the answer is. I just know God is God and I am not. There's a reason for that: I'm not qualified for His role in the universe. That's one admission that keeps me real before Him. Even when I don't understand, even when there seems to be a simpler way for things to work out, He is still God and still in control.

Because I believe that as it applies to the larger sense of how the world operates, I have to embrace that concept in my own little world as well. When I pray for something God says no to, I am forced to take a step back from the emotion of that no and try to see things from His perspective. Maybe a no will allow Him to work mightily in me or someone else. It is possible that a yes to me will hinder what He wants to do in others.

I have to consider the fact that my viewpoint is skewed by my desire for ease. I want things to work out the easy way so that I don't have to deal with pain or disruption in life. Isn't that normal? If you're honest and take a look at your own prayers, isn't that one of your underlying goals? When we pray for God to remove an obstacle, isn't our motive that we don't want to take the long way around? We want a straight line to our goal with no hindrance. We forget that the journey to our destination is where God does some of His greatest work. He strengthens feeble legs along the way. He deepens shallow faith and grows the babe into maturity.

It's the same with those we love. We don't want to see them suffer. Isn't that especially true for parents? We pray for and hope for ease for our children. If they have a smooth ride, then so do we as the ones who love them most.

No parent enjoys this next train of thought: What if our prayers were instead focused on our children's ultimate best and not their ease? If their spiritual growth requires hardship, are we willing to pray for that? Would you dare to pray "whatever it takes" for your children if you knew that may mean a disruption in their lives and pain in yours?

Many years ago now, I prayed "whatever it takes" for my oldest son, Adam. Then I quickly added, "Anything but jail." Within weeks of that prayer, Adam had his first jail visit. I say first since there were several more to follow, including one actual prison term. There's no way to express the pain of that season or the fear that came with knowing my son was in the midst of such evil and wickedness. Prison is an unimaginable place for us law-abiding citizens, and the reality of what happens there is indescribable. Riots and bullying aren't on TV solely for dramatic effect. They are real. Prison is a horrific place, one my son never wants to enter again. That season made an impact on a young man who was charting his course with one bad decision after another. Now, as a dad and family man, Adam would be the first to tell you that prison changed his life.

My whatever-it-takes-but-jail prayer was answered just as it needed to be. God allowed what I considered the worst to happen in order that good might come of it. I now trust the whatever-it-takes prayers with no "but-this" qualifiers.

As evidence of how God can use our worst-case scenarios, I released my first book, *Unmending the Veil*, while Adam was incarcerated. Would it surprise you to know that he had gangbangers lined up to read a

Christian novel when he was finished reading it? Ironically, one of the characters had just been released from prison. Only God could have orchestrated that.

One of his cell mates planned to have a verse from Job that I had used in the book tattooed on himself: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). That same young man was a former satanist who had an upside-down cross tattoo. Girls, God can do mighty things with our pain.

Consider that verse from Job. Circumstances come, and we feel God is slaying us. I had a conversation about this with Him not so long ago. My conclusion was this: He can only live through me once I’m slain. An alive Lisa fights for control and remains unwilling to allow the Spirit complete control over her life. So yes, I believe He is slaying me, yet I will trust in Him.

When I’ve felt too wounded to even pray, for myself or others, I have repeated these three things to Jesus:

I know that You love me.

I believe You have a plan.

I will wait to see how it unfolds.

When nothing makes sense, when all you can do is be still, be real, and believe, these three truths will remind you: You are loved, God is in control, and time will allow you to see His goodness, even amidst the chaos.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAY

Key Point

There is never a moment when God is not in control or is surprised by what is happening.

- 1) When tragedy strikes, how can you combat that initial feeling that tells you God is not in control?

- 2) What is a verse(s) you can have in your arsenal to remind you that He can be trusted? A few to consider are: Genesis 50:20, Psalm 27:13-14, Psalm 29:10-11, Psalm 103:19, and Proverbs 3:5-6.

- 3) In this season, does anything have you on a roller coaster of up-and-down emotions? Note below.

- 4) Do you fight for control in an out-of-control world? Give an example of how you are now trying or have previously tried to control outcomes.

Key Point:

Sometimes God, as Lord of your life, answers your pleas with no or not now.

- 5) Do you have an ongoing prayer before the Lord about an out-of-control circumstance in your life? How long have you been crying out to Him?

- 6) How can your history with God deepen your trust in Him as Lord over your life and its storms?

- 7) When praying for others, why is it so easy to lose sight of the fact that God knows them, loves them, and wants their best even more than you do?

Key Point:

When circumstances are out of your control, trust Jesus as Lord over your storm. Be still. Be real. Believe.

Be Still until you know how He would have you proceed.

- 8) When you don't know what to do in a situation, why is it vital to be still until you know deep down how to proceed? What are the dangers of moving forward when you don't have clarity from the Lord?

- 9) When have you sensed you should be still but acted anyway? Do you have an example of when you took the reins from the Lord Jesus and drove yourself over a cliff? What was the outcome?

Be Real in your prayer life.

- 10) God knows your heart and what you're feeling, so pretense is pointless. How open and real are you in prayer? Do you utter words of faith, yet harbor doubt in your heart?

- 11) It's easy to give sound advice and scriptures to others. When faced with your own life's storms, do you ever stop and ask what your advice to another in a similar situation would be?

- 12) Have you faced trials that you ultimately learned were perfectly suited for you, that you were *the* called (Romans 8:28) one for His purpose in that situation? Give an example.

Believe that God has a plan, even when it isn't evident.

- 13) It only makes sense that an easy road for others creates ease for us. Heart Check: Review your current prayer list. Do any of the answers you seek have your own ease as their basis?

- 14) What if your prayers as a parent or a friend were focused on the other person's ultimate best and not their ease? How can you pray for people in your life differently?

- 15) Read Job 13:15. God can only live through you once you're slain. An alive _____ will always fight for control.
your name here