

WHO IS IN CONTROL?

Proverbs 3:5,6

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will direct your paths.

Who here remembers learning how to drive? Or, maybe you're a parent, and you remember teaching your kids how to drive? Every kid learning how to drive had at least one panicky parent. And sometimes, they had two.

The panicky parent is the one who basically gets into the car stressed. Like before the engine has even started, they're worried, they're anxious, they're looking at all the mirrors and making sure that no cars are around. Nobody's even put their seatbelt on and they're already thinking that they've been in the car for too long.

And if you just so happen to be that panicky parent, it's not like you want to make your kid anxious and confused, but you really are making them anxious and confused. Your heart's in the right place, you just want them to be safe, to drive well, to not hit anything, and you just don't want anything to happen to them. Ultimately, what you want to do is that you want to guarantee that they're safe. You want to take control of the whole situation to make sure that they'll be ok and that everything will be fine.

The problem is that we want to be in control. We want to control as much as we possibly can.

We know that we can't control everything, but in everything that we can control, we want to be in control. We want our hands on the steering wheel, we want to make them turn when we tell them to, we want to make sure that it's all happening the way that we want it to.

But what happens when we're not in control? Because the reality is, there are a lot of situations where we are not in control, where there's literally nothing we can do to change the entire situation.

The last 18 months have been a bit like that. There are some things we can do, but there's also a lot that we can't do. Or maybe you're facing a situation in your family, in your health, in your friendships, at your workplace or school, and basically there's nothing that you can do about it. It feels like it's spiralling out of control, you can't make a difference, and it looks like there's no way out or through the entire situation.

And maybe you're even wondering whether God's in control.

Not everything that happens is God's doing, because sin exists, people make choices, and there are plenty of things that happen that are totally not God doing it.

God didn't cause it, but God can use it.

So even if the circumstance is completely opposite to what God wants, God can still use it. God's plan is not a victim of circumstance, which means that even though things don't start off the way God wants, God can take it, use it, and turn it around so that ultimately, it'll serve His purposes.

In **Gen 50:20**, Joseph is talking to his brothers, they've come to ask for his forgiveness, and he says this:

²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

And Joseph really just summarises it all in half a sentence, he says, "you intended to harm me" but just think about what that means.

Joseph is looking back on his life, and he's remembering what his brothers did to him. They hated him and were jealous of him, they wouldn't even speak a kind word to him. They plotted to kill him. They threw him into a cistern, they sold him as a slave. As a result, he was falsely accused and put in prison for at least two years.

But then he says, "but God intended it for good". **God's intentions are greater than man's intentions.** They intended it for harm, but God intended it for good.

And Joseph continues by saying, "God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done." His brothers had intentions, but they didn't accomplish what they intended, what they wanted didn't happen, what they were going for didn't come to pass, but when God has intentions, they accomplish something, they get done, they fulfil promises, they achieve dreams, they do good for others, they save many lives, they make a difference in the world around us, it means that God accomplishes His word, God has His way, God makes sure that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

But sometimes, when you've been thrown down, hated, sold out, falsely accused, locked up, all you can see is the intentions to harm. All you can see are the constraints, the restrictions, and we can't seem to see how God is going to get us through this or out of this.

Joseph, at the time, could not see this as God's plan for his life. He's had dream and visions of being in a position of authority, of leading, but the reality all around him was the exact opposite. He was either trapped, stuck, or in prison. How is he ever going to be in a position of authority?

Sometimes God's plan doesn't look like what you think it's going to look like.

Isaiah 55:8, 9

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.

⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Sometimes we don't believe that God is in control because He's not doing it the way we would do it. His thoughts and His ways are different, they're higher, they're above how we would think. God is absolutely in control, but His plan, His ways, are higher than what we can understand. But we don't need to understand God's ways in order to trust God. Trust that God has a plan, trust that **Romans 8:28** is true, that ²⁸ we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God's able to take the prison experience and turn it into a promotion, what was once just chains and prison bars, God works at it, He does something with it, and He turns our chains into chances and our struggles into strategies and our drought into dreams.

Because in ALL things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Because God will always make sure that His purpose is accomplished.

But while we're in the prison, while we're still stuck in the situation, unsure of what God's doing, not yet seeing the breakthrough, still struggling, we have a responsibility. As much as God is going to have His way, there are a couple of conditions on allowing God to have His way. It's not an automatic forceful thing where God ignores our own will and does whatever He wants. God wants to have His way in our lives, so even when we can't see a way out, we need to let Him have His way.

When Joseph was in prison, he still continued to serve God. In Genesis 40, we read that he's in prison, and he has an opportunity. Two people come in, needing their dreams interpreted and Joseph, knowing that God has given him the gift to interpret dreams, could have just sat there, thinking, "You know what, I know God's given me a gift to help them, but where's my help? Why should I help them when nobody's helping me? Why should I do them any favours or care about their wellbeing when I'm going through such a difficult time?"

But instead, Joseph says to them, "Tell me your dreams." **He continues to use the gifts God has given him for others, even when he needed help himself.**

You might not have control, but you do have gifts. Instead of focusing on what you don't have, use what you do have. Things might not make a lot of sense to you, but you can still help make sense for someone else. You might still be trapped, but you can help someone escape.

In **Luke 16:10**, Jesus says, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." And Joseph, in this situation, had two people to look after. He had two people to minister to and to care for. But because he could be trusted with the two, he was then given a nation. Because he was faithful when he was in prison, God knew that he would be faithful with a promotion.

Be faithful while you're stuck. Do what you can, even if it's not what you want. Use your gifts even when it feels like a waste. I'm not saying to accept the situation or to be ok with where you're at, but while you're there, keep loving those around you, keep praying for them, keep ministering to them, keep using what God has given you. Because if you're faithful in prison, you'll be faithful in the promotion.

Trust that God is at work, that He's in control, that He's still faithful to His word. If we know that God is faithful to fulfil what He promised, we can be faithful in serving Him.

The condition of God making it work for our good is this – we love God and we're called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28 ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

When things aren't looking good, keep loving God, keep pursuing God's calling and purpose for your life. And loving God is just about constantly checking our hearts, where are we at with God, are we open to Him, do we still value God above everything else? It's not about being religious and ticking all the boxes and appearing right, it's about our hearts and having that relationship with Him.

And when it comes to being called according to his purpose, it's about pursuing what God has given us to do. Responding to His call, serving him in whatever way He's asked us to, even when it's difficult, even when things don't look good. When things aren't good yet, don't give up on God's purpose, don't abandon your calling, because when you follow your calling and your purpose, God makes it good.

Joseph, in the middle of his struggle, kept choosing to pursue God's purpose. If God called him to be a leader, then even in prison, he'll be a leader.

If God's called you to do it, then even when your audience and influence is small, you can still do it. **Zech 4:10** says, ¹⁰ Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. Sometimes we want to give up because it's small, but what we need to understand is that God rejoices to just see the work begin, God rejoices to see the work continue, and when we are pursuing God's purpose and God's calling, He makes all things work together for our good, He turns that small beginning, that faithful continuing, and He completes it because what God has begun, God is faithful to complete.

Don't stop pursuing God's purpose, stay committed to God's calling, that's how we make sure that God is still in control.

If we want God to work in our lives, then we need to be actively engaged in our relationship with Him, in His purpose, in His calling for our lives.

What has God gifted you with?

What dream did God place in your heart?

What's God put in your hand to serve Him with?

When we pursue His calling and His purpose, God will make it work for our good. Let God have control in our lives.

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Think about this phrase 'He will direct your paths'. He tells you what decision to make, what the right choice is, what to do, whether it's the right next step, whether you should take that job, be in that relationship, associate with those people.

But before we get to the part about God directing our paths, it says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him."

When it comes to God's ways, we need to trust Him with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding.

The reason that God directing our paths is so difficult is because trusting God with all our heart and not leaning on our own understanding means that sometimes, God will take us on the detour, on the scenic route, because sometimes, what we think is our destination isn't nearly as great as the destination God has for us.

Joseph has this dream that he's going to be this leader, that he would have authority over his brother and even his father, but when he gets thrown in a cistern, sold into slavery, and put in prison, that dream is a fantasy, it's impossible, it's the furthest thing from reality. Joseph isn't even anywhere near his father or brothers, how could he ever have any influence over them?

And this whole thing is a detour, it makes no sense, but Joseph trusts the Lord with all His heart – he continues to serve God, to love God, he continues to do what doesn't really make sense, things that defy his understanding by being faithful in the small, by not despising the day of small beginnings, Joseph continues to submit to God, making sure that God was in charge of his life.

And Joseph thought that his destination would be leading his father and brothers, but when God directed his paths, Joseph led all of EGYPT. Joseph brought his brothers and father into Egypt, saving them, leading them, ultimately bringing the plan of God into action.

Because when we trust God with all our heart, lean not on our own understanding, submit to Him, God directs our paths, He shows us the way, He takes us to a greater destination than we ever thought possible. Joseph thought that being in prison was his small beginning, but to God, Joseph's DREAM was a small beginning, he had no idea of the greater things that God had in store for Him.

God is in control as long as we let Him be in control. God is in control when we love Him, when we pursue our purpose and our calling, when we trust Him. Don't let your circumstances derail your trust in God.

Don't let a season of uncertainty shake a foundation of His faithfulness.

Continue to trust Him. Even in the small. Even in the difficult. Even in the prison. God's faithful, God's in control, and what the enemy intended for harm, God intended for good and He will accomplish His purpose,