

A 6-Week
Guided Journey

It's
All Under
Control
Bible Study

Jennifer Dukes Lee

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It's All Under Control Bible Study: A 6-Week Guided Journey

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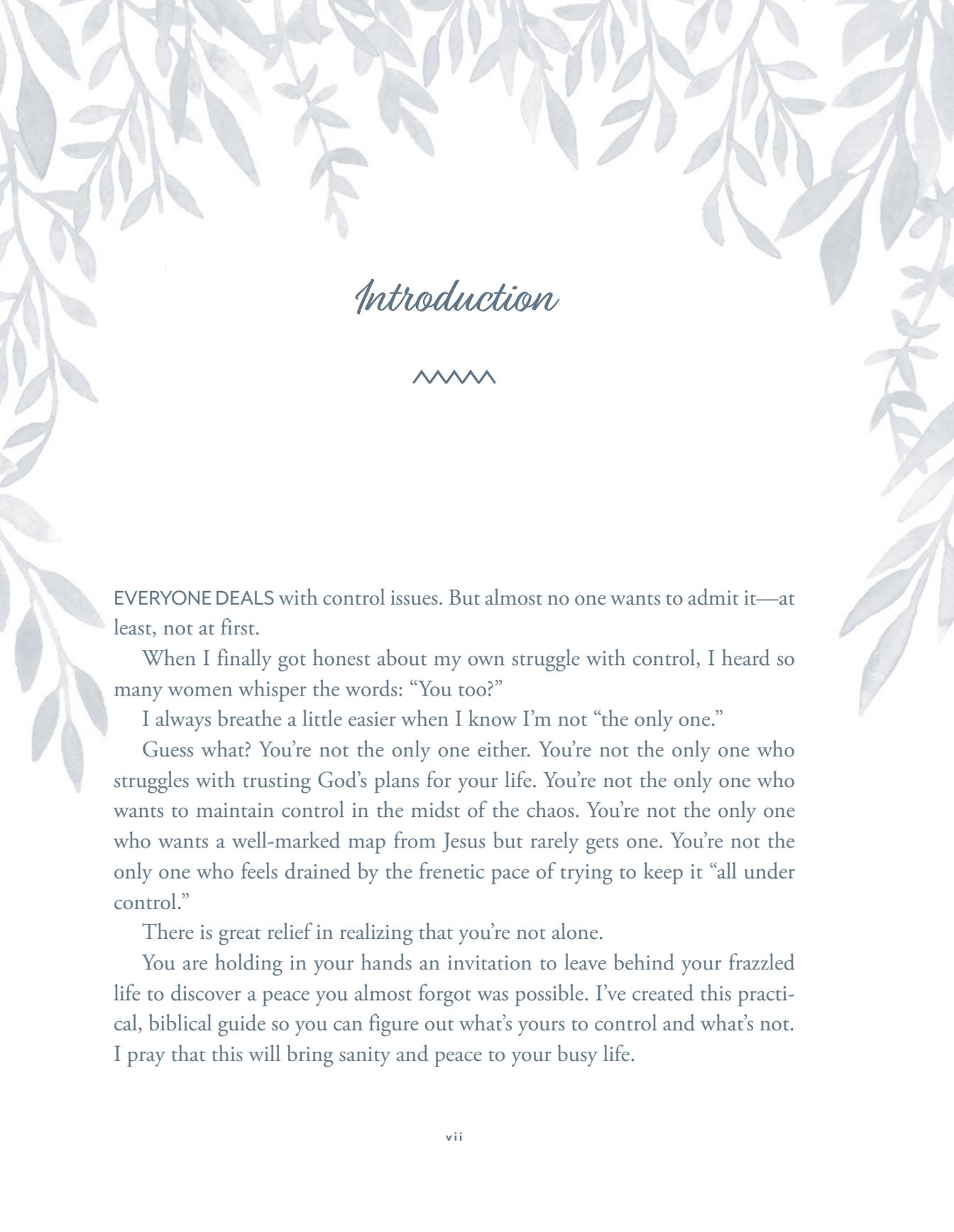
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Introduction



EVERYONE DEALS with control issues. But almost no one wants to admit it—at least, not at first.

When I finally got honest about my own struggle with control, I heard so many women whisper the words: “You too?”

I always breathe a little easier when I know I’m not “the only one.”

Guess what? You’re not the only one either. You’re not the only one who struggles with trusting God’s plans for your life. You’re not the only one who wants to maintain control in the midst of the chaos. You’re not the only one who wants a well-marked map from Jesus but rarely gets one. You’re not the only one who feels drained by the frenetic pace of trying to keep it “all under control.”

There is great relief in realizing that you’re not alone.

You are holding in your hands an invitation to leave behind your frazzled life to discover a peace you almost forgot was possible. I’ve created this practical, biblical guide so you can figure out what’s yours to control and what’s not. I pray that this will bring sanity and peace to your busy life.

IT'S ALL UNDER CONTROL BIBLE STUDY

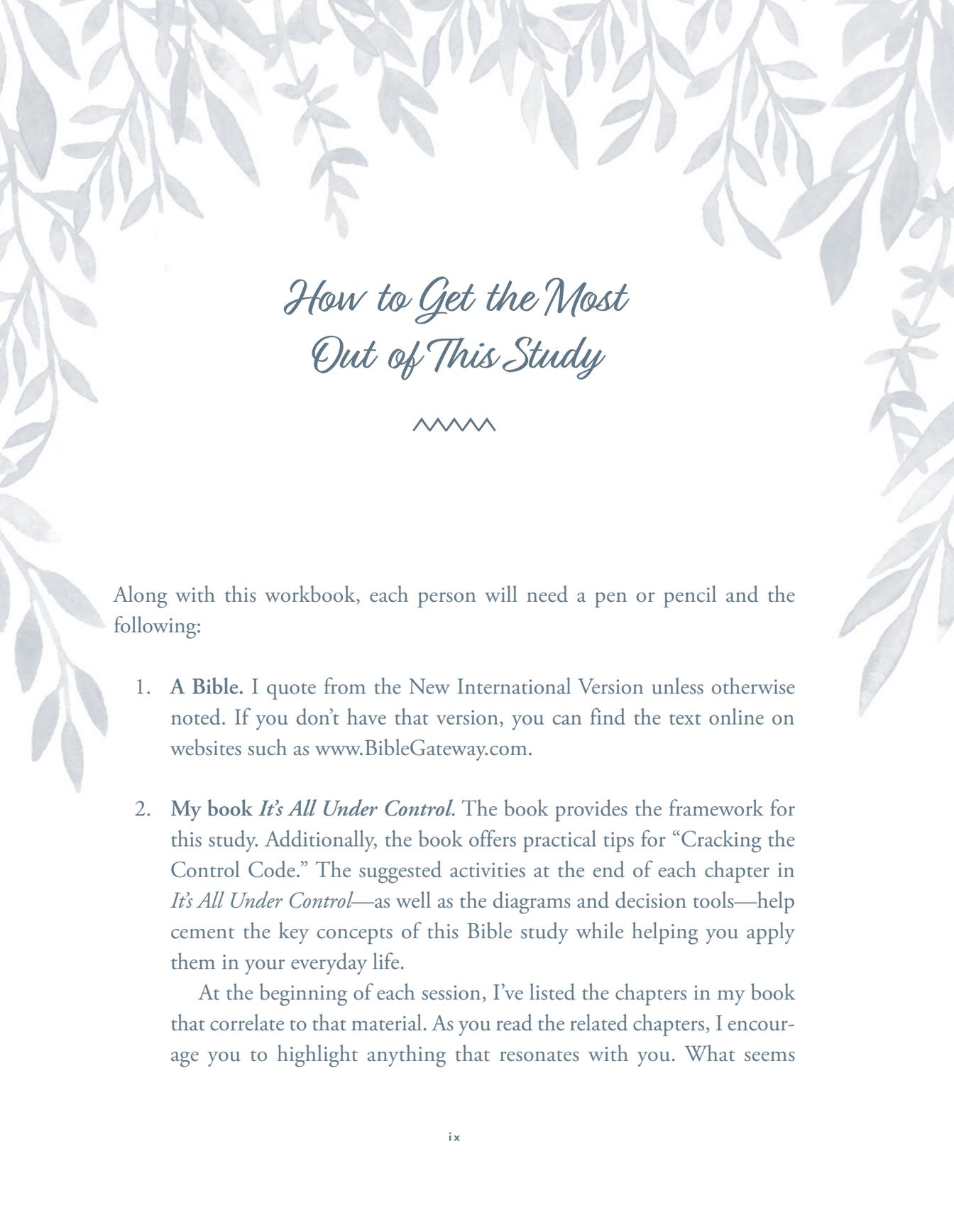
So gather up some friends and prepare to meet some like-minded comrades in the pages of your Bible. Together we will take steps toward surrendering to the one who has it all under control: Jesus Christ.

I'm convinced that we will come out of this study trusting God more than ever before. With Scripture as our guide, we will let go of what God has *not* asked us to do so we can shine at what he *has*.

I'm ready for this.

You too?

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer". The signature is written in a light gray or blue ink and is positioned below the text "You too?".

A decorative border of light green leaves and branches frames the top and sides of the page.

How to Get the Most Out of This Study



Along with this workbook, each person will need a pen or pencil and the following:

1. **A Bible.** I quote from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. If you don't have that version, you can find the text online on websites such as www.BibleGateway.com.
2. **My book *It's All Under Control*.** The book provides the framework for this study. Additionally, the book offers practical tips for “Cracking the Control Code.” The suggested activities at the end of each chapter in *It's All Under Control*—as well as the diagrams and decision tools—help cement the key concepts of this Bible study while helping you apply them in your everyday life.

At the beginning of each session, I've listed the chapters in my book that correlate to that material. As you read the related chapters, I encourage you to highlight anything that resonates with you. What seems

surprising, challenging, or remarkably familiar to your own experience? Consider how it relates to that week's session.

3. **A commitment to complete each session.** This study will ask something of you beyond simply filling in the blanks. You are about to embark on a journey toward trusting God like never before. You will grow most if you:
 - ▶ Ask God to reveal his heart to you as you respond to the questions and prompts.
 - ▶ Get honest with God, yourself, and others about your fears, doubts, experiences, and patterns of behavior.
 - ▶ Put into practice what Scripture asks of you. As Jesus' own brother James told us, we are called to do more than read our Bibles: "Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (James 1:22-24).

I know you are a busy woman. This study was designed especially for women like you. Here's a confession: At times in my life, it's been hard for me to invest time to dig in and study God's Word. I have worried that if I spent time with God, I'd miss something else I was supposed to be doing. But here's the life-changing truth of the matter: You will never regret time spent with Jesus. And you will never regret a decision to trust God.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN EACH WEEK'S STUDY

A key Bible verse: Each passage will relate to that week's content. I encourage you to memorize these verses.

My Story: I'll go first by sharing a bit of my struggle.

Your Story: You'll have an opportunity to get honest about your feelings, doubts, fears, and attitudes before you dig into the Scriptures.

Their Story: The Bible is filled with stories from people who struggled like you and I do. Each week, you'll learn and grow from their stories.

Getting Your Control Under Control: This is an opportunity to reflect on the week's lessons and apply them to your everyday life.

Prayer: There's no better way to end each lesson than by asking God to sink his truths deep into your heart and give you the strength to trust and obey him. Whether you pray in a group or on your own, committing yourself to God has genuine power to transform your life.

You'll also have the opportunity to go deeper with **On Your Own** activities, if you choose.

ESPECIALLY FOR LEADERS

I am so glad you said yes to Jesus by leading this study. You, my friend, have been equipped for this. At the same time, I know you are busy, so I have put together a leader's guide full of tips, ideas, and resources to take the guesswork out of heading a group. See page 101 for a full guide.



WEEK 1

*Is Control Setting You Free or
Making You Frazzled?*



I am not the Christ.

JOHN 1:20



WEEK 1 FOCUS

- ▶ To identify how pervasive the problem of control truly is
- ▶ To get a sense of what it looks like to trust God more fully

LET'S GET STARTED

Read the introduction and chapters 1, 2, and 3 of *It's All Under Control*.

For a bonus teaching video from Jennifer based on this week's session, visit www.ItsAllUnderControlBook.com/Resources.

Why did you say yes to this study? What do you hope to gain by the end of our journey together?

MY STORY

I read once that surrender is what happens when God hands you a blank piece of paper with a space for you to sign your name at the bottom and then you hand it back to him to fill in as he wills. For a woman who wants to have it “all under control,” that kind of surrender terrifies me!

When I began this journey with Jesus, I asked myself: What would it look like to have blank-paper trust with God? What would it look like to open my fists in order to receive God's best for my life?

That's our goal for the next six weeks. My hope is that when we get to the last page of this study, we will trust God like never before. Together we are going to figure out what to hang on to and what to let go of. We are going to figure out what's ours to control and what isn't.

So much of life feels out of control, doesn't it? Every morning, Twitter tells us about another terror attack, a mass shooting, a hurricane, a wildfire. It seems as if Earth is one big emergency.

Even if we're not in the middle of a crisis, everyday life feels chaotic. We do

our best to wrap our hands around everything: our busy schedules, our children, our work responsibilities, our relationships. We want to have it “all under control,” but most of the time, life feels anything but.

In the first chapter of my book (see pages 8–9), I write honestly about my own struggle with control:

Confession: I have loved the steady comfort of control—even though it was only an illusion.

Control had become a coping mechanism to numb myself from the pain of life. I believed that even if I couldn’t control the big things, I could at least *try* to control the little stuff: what I put in my mouth, how many steps I tallied on my Fitbit, my gray hairs, how I scheduled every minute of every day, what you thought about me when I talked with you. . . .

I’ve generally been able to handle a lot of tasks at once, and I’ve always been an achiever who won’t easily back down from a challenge. Hard work has never scared me. But I can’t begin to tell you how much my inner achiever propels me into dangerously high gear. . . .

All of this doing and striving was supposed to bring me happiness. With great surprise, I realized that it wasn’t working out that way at all. Trying to wrap my arms around everything and everyone felt like attempting to herd baby kittens.

YOUR STORY

Describe the last time your attempts to manage something in your life felt like an exercise in herding baby kittens.



How pervasive is the issue of control? Do you think it's something everyone deals with? Or are some people "cured" of the desire to control?

We can probably all think of women in our lives who seem to be free-spirited, employing a *whatever happens, happens* philosophy. Let's call them the Free Spirits. We can probably also think of women who feel responsible for many things, do a lot of those things really well, but can end up feeling frazzled and weary under all that pressure. Let's call them Frazzled Spirits.

On the continuum below, where would you put yourself? Mark an X on the spot.



When was the last time you felt frazzled on account of all you believed you needed to do, oversee, or manage?

The more frazzled and out of control my life gets, the more I try to control it. That sometimes results in even more frazzle! It's a vicious cycle. Is that your experience too? Why or why not?

Here's a list of areas that women often feel the need to control. Which ones strike you personally? Circle those. Try not to overthink your answers.

My weight

Job responsibilities

My thoughts

My children

The future

The past

My health

My house

Anger

Finances

Wrinkles

What I eat

My attitude

My husband/boyfriend

My friends

My to-do list

What people think of me

Current projects

Decisions affecting my extended family

Safety concerns with kids

A difficult relationship

My schedule

My perspective

The quality of my work

Other: _____



Control. When we hear that word, we often bristle. Our minds tend to drift toward negative connotations of the word. For example: *She's such a control freak. He's such a controlling narcissist. Why is she so hyper about every little detail?*

But not all areas leave us frazzled—and we shouldn't jump to the conclusion that *all* control is bad. Notice that some of the items in the list on page 5 carry a more positive connotation, and in fact, God calls us to live a life of self-control. Furthermore, most people agree that if we gain control of our attitude and perspective, we will be healthier, calmer people. So in those cases, we aren't frazzled, we're free, which reveals that some control is actually a good thing! For instance, some control over your children or your workplace might be in order. Good management often leads to a sense of calm and well-being.

The danger comes when we find ourselves slipping from healthy control to unhealthy control, from free to frazzled.

Here are a few examples to demonstrate the difference between the two.

Weight

- ▶ *Healthy control is:* following your doctor's orders to manage your weight.
- ▶ *Unhealthy control is:* excessively counting calories and following strict, self-imposed food rules with detrimental results such as eating disorders.

Finances

- ▶ *Healthy control is:* being a good steward of your finances.
- ▶ *Unhealthy control is:* monitoring and questioning every purchase your spouse makes.

To-Do Lists

- ▶ *Healthy control is:* saying yes to a God-given assignment and adding it to the list.
- ▶ *Unhealthy control is:* feeling like you need to say yes to every opportunity and every request, resulting in an overburdened life and an overwhelming list.

Family

- ▶ *Healthy control is:* offering to host your family's Thanksgiving dinner when your aging grandmother no longer can do so.
- ▶ *Unhealthy control is:* telling every member exactly what to bring to Thanksgiving dinner—along with the recipes they are to follow.

With these comparisons in mind, review the list on page 5 once more. Put an X beside any area where you sometimes slip into unhealthy control.

Friend, it takes a lot of guts to admit our struggle with unhealthy control. Congratulations on risking vulnerability. We can't fix what we're not willing to admit is broken. I'm right here with you, with my own hand raised.

Now, as best as you're able, describe in a couple of sentences what might cause you to fall into areas of unhealthy control. Is there something you fear will happen if you don't take control?

We become frazzled not only when we're trying hard to manage too much, but when our efforts are driven by anxiety. I don't know about you, but when I get fearful, I make a plan! I believe my plans will ensure security for my children, assuage my fears about the future, and keep everyone headed in the right general direction. Do I sound a little type A here? Are you that way too? Tell me I'm not alone.

Heaven knows that we want type-A planners in charge of sewage-treatment



plants, operating rooms, airplane flight patterns, and the catered meals at our weddings.

But as my friend Cheri once told me, our plans and type-A behaviors can get out of hand. Cheri's father worked in the medical field, where a mistake could result in death. At one point in her life, Cheri said, "I took that same level of control to karaoke, to charades—to anything that involved spontaneity—because I didn't know the difference." As it turns out, she noted, incorrectly recording someone's lab results and singing the wrong notes in karaoke are two very different things.

Friend, God calls us to use our skills to make the world a better place. He calls us to be wise planners with our time and resources. Our ability to think ahead and predict possible outcomes is part of what distinguishes us from animals. Yet God asks us to hold our plans loosely, recognizing that our understanding of the future is limited while his is limitless. I'll bet you know the old saying "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans."

I'll bet you know an even older saying from Solomon's book of wise sayings. Read and reflect on Proverbs 16:9. Fill in the blanks. "In their hearts humans _____ their course, but the LORD _____ their steps."

THEIR STORY

Let's take a moment to look back on our collective history as the people of God. The human desire to control and plan is as old as time. In fact, control is a thematic thread that runs straight through the Bible—from beginning to end.

- ▶ At the start of the biblical narrative, Adam and Eve ate fruit from a forbidden tree (Genesis 3:6). Ultimately, they wanted control in the form of wisdom.
- ▶ In the middle of the narrative, religious leaders wanted to control the people. Because Jesus was a threat to that control, they plotted to kill him (Mark 3:6).

- ▶ In the end, the book of Revelation is ultimately about who will control the world.

There are hundreds of control moments in between. Throughout the Bible, we encounter numerous people who had a plan and wanted to wield a bit of control over a situation. Some of those people had a healthy relationship with control, but others didn't.

Let's meet a few of them.

Healthy control

Turn to Genesis 6:9-22 for an example of healthy control. As you read the passage, note each time a well-detailed plan and a bit of healthy control was beneficial. What most impresses you about the task set before Noah?

The Bible doesn't say exactly how long it took Noah to build that ark, but scholars agree that it would have taken decades. Imagine the planning required to build a boat the length of one and a half football fields and as high as a four-story building. The Bible doesn't say specifically, but it's certainly plausible that people mocked Noah. If so, imagine the self-control required to keep moving forward despite opposition. Imagine the plans needed to gather "every kind of food" (Genesis 6:21) to feed all those animals, as well as Noah's family. And think of the organizational skill required to gather up all those lumbering, skittering, slithering, flying, and sprinting animals. Scholars have estimated that about 45,000 animals would have fit into Noah's ark.



Read Genesis 7:4 to find out how long it took Noah to make final preparations and get every animal and his family settled into the ark. Write the length of time here: _____

That's not much time, people. If it were me, I would have left the snakes and spiders behind—and then blamed the tight deadline. But Noah, a man of obedience, did what he was told.

Where did he get his plan? Read Genesis 6:22 to find out. Fill in the blank. "Noah did everything just as _____ commanded him."

Noah was a man with a plan—a plan that was set in his hands by God. Noah also had the stamina to follow through on a long-term commitment. There are a lot of reasons why his obedience, his perseverance, and his healthy control make quite a difference to each of us today. Here's one big reason.

Turn to Luke 3:23-38, and skim over the list. This is one branch of the family tree of Jesus. Who is one of Jesus' ancestors? See if you find the familiar name of a shipbuilder in verse 36:

Noah teaches us that when we are in a state of healthy control, we can be used by God to accomplish his plans in this world. Those God-given assignments might have ripple effects that outlive us—and change the world for good.

Unhealthy control

Now let's take a look to see where trying to take control didn't end well—what we're calling unhealthy control.

Remember the Israelites? God made a promise to them while they were still in slavery.

Read the following passage and underline the verbs that reveal God's promises to them.

I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

EXODUS 6:6-7

God followed through on his plans and his promises. He freed the Israelites (Exodus 12:31), miraculously parted a sea (Exodus 14:22), gave them food (Exodus 16:4), and provided water (Exodus 17:6). Though the Lord divinely and repeatedly provided for the Israelites, they often grumbled and wavered. At one point, they actually said they would have preferred to die in slavery back in Egypt (Exodus 16:3)!

The Israelites were gripped by fear, despite the fact that God had come through for them in mind-blowing ways. In the Scriptures, you can note how quickly they forgot God's provisions and how they assumed their own plans were better than his.

Read Exodus 15:22-24. How many days after that miraculous march through the parted Red Sea did it take before the Israelites started grumbling? _____

Only three days. My, my, we are an impatient, forgetful people. We're fooling ourselves if we say we wouldn't do the same thing as the Israelites! In his goodness, God sweetened the water (Exodus 15:25). Then when their bellies started grumbling, God sent a miracle food from heaven called manna.



Read Exodus 16:19. What were the instructions about storing this heaven-sent food?

Like us, the Israelites felt the urge to make their own plans, just in case God didn't come through.

What did the Israelites decide to do instead? How did that turn out for them? Read Exodus 16:20 and record your answer.

(And all the people said, "Ewwwww.")

Fast-forward to today. God promises throughout Scripture that he's got us covered. We say we trust God. We might even have the right Bible verses underlined and everything! But still our actions betray our fears. We try to take matters into our own hands, and in this modern age, it's easier than ever to trick ourselves into thinking we can do it on our own.

We've become so scarily self-sufficient—even as Christians. We believe in God, but we don't actually rely on him. We manage our lives instead of living them. We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," but if we run out of bread, we drive the Escalade to Costco to buy in bulk what we don't really need anyway. (*It's All Under Control*, page 36)



*If we've got it all under control,
why are we so wrecked and weary?*



So often our actions reveal that we trust our own plans more than God's. If we *do* surrender something to God, we are tempted to check back on his progress. (Tell me I'm not the only one to "help" God when he didn't actually ask for it.)

In short, we can act like self-appointed saviors to fix the people and problems in our lives. That is why it pays to listen for God's direction. Noah and the Israelites are proof that sometimes God calls us to *stand up* (as Noah did); at other times, he calls us to *stand by* (as the Israelites often failed to do).

Stand up

Like Noah, you may be asked to fulfill an assignment that requires great bravery. Stand up! Be fully you, with all your gifts and talents and ambition.

What does Hebrews 11:7 tell us about what compelled Noah to build the ark? Where do you sense God calling you to stand up and be brave? Or where have you sensed this in the past?

Stand by

Other times, like the Israelites, you will be asked to stand by. God is working out his plans in places you can't yet see.

According to Exodus 14:13-14, what did God ask the Israelites to do when the Egyptian army chased them soon after their escape? Where do you sense God calling you to stand by and wait? Or where have you sensed this in the past?

GETTING YOUR CONTROL UNDER CONTROL

John the Baptist shows us what it looks like to let God be God. When he first began preaching out in the wilderness, all kinds of people were asking who the goofy-dressed guy was. John let everyone know who he *was* by first telling everyone who he *wasn't*.

Let's see how the Bible describes John—and how John describes himself. Read the following verses and fill in the blanks.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. . . . He himself was _____ the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (John 1:6, 8)

They asked him, . . . “Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am _____.” (John 1:21)

“Among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am _____ worthy to untie.” (John 1:26-27)

What's the common word that you inserted in the blank spaces above?

Now for the kicker. Who else did John say he was not?

“I am not the _____.” (John 1:20)

On Your Own

A great way to apply these biblical principles to your everyday life is by completing the “Cracking the Control Code” exercises introduced in *It's All Under Control*.

The control code is what I call the system of ideas, rules, and behaviors that we have set for ourselves to keep our lives in order. We want to crack that code so we can understand why we operate the way we do. Then we can replace those old systems with healthy living.

In this week's exercises, you'll create an inventory of what weighs you down in your life (“Running Smarter,” page 105); identify times in your life when good intentions went south (“I Am Not the Christ,” page 106); and pinpoint what gives you your identity (“Who Are You?,” page 107). You can also download these resources at www.ItsAllUnderControlBook.com/Resources.



Let's call it the Great Ministry of *Not*.

When it comes down to it, we sometimes function like we are gods of our own lives. But we are *not*. I like how the 1984 edition of the New International Version renders John the Baptist's words in John 1:20: "I am not the Christ." (The terms *Messiah* and *Christ* both mean "the anointed one.")

Repeat after John the Baptist: "I am not the Christ." We know this truth in theory, but when we try to take control of what was never ours to control, we are playing God.

Ultimately, we've got to settle this issue of identity. We have reaffirmed, above, who we *aren't*. So then that raises the question: *Who are we?*

Read 1 John 3:1. Record who God says you truly are below.

No one ever asked you to be God. Instead, the truth is, you *belong* to God. You are a daughter. And because you belong to him, he will call on you to partner with him in some pretty amazing stuff. He will call you to do great things with the right amount of healthy control. And he will call on you to let go of areas where you are experiencing unhealthy control. He wants you to live as a free, not a frazzled, daughter of the King!

PRAYER

Let's pray that, over the next several weeks, God will reveal what's ours to control and what's not. Consult your list on page 5 and fill in the lines of the prayer on the next page with areas where you are currently in danger of crossing into unhealthy control.

IS CONTROL SETTING YOU FREE OR MAKING YOU FRAZZLED?

Dear Lord, I know your ways are perfect and your plans are far better than my own. Make me brave to stand up and take hold of what you've put within my reach. And compel me to stand by when you actually want me to wait while you work. Today, I confess the areas where I am tempted to take control of people and situations that I need to fully surrender to you:

I am not the Christ. But I am loved deeply by the Christ. Help me to live as one beloved. In Jesus' name, amen.

