

#3 Concede Control

Does anyone out there like to be in control? Do you do the driving whether you are in the driver's seat or not? Are your spices alphabetized? Is your house immaculate? Do you tell your husband *how* to put the children to bed when you go out for the evening? Do you hate when things don't go as planned? Do you have conflict with *other* controlling people? Um ... I mean, people you consider to be very controlling?

To some degree we all like to be in control, but this is more of an obsession for some people than others.

My eldest is a strong-willed child. I think it's my sister's fault. Her first-born is also strong-willed and she herself was a strong-willed child. I don't know if she felt I was judgmental of her parenting skills or what darkness came over her soul, but Debbie actually prayed that I, too, would have a strong-willed child. What kind of a sister would do such a thing?

At any rate, Kendall Hope Carter arrived in the world demanding her own way. No, she would not go to sleep in her own crib. No, she would not eat green beans, play in the playpen, or tolerate water in her bottle.

Her strong will, now properly channeled, has served her well as a young woman. It has enabled her to become an excellent gymnast. Because her resolve is strong, she trains hard, refusing to allow tired muscles to interrupt her regimen. She is also a fine student because her steely determination enables her to push through the barriers to her goals. And she is a natural leader because she is far more directed by her own agenda than by peer pressure. In the midst of the power-struggle years we weren't always able to see the upside of raising a strong-willed child. There were many scenes that we look back on and laugh about ... now. At the time we were exasperated beyond belief.

One memory of Kendall that stands out for me is of our second summer vacation with her. Just over a year old, she was barely walking and was an absolute delight 90 percent of the time. She was a busy baby and so we traveled with as many distractions as a Honda Civic could hold. We tied a variety of treats and toys to her car seat so that we could travel decent distances between her protests. But in spite of our creativity and forethought, the trip quickly became the parenting version of an Outward Bound Course. Her protests were frequent, loud and angry.

We survived the trip to the cottage but decided we could not face the return trip without a new, stronger intervention. A chemical intervention. Yes, we drugged her ... with Children's Gravol. Now I can hear the self-righteous child advocates rise up with indignation preparing their long speeches about the detrimental

effects of medication in general, and Gravol in particular, on children. I'm not proud of drugging my child but I'm willing to bet that if you'd been in the car with us, you would have done the same thing. Maybe you *have* done the same thing.

In my mind, it was supposed to work like this: we would administer the drug, and she would drift off to sleep, allowing my husband and me hours of peaceful conversation as we enjoyed the passing landscape. Once safely home, her long eyelashes would flutter only briefly as we lifted her from her car seat and gently placed her in her crib, where she would sleep through the night.

In reality, a drug that would make any normal person sleepy had some odd kind of reverse effect on Kendall, making her unbelievably hyperactive and unwilling or unable to sleep. You've heard how people who get drunk get either happy or mean? Let's just say that Kendall was a mean drunk. She wailed and raged almost the whole way home. The farther we got from the cottage the more tired she became. But she refused to go to sleep. By hour six of this incessant screaming, my husband was seriously considering attaching her to the bike rack on the back of the car with bungee cords, just to make the noise stop. By hour seven he was demanding drugs.

About an hour away from home, all three of us were a mess. Every nerve ending in our bodies was standing at attention. And still Kendall shrieked on. I finally climbed into the back seat, took her out of her car seat and held her in a vise-grip. She struggled and fought against me, but I would not let her move. Eventually, she wore herself out and *10 minutes from home* ...she fell asleep in my arms.

Okay, so apparently Kendall did not want to sleep. I doubt if she knew why, but she didn't want to. But most of all, she wanted to win. We knew she needed to sleep. The trip would have been so much better for us all if she had, especially for her. But children are not typically good at knowing what is good for them. They just don't know enough. Their experience and education are simply too limited.

Does any of this sound familiar? It should, because we as adults are much the same. We fight to maintain control over people and circumstances and the future. We use our will to sculpt the world to our liking. But in due course, we often find the struggle has been futile. We are *not* in control. The control we had or thought we had was nothing but a mirage.

We can't hold a marriage together by the force of our will. We can't prevent the death of a loved one or the loss of a job. We can't hold back the rain or even the tears. We can't make our children obey us, our boss promote us or our husbands love us. We are not in control.

What if, in the light of that reality, we could just relax into the embrace of a compassionate parent who would gladly take the weight of all that responsibility off our shoulders? What if there was a good God who knew us intimately and loved us passionately? What if he never acted toward us except as an expression of perfect love? What if he was all wise and all powerful? What if we never had to question his motives or his capabilities or commitment to us? What would life be like if we could rest in the knowledge that whatever came into our lives was allowed by such a God? And that in those times when he allowed the unthinkable, we could know with absolute certainty that he was still on our side and that he would be there to lend his strength while we walked through the storm?

What would it be like to not struggle for control when life seems out of control? What would it be like to trust God instead?

Donna Staddon is one of the seven mothers who lost a child in the February 2003 avalanche tragedy in the Canadian Rockies. She described in an email to me what is like to rest in such a God when life takes a very bad turn.

Over the past 15 months there have been many times when I have felt overwhelmed with the loss of Marissa. One of those moments happened last August when Brittany was at camp and I was at home alone. I had decided to go through a file of receipts. It was full of purchases for Marissa when she started at Strathcona. She had just come back from her mission trip to Mexico. There was a new maturity about her, realizing just what a fortunate life she lived. When it came time to purchase her school uniform and all the accoutrements, she was worried I was going a bit overboard. "It's just too much, Mom," she said. I can remember making those purchases with her like it was yesterday.

So, there, by myself, with a box of receipts, I wept and I groaned with more pain than I had ever experienced before. Since her death, this was the first time I allowed the emotion to come from way down deep inside and just pour out. I cried to God to hold me and help me through this pain and anguish – I knew he understood the immensity of this loss – he lost his Son – and I depended fully on him to guide me through these difficult times. I felt God's arms just holding me and comforting me. I felt assured that my reality of now wasn't a forever thing. I would see her in heaven one day and that would be for eternity!

I have found that this tragedy has brought me so much closer to God. My faith has become stronger and I have such a deep desire to learn more about God and his word. I have a clearer understanding of God as my comforter and my refuge. I have seen evidence of his working out details far beyond what I could have ever imagined and experienced his care for me through the deep, difficult days – which are still happening. I think I

will always have those times when my grief hits me like a wave – I do allow myself to have those moments. I don't try to resist or deny them. I will journey through them holding God's hand...

After I expressed this thought to a friend she showed me the Bible verse in Isaiah where God says, "I am holding you by your right hand. I ... the Lord your God, and I say to you, 'do not be afraid, I am here to help you.'" I have experienced that and I have *hope*.

I have often said I wish so much that I was at the point where I am today in my faith journey, without having gone through this tragedy. I have learned depths of spiritual truths having come through this. I believe that God is in control today just as He was on February 1, 2003. I believe that God's plan for Marissa's life was to be just as she was — vibrant, living faithfully, impacting others. I do not understand the why of this accident, but because of my deep faith in him, I trust and accept his *will* in this accident. I am determined to continue on, grow through this, learn from it and hopefully I will be able to reach out and help others in new ways.

We can walk through the peaks and valleys of life holding the hand of a Father God who loves us, is committed to us and is in control. Or, because like little children we don't know enough to decide what is best for us, we can rail and rage against him, hurting only ourselves.

We experience life like someone watching a parade. We see one event at a time with no idea of what is coming around the bend. God sees the parade from the perspective of a bird soaring overhead. The whole of your life ... the whole of eternity all at once. He is in a much better position to judge what's best for you and for me.

And he has made this promise in Romans 8:28: "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."

Does that mean good people always succeed and the bad guy always gets it in the end? You and I know that life isn't that way. At least not the dimension of life we find ourselves in presently. But for those who choose to live in relationship with God, who love him and live in harmony with his design as it is made known in the Bible, it means that God will never let us down. That he is in control of the events that touch us. So that even when evil interrupts life and steals what is most precious to us, God will use even *that* to our advantage. God will not waste our pain but will use it to draw us to our destiny, to our place of highest fulfillment.

But he makes this promise only to those who return his love and are "called according to his purpose for them." That means that they have surrendered

control to God and welcome his plan for their lives.

We don't like the idea of surrendering control to anyone. It's scary. It makes us feel weak and vulnerable. But to surrender to a God of Love, the God described in the Bible, leaves us feeling safe and protected, loved and cherished, confident and secure. Living any other way is futile. Any control we think we have is a mirage. The Bible says in Psalm 127:1:

Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.

God wants us to stop our striving for control and rest in the security of his care. In Psalm 121:3-4 we read this:

He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps.

It seems only reasonable that I stop letting all this responsibility I've needlessly assumed keep me up nights. *He's up anyway.* And he is in control.

Conceding control of all the events in your world as they unfold will help you build a better life by replacing your worry with faith, your struggle with peace and your grief with hope.

Discussion Questions

1. What areas of your life do you most feel the need to control?
2. Is there an area of your life where you won the battle for control but lost the war?
3. How does your perception of God affect your desire to be in control?
4. In the face of overwhelming loss, how would your response be similar to or different from Donna Staddon's?
5. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." What does this mean?
6. How does the idea that "it's not all up to you" make you feel? Relieved? Afraid?

7. To what degree are you ready to trust God?

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