

## Chapter 12 - Breaking Controlling Powers

It is offensive to God when we let other people control us. He sent Jesus, His only Son, to purchase our freedom with His life. The Bible says we have been purchased with a price (See 1 Corinthians 6:20), and that price is the precious blood of God's only, dearly beloved Son.

If you are letting someone control your life—intimidate you, manipulate you, and cause you to do what you know in your heart is not right—then you need to break those controlling powers. It is not God's will for us to be controlled by anybody except His Holy Spirit, and even that decision He leaves up to us. God won't even force His will on us, so we certainly should not let anyone else do it.

Approval addicts almost always end up being controlled and manipulated by other people. Satan always sends someone along their way who is a "user." A user is someone who deviously takes advantage of people for his own benefit without any concern for others.

People who are being controlled are not **confronters**, and those who are controllers don't like being confronted. These two types of dysfunctional people play on each other's weaknesses. One enables the other.

### THE ENABLER

We need to take some time to discuss the person who is an **enabler**. We can actually enable people to stay in bondage by continuing to give in to their demands instead of choosing to do what we believe is right for us as individuals.

People will take advantage of you, if you let them. They will be used by Satan to draw you away from what you should be focused on, which is God's will for you. The most vital thing for any Christian is prompt, hearty obedience to God. As we have already established, one cannot be a **God-pleaser** and a **people-pleaser**. The two will ultimately end up diametrically opposed to one another.

A woman who attended many of our conferences claimed to have an abusive past that was quite horrible. In our meetings, the woman displayed very disturbing behavior. She was disruptive. She would fall onto the floor, curl up in a fetal position,

become wildly emotional when touched, and have to be literally carried out of the meeting.

We always had several people minister to her the best they could, but this pattern continued again and again. I began to dread her arrival any time I heard she was coming. I felt my heart sink when I saw her.

At times I felt bad about my negative feelings. I felt I should help her, but I honestly did not know what to do for her. There were times when she seemed as sane as anyone else, yet at other times she was quite out of control. Or as I discovered later, she was in control! She was not in control of herself, but she was controlling my meetings and my staff with her behavior.

One afternoon as I taught God's Word to a crowd of several thousand people, this woman began to act the same way she had in the past, only this time she fell out of her chair and lay on the floor between two rows of seats. The attention of everyone for several rows around her was on her. Our staff workers had to get between the rows and try to minister to her. Finally they carried her out again as they had done previously. This of course totally disrupted the meeting. They took her to a private room and prayed for her, but nothing changed.

One of the women who was trying to help her felt in her heart that the woman was putting on an act to get attention, so she took a bold step. She said, "Okay, lady, you can lie here as long as you want. There will be an usher outside the door, but I am going back to my seat; I don't want to miss any more of the teaching." She walked out of the room, stood in a hallway, and watched to see what the woman would do. When the woman thought nobody was looking, she got up, walked out the door, and left the building.

The woman was manipulating us to get attention. She had been abused in her past, and she did need help, but at that particular time she was using us, and we were not helping her. As long as we continued to cater to her bizarre behavior, we were enabling her to remain in her trap. Confronting her was the kindest thing we could have done.

At times we feel we are being mean if we confront people who have problems, when in reality "tough love" is what Jesus often used to set people free.

Although Jesus had compassion for hurting people, He never merely felt sorry for them. And whenever possible he helped them help themselves. He instructed them to take some particular action, and frequently His instructions were shocking. For instance, He told a crippled man to rise, take up his bed, and go home (See Matthew

9:6). He told a man who had just received a report that his daughter was dead not to be afraid (Mark 5:35-36). When Jesus saw a blind man. He spat on the ground, made some mud by mixing dirt with it, and then rubbed it on the blind man's eyes. He then instructed the man to walk to the Pool of **Siloam** and wash himself in it; when the man did as Jesus had commanded, he was able to see (See John 9:1-7).

We see that Jesus often told people to do things that were not only surprising, but were seemingly impossible. How could a crippled man rise, take up his bed, and walk? After all, he was a cripple.

How could a man who had just received a report of his daughter's ^ death be expected not to fear? How could a blind man see to get to a certain pool of water when he was blind? Instead of merely feeling sorry for these people, Jesus moved them to action. He helped them get their minds off of themselves and their problems, and He motivated them to do something about them. Jesus was *moved* with compassion (See Matthew 9:36 **KJV**). He was moved to do something besides enable people to stay the way they were.

When Martha wanted Jesus to instruct her sister Mary to get up and help her work, Jesus told Martha that she was anxious and worried about too many things and that Mary was doing what was right in worshiping Him (See Luke 10:38-42). Jesus was straightforward, and He did not enable anyone to remain in deception. When we fail to confront people who are controlling us, we enable them to stay the way they are.

### MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS

Don't allow other people to make your decisions for you. You are being very unwise (foolish) if you let others make your choices. The Bible does say there is safety in many counselors (See Proverbs 11:14). It is a good thing to consider what others say, but the final choice must be yours. As the saying goes, "To thine own heart be true"; otherwise, there can no real happiness.

Being controlled and manipulated steals your joy and peace. It ministers death to your spirit, your mind, your emotions, and every other part of your life. God said, "I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

If you are going to choose life, then you must also choose to confront those people in your life who try to control you. People will actually respect you if you have borders in your life—areas you let them into and areas you do not let them into.

Dave and I run *Joyce Meyer Ministries* together as **co-directors** of the ministry. We both have strong personalities and frequently give one another advice. I receive advice from Dave in every area except what I am teaching in our conferences and on television. I know I must receive that information from God's Spirit—and not Dave or others—if it is to be anointed. I am a mouthpiece for God, and as such I must be led by Him in what I teach.

Dave has his own areas of expertise. He was in the engineering field prior to entering full-time ministry. When we built our ministry headquarters, he was very involved in the process because he understands that area. On a few occasions I tried to give him advice about something concerning the structure of the building, and he politely told me I should let him handle the building since that was his field.

We each receive advice from the other, but we have our borders, and we respect each other for it.

### **WHAT ABOUT SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY?**

The Bible teaches us to submit to authority (See 1 Peter 2:13). We are to submit to civil authority, church authority, employer authority, parental authority, and spousal authority. A rebellious attitude is one of the worst attitudes we can have. If we will not submit to man's authority, we will not submit to God's authority either.

However, the question always arises, "What if the authority I am under is unfair?" In some ways that is a hard question to answer simply because we frequently feel anything we don't want to do is unfair. God does not want nor does He expect us to be abused. But we may have to endure some things we feel are unfair.

The Bible says, "One is regarded favorably (is approved, acceptable, and thankworthy) if, as in the sight of God, he endures the pain of unjust suffering" (1 Peter 2:19). Unjust things may happen to us in this life, but God is just, and He will always make wrong things right, if we are patient and put our trust in Him. Our suffering does not make God happy, but when we continue to do what is right even if it means we have to suffer, that does please God.

I believe the key phrase in this Scripture is "if, as in the sight of God." In other words, we should endure the pain of unjust suffering for God, not necessarily because we want to. The verse prior to the one I quoted above is specifically talking about submission to authority that may be unkind and unreasonable. So if we endure unjust suffering from an authority that is unkind or unreasonable, for the sake of God

and His kingdom, it pleases Him.

For example, a person may be led by the Holy Spirit to remain on a job where he is not treated fairly in order to be an example to unbelievers of the proper way to behave in such a situation. Or a person may be the only believer in Jesus Christ at his company, and the Holy Spirit may lead him to remain there in order to be a light in an otherwise dark place. All too frequently we are more concerned about our own personal comfort than we are about bearing good fruit for **the** kingdom of God. If being in the will of God means enduring some **e** personal suffering or discomfort, we should not be afraid of it. Anything we do for God ultimately brings a reward. God *a/ways* vindicates us and brings justice into our lives, but there are times when we must endure things that seem unfair at the moment.

There are also times when we should not endure; instead, we should confront. Discerning when to endure and when to confront is the real key to success and fulfillment in this area. I cannot **g**ive you exact direction on this subject. There is a time to do nothing and a time to do something. Each of us must seek God and be sensitive to follow His leading.

Some people are so timid, they endure longer than they should. They become a doormat for other people to walk on. As a result, they spend their lives being mistreated. Other people confront too quickly and too often. These people need to learn the dynamics of standing still and waiting on God.

People may think they are free when they refuse to submit to anyone, but they are actually in great bondage. True freedom is being free not to exercise a freedom if exercising it would not be good for all concerned. Love is the highest law in God's kingdom, and the apostle Paul stated in Romans that if what we do causes our brother to be pained or hurts his feelings, then we are not walking in love (See Romans 14:21). Paul also said he was free to do anything he wanted to do, but he was also free to discipline his personal desires for the good of the kingdom (See 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 9:22).

As Christians, we may say we are free to do whatever we want to; however, when it comes to living in community with others, this type of philosophy simply does not work. When one person in a group or society controls everyone else, it is called a dictatorship, not a family or a community. The only one who thinks he is happy is the dictator, and even he eventually discovers he is not happy either. God created us to live and work together in love and unity; without love and unity nothing else will ever work properly.

Let's look at some of the areas in which we are often challenged by negative authority.

#### **WORK**

When a boss demands so much of an employee that it is ruining his home life, his spiritual life, and perhaps his health, that employee is not being rebellious if he confronts the boss and states plainly what he can and cannot do. He actually would be guiltier if he did not confront than he would be if he did confront.

God expects a person to put his marriage, his family, his home, his spiritual life, and his health before his job. If he loses his job as a result of proper confrontation, then God will help him get a better one. It is sad when a person lives in so much fear of the loss of money and reputation that he allows himself to lose his health, the respect of his family, and a good relationship with God. If you have been allowing someone to control you, you should ask yourself what price you are paying to have that person's approval.

As I mentioned previously, I once worked for a man who required way too much from his employees. He was a Christian leader, and I respected him greatly. In the beginning, I just assumed that whatever he told me to do must be what God wanted me to do. But after a period of time I began to realize that my life was seriously out of balance because of trying to meet all of my boss's requirements in order to keep my job.

I regret to say I let the situation deteriorate to the point that I was sick, and my marriage and children needed some serious attention. I had the approval of my boss, but I was out of God's will.

We can usually look back and see what we did wrong in the past easier than we can see what we are doing wrong while we are caught up in the emotion of the actual event. But, at least we can learn from our mistakes and not do the same foolish thing twice. I learned a lesson from this situation that has been beneficial to me at many other times in my life: When we let our lives get out of balance, we will always pay a price somewhere along the line. If you don't want to pay the price, then don't play the games you have to play in order to have everyone's approval.

#### **CHURCH**

When a pastor or other spiritual leader tries to "hear from God" for all his people about their decisions, he is being spiritually abusive. We all have the Holy Spirit, and

we can all hear from God for ourselves. That does not mean we never need advice, because we do. But some people get way out of balance in this area.

Dave and I once had a pastor who thought the people in his congregation should not even sell their houses and move unless they asked him if he felt it was the right decision and the right time for them to make it.

This type of attitude is of course controlling and totally unscriptural. As far as I am concerned, this man was insecure and wanted people coming to him for everything so he would feel important. This same man also told my husband that he was making a mistake by letting me teach a Bible study in our home. He said my husband should be teaching it. There was only one small problem:

God had given the gift of teaching to me, not to my husband. Dave tried to teach for a period of time, and I tried to keep quiet. Neither of us was happy or successful in our efforts!

Well-meaning people may try to tell you what you should do, but that does not always mean they are right. Dave and I would have missed an opportunity to share the gospel with millions of people worldwide had we listened to that pastor. He may have been sincere, but he was sincerely wrong.

#### **HOME**

Parents must know when to let go of their children. Nothing is worse than parents who are still trying to run the lives of their grown children. Parents should not do that, but the children must not allow it. Both have a responsibility. There are times when Dave and I give our children advice, and I am sure there are times when they don't want it. We may tell them what we think, but we don't try to make them do it. We realize they must be free to make their own decisions and deal with their own consequences. If they give any indication that they really don't want our advice in a specific situation, we then keep our advice to ourselves, which is the right and proper thing to do.

Even if you are sure your child is making a mistake, you may not be able to do anything about it. Sometimes children learn more from the mistakes they make than from anything else.

#### **HUSBANDS AND WIVES**

Because it so often comes up in issues of authority and submission, I want to quickly address this. In the Bible, wives are told to submit to their husbands "as unto the Lord" ([Ephesians 5:22 KJV](#)). This has been a big problem for many women,

especially in our society today when women are fighting for equal rights. Women are equal with men; the Bible never says they aren't. But God is a God of order (See 1 Corinthians 14:33), and there can never be order unless someone is ultimately in charge. Someone has to have final authority to say what will and will not be done, especially when there is disagreement. Women are not to be abused or controlled by their husbands. If a man dominates his wife—if he gives her no money, tells her what to wear, allows her no friends, refuses to let her go to church or read Christian books, *et cetera*—then I believe he is out of order, and she needs to confront him. That is quite different from being asked to do something she does not want to do. Doing things we don't want to do is part of life. The Bible tells us to adapt and adjust to others in order to maintain peace in our relationships (See Romans 12:16). Between two people or in a group of people there should be give and take; when there is not, it can easily become a situation in which one person controls everyone else. This is not right!

As a wife, learning to submit to Dave's authority and be respectful to his opinions was very difficult for me. The pain I experienced in my past as a result of my father's controlling nature left me with an unhealthy perspective about the subject of submission. There were many times when I perceived (or I felt) Dave was trying to control me, when in fact that was not the case at all. If he even had an opinion that varied from mine, I felt threatened. If he ever actually told me he did not want me to do a certain thing I wanted to do, I responded by shouting, "If you think you're going to control me, you have got another think coming!"

With God's help I finally realized that my fear of Dave's trying to control me actually made me controlling. I am eternally thankful to the Holy Spirit for showing me the truth that has set me free to be submissive to authority—and thankful that Dave stayed with me long enough for me to learn.

Once again, submit to authority, but don't be controlled. If you are a person in authority, be authoritative, but don't be a controller. I have tried to learn not to be a "bossy boss." I pray for balance in these areas. They are not always easy to discern, but God's Spirit will guide us if we let Him. When you do make mistakes, which we all do, admit them and learn from them.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONTROLLER

If you are being controlled, the controller is likely someone you love and respect, or at least someone you liked and respected at one time. You may have lost your



respect for the person because of the control but are so caught up in the cycle that you do not know how to break free.

The controller may be someone you need, and the controller knows it. It could be someone who supports you financially, and you don't know what you would do if that person were not in your life. It could be someone you feel indebted to for some reason, someone who has done a lot for you in the past—and who regularly reminds you of it. It could be someone you hurt in the past, and now you feel that you owe that person the rest of your life.

The controller may be someone you are afraid of. That was the case with my father and our relationship. You may be afraid of personal harm or loss, as when parents threaten to take children out of their will and not leave any of their money or possessions to them if they don't do everything they want them to do.

The controller may be someone who was controlled in childhood, and now he is functioning in learned behavior. It may be a proud, selfish, or lazy person (someone who wants and expects everyone else to serve him).

The controller may be a deeply insecure person who feels better about life when he is in control. He may need the number-one position to feel safe.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERSON BEING CONTROLLED

The person who is most likely to be controlled is someone who has always been controlled, so that it is a habit, a way of life. Such a person is not accustomed to making his own decisions. It may be an insecure, fearful, or timid person who has never practiced confronting anything or anybody in life. His excuse is, "I don't like to confront." My answer is, "We all have to do things we don't like to do."

A person who is controlled may be confused about submission to authority. He may not be able to tell the difference between true godly submission and a wrong type of demonically instigated control. It would help him to remember that the devil controls; God leads!

The controlled person may have a poor self-image. He may think so little of his ability that he assumes everyone else is always right, and he is always wrong. Anytime anyone disagrees with him, he may instantly shut down inside and submit. The person may be a neurotic individual who feels he is at fault in every conflict.

The controlled person may be dependent on others for care, finances, a place to live, employment, companionship, *et cetera*. The controlled person may have done wrong at one time and now feels he owes a debt to the controller, so he allows the control to continue.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTROL

There are two main characteristics of control. I want to address both of them.

## EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Emotional manipulation is one of the most evident and powerful characteristics of control. Tears, rage, and silence (especially silence as a form of rejection) are all methods frequently used by controllers to control others.

Perhaps both sets of parents want the **newlyweds** to spend the holidays with them. Controlling parents may use silence, rage, tears, or anger to get their way. They may remind the couple of "all the money" they gave the couple. This, of course, makes the couple feel indebted, in which case the parents really did not "give" them anything. True giving has no strings attached by which the persons who receive the gift can be pulled in whatever direction the giver wants them to go.

On the other side, parents who are behaving properly will allow the couple the freedom to make decisions for themselves; they will not pressure them. If they are Christian parents, they will probably pray for God to lead them and their children, and then go on about their business, trusting God to work it out. Parents who apply the least amount of pressure may not always get the children for the holidays, but they will receive the most love, admiration, and respect from them.

Although I was deceived about the true nature of my actions, I tried emotional manipulation for years. Every time Dave did not do what I wanted him to do, I got angry, became silent, cried, pouted, displayed a pitiful attitude, and cleaned house or worked continually at other chores hoping to make him feel guilty or sorry for me.

I am glad to say it did not work. No matter how I acted, Dave stayed happy and did what he felt he should do. Had I been successful in controlling him with my emotions, I might still be in the same trap. His lack of confrontation would have enabled me to continue my controlling ways. If you are a controller and really want to be brave, pray that God will lead people to confront you anytime you really need it. Then pray that you will receive it and not respond defensively with anger, accusations, and excuses.

## VERBAL CONTROL

Other people may try to control with words of failure, defeat, unnatural obligation, guilt, criticism, and intimidation. Sometimes they use threats. For instance, they may threaten with loss of relationship (rejection). In other words, they may infer that if you don't do what they want you to do, they will no longer want to be in relationship with you. I believe many teenagers get involved in drugs, alcohol, and sexual misconduct because they are threatened with loss of relationships. We call it "peer pressure." It is actually control.

There are many methods of controlling others. If you are being controlled, learn to recognize the methods being used against you. If you are a controller, ask God to help you recognize your own methods of control. You cannot do anything about something you don't recognize. Pray for truth; the truth will make you free!

## SYMPTOMS TO WATCH FOR

If you are unable to interact with others without the controller making you feel tense and guilty that you are enjoying yourself, what you are experiencing is a symptom of being controlled. Or perhaps you cannot make new friends without the controller becoming jealous and possessive. You feel you always have to "check in" with the controller before you do anything. You have no personal life of your own. You have to tell the controller everything, invite him everywhere, and get his opinion about everything.

Maybe you have the controller on your mind excessively. You live with a vague fear of what he will think or say about everything you do.

These are all signs of a crisis that must be addressed. Let's take a look at five important steps in gaining freedom from control.

### I. RECOGNIZE

The first step to getting free from control is to recognize you are being controlled. Some people may think they are just keeping the peace. As Christians we can even believe we are obligated to keep peace at all costs. The Bible does teach us to be makers and main-tamers of peace, to adapt and adjust to other people in order to have harmony:

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty (snobbish, high-minded, exclusive), but readily adjust yourself to [people, things] and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits. (Romans 12:16)

As Christians, we are to do everything in our power to keep the peace, but that does not mean we are to allow others to control us. Any Scripture taken to an extreme can create a problem. Operating in love, we are to do what is for the good and advantage of other people, but we must realize it is not good for other people if we let them control us.

## 2. ACT

Once you recognize you are being controlled, choose to do something about it. You must not let it continue—not only for your sake, but also for the sake of the controller. If you let it continue, you are enabling him, and you become as guilty as he is. A bad habit has been formed that needs to be broken. You probably *react* to the controller in certain ways, and you must learn to *act* on God's Word and instruction to you. This will take some prayer and determination. Don't be discouraged if it takes time. It has been said that it takes thirty days to make a habit and thirty days to break one. I would imagine by the time you have confronted the controller thirty times, you will be well on your way to developing a new set of relationship rules.

## 3. UNDERSTAND

As I have mentioned, you need to learn *how* the person controls you. Is it through fear, anger, silence, rage, tears, guilt, or threats? It is important to quickly recognize the control tactics and resist them immediately. The quicker you resist, the less likely you are to fall into the trap you are trying to break free from.

## 4. CONFRONT

Face the battle of confrontation. Realize that if you have let another person have his way all the time, he will not like it when you change. It may even be wise for you to discuss the situation with the other person. You might say something like, "You may not be doing it on purpose, but I feel you are controlling me. I need to have freedom in our relationship, and God has shown me that although you should not control me, I have been wrong in allowing it. I am going to make a change, and I realize it may not be easy for you. I love you, and I want our relationship to flourish, but from now on I will be following my own heart."

Don't even expect the person not to react adversely. Just as you have been addicted to approval, the controller is addicted to control. No addiction is broken without some fleshly reactions. As I always say, "The flesh (the carnal nature of man) never dies without a fight."

You may be afraid to confront, but you must do so even if you have to *do it afraid!* If you stand firm, the controller will ultimately move from anger to respect. I have never had a relationship with people who allowed me to control them in which I respected them. I actually disrespected them for not confronting me.

You may fear losing the relationship, and that is a possibility. The only thing I can say is that you would be better off without the relationship than to spend your life being controlled and manipulated. If people have no interest in you unless they can control you, then they are not really interested in you at all. Don't let people use you.

#### 5.PRAY

Don't try to make any of these changes without a lot of prayer. Timing is very important in situations like these. Pray for the people you need to confront, asking God to prepare their heart. Ask Him to make them aware of their actions even before you speak to them.

### **A WORD TO CONTROLLERS**

Although most of this book is directed to those who are addicted to approval and in the process allow others to control them, I also know that some people reading the book are controllers themselves. It is possible to be both a controller and someone who is controlled. I had periods of time in my life when I was controlling anyone who would let me, and at the same time I was being controlled by someone else. In both cases I was out of God's will. You may be the same. For instance, you might be controlled by your boss and yet be controlling your family at home.

If you are not sure whether you are a controlling person, ask yourself the following question: How do I respond when I don't get my way? Do you usually become angry or try to convince others that your way would be best? Are you unhappy until you do get your way? Be honest in your answer, and you will be able to identify yourself quickly.

People have a right to make their own decisions. God wants us to be led by His Word and Spirit, not by outside forces. He also wants us to let others be led the same way. As a matter of fact, we should not only let others be led by God, we should encourage them and help them do it. When we want others to do something, and they seem unsure, instead of trying to convince them to do what we want them to do, we should tell them to pray about it, and then trust that God will show them what to do. We can encourage people to do things, but we should not manipulate them to get our way. As the saying goes, "If you really love others, set them free; if they really belong to you, they will come back on their own." True love means that we help a person make the right decision for all concerned, not just the right decision for us.

## FIVE THINGS TO DO IF YOU ARE A CONTROLLER

If you have controlling tendencies, you need to do the following:

1. Admit it to yourself. Try saying out loud, "I am a controller."
2. Ask God to forgive you and to teach you to respect other people's rights.
3. Ask the people you have been trying to control to forgive you.
4. Encourage them to be honest with you about how they really feel about situations between the two of you. Ask the person to confront you when you get out of line.
5. Don't give up or get discouraged if your change takes time.

You must realize your controlling tendencies won't just disappear overnight. Even after you admit them and begin to recognize them, it will still take time to break free of them. Confessing our faults to one another breaks their power over us and has a freeing effect on all concerned (See James 5:16). Facing truth starts a healing process in our life. When I was in my healing process, I told my husband to let me know if I sounded disrespectful to him. I had a lifetime of bad habits to overcome, and I wanted all the help I could get.

You may think, as I did, you are protecting yourself by staying in control, but you are actually opening a door for the devil to destroy all your relationships and load you down with unbearable stress. Trying to control everyone and everything is very stressful. I was relieved to finally discover I did not have to try to run the entire world. If you have been the great choir director of everything in your world, you need to retire.

Even if you have developed controlling tendencies because you were hurt in the past, it is still wrong. You may be a certain way because of the pain you have endured, but don't let it be an excuse to stay that way.

Not everyone who is controlling has abuse in his or her past. Some controllers just have very strong personalities and very definite ideas about how everything should be done. They are so strong about what they think and feel that they are not open at all to other people's opinions and thoughts. Others are just plain selfish. They are addicted to getting their own way, and they may have developed the bad habit of not respecting other people. Perhaps **they** were not corrected for these bad attitudes as children or were praised by parents who displayed controlling traits. Whatever the reason, one thing is for sure: they are not walking in love, and God is not pleased.

If you realize you have been controlling others, make a decision to let them be free to make their own decisions. If you don't agree with their decisions, refrain from showing displeasure. You might say, "I respect your right to choose; you are entitled to your own opinion."

Don't insist that everything be done your way. Don't get angry when others tell you no or don't seem to want to do what you want. Don't give people the "silent treatment" when they say no or confront you. Don't make them feel rejected. Tell them you respect them and realize they need to be free to follow their own heart. Tell yourself over and over, even repeating it out loud, "People have a right to make their own choices and have their own opinions and I should respect their right to do so." Say it until your attitude begins to change.

When I was in the process of overcoming controlling tendencies I frequently said quietly to myself, "Joyce, this is none of your business." I did this when I was tempted to get involved in something that no one had invited me into. We love to give our opinions and tell people what we think, but the truth is most people don't even really want to know what we think. (I have found that even when people ask me what I think, they normally just want me to agree with them so they feel better about their decision.)

Don't make plans for other people without checking to see if they want to do what you have in mind. Following the simple scriptural instruction to treat other people the way you want to be treated will solve all of the control problems (See Luke 6:31).

#### DON'T OVER-CORRECT YOUR PROBLEM

*It* is not uncommon upon discovering that we have been extreme or out of balance in an area to swing to the other side of extreme behavior in an effort to correct the situation. For example, when Kevin finally realized that Stephanie had been controlling him for years, he decided he was going to correct the situation. His decision was good but his methods were not. He became so determined that she would never control him again that he became overly aggressive toward her anytime she seemed to be anything other than totally compliant to his wishes.

In trying to make sure she never controlled him again, he ended up being the way she had once been.

They went to counseling sessions and Stephanie admitted her problem and sincerely wanted help. She needed to be confronted but Kevin became downright



mean to her. Kevin finally saw that his methods were extreme and that he was trying to fix one problem but in the process was creating another problem. It took some time and effort but with God's help they learned to respect one another and have a balanced relationship.

Excess is the devil's playground. Anytime we become excessive in any area it becomes an atmosphere that Satan can work in. Strive to be in balance. If you realize you have been being controlled by someone you definitely need to take measures to regain your freedom, but don't let your response be emotionally driven. Pray often, use wisdom, and be patient. Don't go from being controlled to being so determined no one will ever control you again that you react to people in an **out-of-balance** manner. Likewise, if you have been a controller don't go to the opposite extreme and think you must never show any aggression at all.

Now that we have discussed taking positive steps toward freeing ourselves from negative control, let's look at ways we can use the pain we have experienced in the past to make a positive difference in our lives and the lives of others.