

CONTROL IS AN ILLUSION

Control is, in large part, an illusion. Nevertheless, as deceptive as the idea of control is, it is an illusion that I and many others still indulge in at times. Who knows why most of us think we can control circumstances and events or even people when no one in the human race has ever had a proven track record in this pursuit? Maybe we don't really believe we can—maybe we just hope we can? Maybe the feeling of anxiety or fear of the future or desperation simply drives us to act upon the impulse to try and gain the upper hand in any situation that causes us concern. After all, to do nothing seems more ridiculous than trying to control what is beyond our control. Isn't it interesting how either path leads us back to where we started? We have a dilemma. So, what do we do?

The good news is that, if we have hope of controlling anything, it is ourselves. In fact, it is also probably the only variable we should try to control. By gaining control over ourselves we are better able to react to or cope with that which troubles our minds. The economy, the weather, world events are way outside the scope of our control, but still trigger reactions with us and threaten the ability of some to cope. Probably the biggest trigger of anxiety or upset leading people to try to control is the behavior of other people. Other people are certainly beyond our control, yet this is a major area of frustration for a multitude. People want to make other people love them. Family members and spouses often want to make others in their lives change. They may want to control the actions of others and the choices they make. Employers sometimes want to find a way to help employees to change for the better and be more productive. But the only way to get off the endless merry-go-round is to go back to what we can control—ourselves.

Controlling ourselves begins with controlling our thoughts and the things we dwell on during our waking hours. This in turn helps us to control our attitude and our outlook on life and others. A better outlook and attitude will influence the choices we make and the things we say to others. This improves our relationships and the outcome of situations in all aspects of our lives ranging from our finances to our health. Think about it for a moment, which has more conflict with others, a person with a good attitude or a bad one? Who makes better decisions, a person who is stressed and filled with anxiety or a person who is calm and collected in his or her thoughts? Who has less of a troubled mind, a person who is hopeful or a person who is negative and cynical?

The key that perhaps you may be waiting for is an answer to the question of, "How does one get control of himself or herself?" The starting point is by choosing the direction of one's thoughts. As a starting point consider what many have known as the *Serenity Prayer*. You may have read it on a plaque or poster somewhere. It was written by Reinhold Niebuhr, and says in part, "God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other." For more aggressive change in one's life, when one's need to control is affecting one's relationships or one's health, there are many professional counselors and psychologists who are trained to help with these specific changes. The need for help in this area does not mean one is "crazy"—just that one needs a better strategy for success.

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