

How I Learned to Stop Being Such a Control Freak About My Future Jim Stephens

This is a series about surrender, trust and learning to understand the sovereignty of God. I think it is human tendency (especially young adult human tendency) to want to be in control. We fight to be the boss of our finances, relationships and our future only to find out we're terrible at it. We try to "plan our ways" and "save our lives" when what we really need is to "lose our lives" and let God "direct our steps."

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 16:25

"A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." Proverbs 16:9

It will be each teacher's responsibility to share a life story and a bible reference about the topic they were given. How did you learn to surrender your relationships, finances, the future to God? Was there a specific story or verse, song or person that gave you strength or taught you something in that time?

- Finances (Corey on 10/9)
- Relationships (Bo on 10/16)
- The Future (Jim S. on 10/23)

The Myth of Control

23 I know, Lord, that our lives are not our own. We are not able to plan our own course. 24 So correct me, Lord, but please be gentle. Do not correct me in anger, for I would die. (Jeremiah 10:23-24 NLT)

I want someone to be in control – in control of my life, my future, actually in control of everything. Make sure you understand that you really are not in control.

Who would you rather have in charge of the story of your life, you or the God of the universe?

If there was someone who knows everything, who is wise enough to always make the right choice, who is powerful enough to do what needs to be done, and who loves you more than you can imagine, would it not be a good idea to trust your life to that person?

God is in control of the entire universe. It's not that much more for him to deal with if you put him in control of your life. He can fit you in right between keeping the planets in orbit and making sure spring follows winter.

The Story of My Life

You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. (Psalm 139:16 NLT)

God has been writing the story of your life all along, even if you've been living a different version of your story. He's ready to hand you the manuscript and co-author the rest of it with you. It takes a decision on your part.

I choose God as the co-author of my life. I make a declaration that I choose God's authorship. **Then I find the things he has written about me** – about my life.

As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord is thinking about me right now. You are my helper and my savior. Do not delay, O my God. (Psalm 40:17 NLT)

God authors the general aspects of my story. He loves me. He has a plan for my life.

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11 NLT)

God loves you and has a difficult plan for your life.

God has a plan. It's better than any plan you can come up with. Trust him.

God authors the specific details of my story. Verses for daily reading, the prophecies. Do these become chapter headings?

- About what I'm going to be when I grow up.
- About what I'll do if things go wrong.
- About what others do.

11 The Lord has said to me in the strongest terms: "Do not think like everyone else does. 12 Do not be afraid that some plan conceived behind closed doors will be the end of you. 13 Do not fear anything except the Lord Almighty. He alone is the Holy One. If you fear him, you need fear nothing else. (Isaiah 8:11-13 NLT)

He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. (Psalm 112:7)

God authors the seasonal chapters of my story. (age and stage)

Everything changes. I get older. People come in and go out of my life. Different things matter more. I experience all kinds of loss. I experience all kinds of gain. Life

has seasons and they are irresistible. Watching the sun come up later. Watching the leaves turn and fall.

1 For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. 2 A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. 3 A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. 4 A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. 5 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. 6 A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. 7 A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. 8 A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NLT)

9 And now, in my old age, don't set me aside. Don't abandon me when my strength is failing. 17 Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. 18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come. (Psalm 71:9, 17-18)

I will be your God throughout your lifetime - until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you. (Isaiah 46:4 NLT)

God authors the circumstances of the story of my life.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139:9-10 NIV)

I will lie down in peace and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, will keep me safe. (Psalm 4:8 NLT)

Are you getting the idea?

You can learn to truly co-author the story of your life with God. Learn to live and act in the context of his authorship.

We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps. (Proverbs 16:9 NLT)

The paradox of dreaming dreams from God and yielding all your hopes and dreams to God.

With a little help from my friends (You can pick your friends...)

West Wing: Do you have a best friend? Is he smarter than you? Would you trust him with your life?

How real is this?

In April of this year, Jean and I and another pastor were in Blantyre, Malawi. This was our second southern African country on this trip and we had one more to go. We were visiting three countries we'd never been in before and we had to go in and out of Johannesburg, South Africa each time to travel between the other countries. Every time you cross an African border there are so many things that can go wrong. And besides, the national airline of Malawi, which used to have seven planes, was down to one aging Boeing 737 that was so old it had ashtrays on the seat arms. And it was rumored they were about to go out of business and we still needed to get out of Malawi, through South Africa, into Botswana.

I was so stressed! I had been saying to God that if he didn't find a way to help me deal with the stress of Africa travel, I didn't think I could keep doing it.

We stopped at our friend Stuart's office at the hospital where we had held the Training Course and the pastors' meeting to pray, to say goodbye, and to borrow his Land Cruiser and driver to get to the airport.

We talked and then Stuart prayed for us. He prayed for safe travel and several other things and then he prayed for peace. As he prayed, something engaged in my spirit and soul and I said, "Father, I receive the gift of your peace." I consciously took all my "what-if's" and gave them to my Father. I felt peace.

The day was long, the details of our travels were complicated. Our flights were late. But every time the stress started to rise, I consciously said, "Father, I give you all these things I can't control. Deal with them as you choose. I receive your peace." And it worked! And it has had a long-term effect. It still requires conscious attention, decision, and release. But it still works!

I choose to let God control my today and my tomorrow!

Does it mean that there are no steep grades to climb, no more conflicts in your story?

- No, that's fantasy. It's way more real than that.

Does it mean my life will be boring and religious and all about niceness?

The God who controls my life saw fit for me to spend a year in Vietnamese jungles being shot at by people who have a different view of politics than I had.

The God who controls writes the story of my life allowed me to live in the Caribbean, in inner city London, travel to eight countries in Africa so far. Be waylaid one day at dusk on the Trans Africa highway between Entebbe and Kigali by rebel guerillas, eat food that is best eaten in the dark so you can't see what you're eating. Provide teaching and

training resources to hundreds of pastors and leaders from at least fifteen African countries. Not boring. Not what I could have done if I'd been in control.

You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. (Psalm 139:16 NLT)

Response and Prayer

So there's me in a Land Cruiser just outside Blantyre, Malawi, receiving the gift of God's peace about things I can't control. For the rest of that day, and for many days since, I start to feel the anxiety and stress and I say, "Father, these things I can't control, I give them to you. I receive your peace." It's still with me. I believe gifts given by God's Spirit can be transferred. I'd like to pray for you and ask God to transfer that gift of peace to you.

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27 NLT)

If you want to start a new chapter in the story of your life today – whether you are a believer and have been a believer for a long time or whether you're just making the choice today to cross the line of faith... If you want to make the choice and the declaration that from now on, God is going to be the author of the story of your life... I ask you to pray this prayer with me...