

Dear Lord,

Enough is Enough!



■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

“If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” ~Jesus

Our world changed a year ago. COVID, economic hardships, and natural disasters swirled together with tornadic force. We feel frustration as our life goals spin away. We try to control our circumstances and others. Barriers arise. Frustration builds. We want more control....

Bad circumstances come and go. We can't control that, but we can use self-control around chasing our desires. We decrease our frustration and increase our self-control when we focus on Jesus as "Lord".

Controlling Our Circumstances

Dr. Timothy Carey notes control is about our ability to lead lives we identify as valuable to ourselves.¹ Control requires having power for change, as well as the authority to do so.² When frustrated, we must ponder this question: What do we consider valuable? Moses told the people of Israel we choose life over death when we choose God over our heart (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Are our dreams clashing with God's will?

My daughter Sarah valued relationships. She dreamed of growing up and marrying the right man. She valued her relationship with Jesus, but the world taught her to "follow her heart". In high school, Sarah's heart led her to dating "John", an emotionally abusive boy. She believed no one could love her except him (as he repeatedly told her). Sarah tried multiple times to break up with John. He would apologize, and her marriage dreams would call after her again. The self-control she needed to follow through plummeted. This continued for over three years.

Controlling Ourselves

We need self-control to win the war between our own desires and God's desires for us. The Apostle Peter recognizes that self-control requires effort (2 Peter 1:5-8). Self-control grows over time as we exercise our will to do the hard things. In my experience, letting go of our dreams in favor of God's plan can be the hardest thing we do. Jesus even warned our lives would be hard when we follow him (John 15:20). Yay?

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Sometime after Sarah moved away for college, she realized John would never change. She knew breaking up would be easier while physically separated. She told John goodbye again. She still believed letting go of John meant letting go of her dream of a loving marriage, so she struggled. This time, though, Sarah followed through with what she knew to be right. Healing finally began.

Jesus as “Lord”

Merriam-Webster defines “Lord” as: “one having power and authority over others; a man of rank or high position, such as one whose right or title comes directly from the king”.³ Christopher Hudson wrote, “Inherent in the title or name [Lord] are the ideas of sovereignty, rulership, and honor.”⁴ We use “Lord” lightly when we choose our desires over God’s. The Apostle Paul encourages us, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10). When we treat him as “Lord,” his purpose becomes ours. Despite the difficulty, we will thrive in time (Psalm 37:4).

Sarah’s self-control in letting go of John allowed her to be open to God’s plan for her life. About a year later, Sarah met Zach, a good Christian man. It turned out God’s plan really did include marriage and children. Zach and Sarah love each other well. They make awesome parents, too.

Shifting Focus

The Apostle Paul calls us to maintain focus on the person of Jesus. He related Christian lives to a marathon race. We must shed excess baggage. We must persevere. We must keep our eyes on Jesus. He puts us at the starting line and coaches us to completion. His own life becomes our example and motivates us (Hebrews 12:1-4). We find God’s will for us when we transform ourselves by studying Jesus (Romans 12:2). Talk to him, ask questions, and listen to him. Make one hard choice at a time.

We can practice self-control to follow through, one choice at a time. Study Jesus. We learn to trust God, the ultimate Power and Authority, to work his plans in us.

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” ~Philippians 4:12b-13 ■

References

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-control/201912/mental-health-and-control>

² Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2008, p. 272

³ Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2008, p. 735

⁴ 100 Names of God, p. 128

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