



# Pause With Purpose

...to refresh

...to grow

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## Control and Responsibility

From the time we begin to discover the difference between "me" and "you", we also begin to resist efforts by "you" to control "me". Children quickly learn the word "no", and teens often exercise both active defiance and the fine art of passive resistance. Even as adults, we bristle at attempts by others to control and dominate us. Our freedom and independence are very dear to us, especially in our western culture.

Yet, we also appreciate community and healthy cooperative structure. We recognize the benefit of wise leaders, clear directives, and organized effort toward a common goal. We like to know who is responsible for what, and typically assign responsibility to whoever is in charge/in control. We also know that when control is lacking, chaos results.

So is control good or bad, a blessing or a curse? To answer this question, it would be helpful to first recognize a few truths about control and responsibility.

1) All human control is limited. Accordingly, our own personal control has its limits. It is wise for each of us to know how far these limits extend, so that we neither neglect nor overestimate them.

How far does our personal control reach? Generally, only as far as our self. To be sure, we can (and at times need to) lead, influence, inspire, organize, and empower others. We may have expectations for them and hold them accountable. But we only control ourselves (and, to a limited extent, babies and the severely infirmed).

2) Our responsibility is limited to our areas of control. That means we are responsible for ourselves - our thoughts, our words, our effort, our actions, our feelings, our decisions. Blaming others for who we are or what we do just doesn't work. Blaming ourselves for what others do also doesn't work. We all are in charge of and responsible for what we are called to control - ourself.

3) We must respect other people's areas of control. This is especially true regarding decisions and behaviors of a personal nature. While their decisions and behaviors may impact us (and such impact should be considered by them), any attempt to control them through bullying, threatening, intimidation, guilt, or "steamrolling" is as much a boundary violation as any other form of abuse.

4) We must guard our areas of control and beware of uninvited and unwanted intrusions. While we may consciously choose to give away some area of control to another person (all the while remaining responsible for that decision), unwanted attempts by others to take control from us by assumption or manipulation need to be dealt with directly and firmly.

5) Holding others accountable to take responsible action in their areas of control is an act of love. Sadly, there are those who prefer to ignore or pass off their responsibilities, regardless of the painful impact it has on others. Ignoring such irresponsibility only serves to strengthen the unhealthy character beneath it.

Like so many realities of life, the benefit of control depends on how and where it is used. Self control, freely exercised and producing responsible excellence in personal behavior, is not only a beauty to behold, but an obligation to fulfill. Attempts to control others and rob them of their rightful responsibilities is disrespect grown from selfishness and fear.

Clearly, control can be a vehicle for greatness, or a car wreck in the making. Let's drive wisely!



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## CONTACT INFORMATION

Your thoughts and comments are warmly welcomed. I would also be happy to share with you more about life coaching and how it can assist you to be your best, personally and relationally, at home and at work.

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## Spirituality and Control/Responsibility

In the latter part of the past century, comedian Flip Wilson entertained audiences with his unique comedic style. He is known as the one who used the line "The devil made me do it" as an explanation for any questionable behavior. The idea was, "Don't blame me. I couldn't control myself. Blame the devil." This handy excuse struck a cord with the general public and was frequently repeated, often as an ongoing joke, sometimes seriously.



It's interesting that no one ever popularized the saying "God's Spirit made me do it" to explain their commendable actions. We seem quite willing to claim this credit for ourselves.

The truth is, both the devil and God's Spirit are real and active. Satan and his hosts do tempt us to rebel against God, and God's Spirit does empower us to faithfully walk with Him. We, then, control our choices, and assume responsibility for them.

Most of us have a fairly checkered past regarding our choices. Thank goodness for a gracious God who is willing to remove our debt of darkness and replace it with the unblemished record of Christ Himself!

"There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self."

- Aldous Huxley