BIBLE STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO

SIX SESSIONS

LYSA TERKEURST

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR



FIND RELIEF FROM THE EXHAUSTION OF OVERTHINKING, TRYING TO FIX OTHERS, AND WANTING TO FIGURE IT ALL OUT

Making Peace with What I Can't Control

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HarperChristian Resources

Making Peace with What I Can't Control Bible Study Guide

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Requests for information should be sent to customercare@harpercollins.com.

ISBN 978-0-310-16951-2 (softcover)
ISBN 978-0-310-16952-9 (ebook)

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HarperCollins Publishers, Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper, Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland
(https://www.harpercollins.com).

Art Direction: Ron Huizinga
Cover Design: Lindy Kasler
Interior Design: Janelle Coury

First Printing July 2026 / Printed in the United States of America

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Letter from Lysa

Hi friend,

Thank you for joining me to do this study on *Making Peace with What I Can't Control: Find Relief from the Exhaustion of Overthinking, Trying to Fix Others, and Wanting to Figure It All Out*.

Maybe you decided to do this study because you have a specific situation or person in mind that you desperately want to change. And while you've tried to figure out how to get them to act better, do better, care more, and stop their concerning patterns, your efforts aren't working. You feel defeated and on edge when you're around them.

Maybe you've never really considered yourself to be controlling. After all, you're laid-back and flexible. But there is a situation you've been praying about that has not gone the way you hoped. You feel confused and frustrated that God isn't doing what you know He could do, so you trust Him less and less. And you're sinking under the exhausting weight that everything depends on you.

Or maybe your worries have compelled you to try to manage people you love because you live in constant fear of something bad happening. You've experienced loss and heartbreak, and you just can't take any more emotional suffering.

These are all understandable responses.

But if you're like me, you want to navigate these situations better. You know you can't ultimately control other people. And you know there are things you can't fix. So, together let's learn how to do what we can but then trust God with the things outside our control.

It is possible to live with less fear, worry, and anxiety, even in the midst of uncertainty and unknown outcomes.

I'm so grateful for all that I've learned, and I can't wait to teach you.

I'm going to ask you to do a couple of things right away.

First, commit to seeking God. Ask God to give you the courage to let Him guide your thoughts and open your heart to all He has for you in this study.

Second, commit to believing and receiving God's deep and tender love for you. If you're in a

tough situation where trying to control has felt like your only option, it can be hard to loosen your grip. And I know it can be hard not to question His love and His ways.

But we can do this: We can rest in His love that never changes. And the more convinced we are that He loves us, the more we can trust Him to carry what we cannot. One of my favorite Scripture verses is Colossians 1:17:

> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Lastly, I'm asking you to be compassionate with yourself and others in your study group. There will be a lot to process as we take this journey together.

Let's get started!

LOVE,



How to Use This Study Guide

GROUP SIZE

The *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting where meaningful discussions can take place. This could be a Bible study, a Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. To facilitate greater participation, larger groups can split up into smaller circles of four to six people after the teaching video is viewed. If you do move into smaller groups, be sure to select one person in each group to act as the facilitator during the discussion time.

MATERIALS NEEDED

To gain the most from this study, each participant should have their own copy of this study guide, as well as their own copy of the book *Making Peace with What I Can't Control*. This study guide contains notes from the video teachings, discussion questions, and personal study days that will deepen the learning between group sessions. Additionally, the leader will need to have the videos either on DVD or by digital stream/download. This study guide also provides streaming access to the six teaching videos from Lysa.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

At the beginning of each week, this study guide provides information on which chapters of the book should be read prior to the next group meeting. Each personal study day will lead you deeper into the biblical content of the video or book. Please note: It is recommended that participants read the introduction and chapter 1 before the first group session. On the next page is a sample of the schedule you will find at the beginning of every new week.

BEFORE YOUR GROUP GATHERING	Read chapters _____ in the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book.
DURING GROUP GATHERING	Watch Video Session _____. Group discussion. Pages _____.
PERSONAL STUDY DAY 1	Personal study based on video. Study guide pages _____.
PERSONAL STUDY DAY 2	Personal study based on book _____. Study guide pages _____.
PERSONAL STUDY DAY 3	Personal study based on book _____. Study guide pages _____.
READING DAYS 4 & 5	Read chapters _____ in the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book. Complete any unfinished personal study activities.

TIMING

Time notations have been given for each heading of the group meeting sections of the study. These indicate the actual time of the video segments and the suggested times for discussion.

Noting these times will help you as you plan your sessions according to your individual meetings. For instance, if your group meets for two hours, you will likely have enough time to cover most of the questions, and you are welcome to use any extra time to discuss some of the previous week's homework together. Or, if your group meets for 90 minutes, you may need to select which questions you feel will draw your participants into the fullness of the group discussion. Our main goal isn't to "cover" every single question but to have deeply beneficial discussion times. In our experience, we've learned that some of the most profound moments in a Bible study occur when participants share their own experiential wisdom with one another.

Your group may opt to devote two meetings rather than one to each session. This option allows conversations to explore the content of both the study guide and the book more fully. While the first meeting could be devoted to watching the teaching video and responding to the group questions, the second meeting could be devoted to exploring the insights gained from the personal study days.

FACILITATION

Having a facilitator for each group helps in numerous ways. A facilitator is responsible for starting the video teachings. Plus, a facilitator can also read the questions aloud, encourage participation, and help keep track of time. A brief leader's guide for each session can be found in the back of this study guide.

It's not too late to
take the weight
of the world off
your shoulders
and hand over
to God what was
always supposed to
be His to carry.

Schedule

SESSION 1

BEFORE THE FIRST GROUP GATHERING	Read the introduction and chapter 1 in the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book.
GROUP GATHERING	Watch Video Session 1. Group discussion. Study guide pages 12–19.
PERSONAL STUDY DAY 1	Personal study based on video. Study guide pages 20–24.
PERSONAL STUDY DAY 2	Personal study based on book introduction. Study guide pages 25–28.
PERSONAL STUDY DAY 3	Personal study based on book chapter 1. Study guide pages 29–33.
READING DAYS 4 & 5	Read chapters 2 and 3 in the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book.

Session 1

FOUR REASSURANCES WE NEED IN THE MIDST OF UNKNOWN OUTCOMES

WELCOME AND OPENING REFLECTION

(Suggested time: 15–20 minutes)

Welcome to Session 1 of *Making Peace with What I Can't Control*. If this is your first time gathering as a group, take a moment to introduce yourselves to the group before watching the teaching video.

Leader Note: Before starting the video, have group members share their responses to any of these questions:

What made you interested in doing this Bible study?

What are you most looking forward to as you begin this study?

What was a helpful takeaway from the introduction or chapter 1 of the book?

VIDEO

(Run time: 25 minutes)

Leader Note: Play the teaching video for Session 1.

Video Notes

As you watch the video, use the outline below to help you follow along with the teaching and to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

Oxford Languages defines control as "the power to influence or direct people's behavior or the course of events."

We exhaust ourselves trying to change what is not within our ability to change. It impacts our mood, our outlook, the way we treat others, and even causes us to do things we wouldn't normally do otherwise.

It's okay to be responsible to manage what is within our responsibility to manage. Taking charge isn't a bad thing until our desire to keep everyone and everything going in the right direction crosses a line from a good desire to an absolute demand.

Our attempts of exercising control are really an attempt at trying to be like God.

Control happens in three places: the thinking, the knowing, the doing.

THE THINKING:

> Genesis 3:1: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?'"

Notice the Enemy introduces doubt about God and His Word and draws Eve's thinking away from the truth.

THE KNOWING:

> Genesis 3:2–5: "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."' 'You will not certainly die,' the

Watch Session 1 at
harperchristian.co/3QGioBi

> serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"

The Enemy tries to make Eve doubt that God has her best interest in mind because He's withholding information from her. And we see Eve overextending the knowledge she was given by God. God's Word does not seem to be enough because she adds to God's words: Not only is the eating of it going to make you die, but the touching of it as well.

THE DOING:

> Genesis 3:6: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

Eve did the very thing that God instructed them not to do and suffered the very consequences that He was trying to protect them from. Notice that, if the Enemy could trip Eve up in her thinking and her knowing, he didn't have to force her to do anything. She chose to disobey God. Our thinking and knowing will always directly impact our doing.

Where are we going to park our thoughts? Are we going to park our thoughts on all that we don't know, or on what we can know for sure?

Our brains are wired for the confidence in knowing. If we never know anything in confidence, our brain is going to spin on things it does not know. And out of that confusion and frustration, we will then do the opposite of trusting God—we will try to take control for ourselves.

The word "uncertainty" is not one that most of us like. We want to be certain that things are going to turn out okay.

> 1 Peter 5:6–9a: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith."

The Greek word for "cast" in this verse is *epiripto*. This means to "cast something off of yourself," thus releasing yourself from the weight of that thing.

One of the senses of the word "cast" is to transfer one's concerns upon another. And the One that we can cast our cares upon is also the One that we can truly trust.

We can be assured or we can be ashamed. God assures us with His strength. The Enemy shames us with our weakness.

We must park our minds on the strength of what the Lord can do, rather than try to take control and expose how incapable and weak we really are.

> James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Four reassurances we need to know about God in the midst of unknown outcomes so we don't continue to try to control:

1. We belong to God, and He has claimed us as His.
2. He is the One who strengthens us.
3. He will help us.
4. He will hold on to us with His righteous right hand.

Group Discussion

(Suggested time: 40–45 minutes)

Leader Note: The ultimate goal for this time together is to have a meaningful discussion with others as you draw closer to God. The following suggested questions are designed to guide you into and through a rich discussion time together. Feel free to add your own questions to this list or remove questions that don't seem like a good fit.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. Lysa explained how taking charge isn't a bad thing until our desire to keep everyone and everything going in the right direction crosses a line from a good desire to an absolute demand.

   Think about how you act when you are in a healthy place of simply desiring a person to act a certain way or wanting a situation to turn out a certain way. Compare this to how you act when you have crossed over to making a demand for a person to act a certain way or a situation to turn out a certain way. How does demanding change your behavior?

   Have one person read the following list aloud. Place a check by any of the words or phrases that apply and feel free to add some of your own.

   When I'm demanding, I tend to…

   - ☐ Overthink
   - ☐ Act irritated
   - ☐ Feel frustrated
   - ☐ Yell
   - ☐ Treat others like they don't know what they're doing
   - ☐ Become dogmatic and unyielding
   - ☐ Act like I'm certain I know what is right and others don't
   - ☐ Become critical
   - ☐ Guilt-trip others
   - ☐ Micromanage
   - ☐ Overplan so I'm not caught off guard
   - ☐ Become perfectionistic and think there's only one right way
   - ☐ Lose sleep
   - ☐ Vent to others too much
   - ☐ Pray less or even stop praying
   - ☐ Other: _____

How do you think these reactions affect you and other people?

2. Control happens in three places: the thinking, the knowing, the doing. Let's look at the story in Genesis of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to see how this three-part process plays out.

   Have someone read aloud Genesis 3:1. How does the Enemy influence Eve's thinking?

   Have someone read aloud Genesis 3:2–5. In what way does Eve add on to what God said?

   Sometimes we try to take control of a situation by filling in our own commentary about what God's Word says. We want things to make sense. We want to "know" details. How can you relate to this?

   Have someone read aloud Genesis 3:6. What does Eve do in disobedience to God?

3. How does the thinking-knowing-doing process play out when you're tempted to be controlling?

4. Lysa shared how our brains are wired for the confidence in knowing and how most of us don't like uncertainty or, in other words, the opposite of confidence in knowing. How do you think uncertainty or a lack of confidence in knowing influences your tendency to control?

5. Look up and read aloud the Scripture verses and answer the questions that follow.

   1 Peter 5:6–9

   What are the commands for us to follow?

   What are the benefits of following these commands?

   Psalm 55:22

   What are the commands for us to follow?

   What are the benefits of following these commands?

James 4:7

What are the commands for us to follow?

What are the benefits of following these commands?

6. We learn four reassurances we need to know about God in the midst of unknown outcomes, so we don't continue to try to control. Read the statements below and share which gives you the most reassurance in God right now. Why?

   Four reassurances:

   1. We belong to God, and He has claimed us as His.
   2. God is the One who strengthens us.
   3. He will help us.
   4. He will hold on to us with His righteous right hand.

7. To end our time together, share any thoughts you have after watching the video and having our discussion. Did anything surprise you? Challenge you? Or give you something to work on in the next week?

CLOSING

(Suggested time: 5 minutes)

Leader Note: Read the following instructions and clarify any questions your group may have about the homework and what each participant should do between now and the next session. Then take a few minutes to pray with your group. You can use the prayer provided or pray your own prayer.

BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION...

Every week, the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* study guide includes three days of personal study to help you draw closer to God and His Word. For the first week of personal study, you'll work with the video session, as well as the introduction and chapter 1 of the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book. You'll also have time to read chapters 2–3 of the book in preparation for our next time together.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the opportunity to do this study and to grow closer to You. Help us to be honest with You, ourselves, and others as we learn how to let go of control. We want to grow in trusting You, and we want to find peace. We ask You to guide us through this study and show us the ways You want to bring peace to our hearts and lives. In Your name, amen.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 1

FOUR REASSURANCES WE NEED IN THE MIDST OF UNKNOWN OUTCOMES

Today we'll focus on Session 1 of the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* video series. If you haven't already watched it, please do so before you begin.

This is the first day of your personal study in this six-session study of *Making Peace with What I Can't Control*. You've already spent some time reflecting on the topics of peace and control, and now with your personal responses you can take your study and reflection further. Remember that there are no wrong answers here, simply an invitation to be honest with yourself and God.

As you watch the videos and read the book, you'll likely hear or read something that touches some tender places in your heart. You may already know that control is an issue for you, or you may be in a place where all you know is that your fears and worries are consuming you and you don't want to feel this way anymore. You long for peace.

Because you're committing to this study, I know that you're also willing to change some unhelpful patterns in your life. Me too. Throughout this study, we need to ask the Lord to show us and help us explore our unhealthy tendencies and how to let go of fears that lead us to try to control other people or situations.

Remember that letting go of control can happen all at once, but more likely, especially when your fears take over, you'll find it's a process. In the same way, finding peace will also be a process.

1. Think about one person or situation that is robbing you of peace right now, and answer these questions:

   What made your thoughts race and spiral recently?

   What fears come to the surface for you?

   What are your biggest doubts about God and what He's doing?

What are the main thoughts that seem to hijack your peace and cause you to question your trust in God?

And most importantly, when this happens, do you know what to do?

2. Lysa talked about how she didn't think she was an especially controlling person. Instead of using the word *control*, she used other words. Maybe that's true of you too.

Place a check by the sentences that describe how you thought about a situation you actually wanted to *control*. Add others that come to mind.

- ☐ I care deeply about people and don't feel okay when they're not okay.
- ☐ I know if they listen to me and do what I'm telling them to do, things will turn out better.
- ☐ I have experience in this area, and I feel an urgent need for them to listen to my wisdom and follow my advice.
- ☐ I just don't want them to get hurt, and I fear how much the consequences will cost them and me.
- ☐ I want to step in and fix this so much that it's consuming my thoughts.
- ☐ I just want things to turn out well for them.
- ☐ No one else is doing anything, so I have to.
- ☐ They've messed up before, so I'm going to make sure they don't make the same mistakes again.
- ☐ I refuse to accept that I have no control over this situation.
- ☐ If I don't step in, they could end up in a really bad place.
- ☐ I can't live with this worry and fear any longer, so I'm going to do something to prevent the worst from happening.
- ☐ I've been praying, but God hasn't done anything, so now I have to step in.
- ☐ Other: _____

3. There are things we should manage responsibly but not control. Why is it sometimes hard to tell the difference?

4. We looked in Genesis at the story of Adam and Eve and saw how this illustrates the three-part process of thinking, knowing, and doing.

   Let's focus on this part of this narrative.

   I explained that when Eve touched the fruit and realized she didn't die, that probably gave her the courage to eat it. She's trying to fill in the gaps of what she doesn't know because she thinks it will help her…but it doesn't.

   The same is true for us when we become fixated on something bad that could happen and then start googling it or using social media to get more info. Suddenly, the algorithm knows we're interested in this and sends us every tragic news story where the worst-case scenario comes true. We then become more convinced that trusting God is a bad idea and only we can prevent our fear from happening.

   We think that if we know more about something, it will help us. It's not bad to research things, but sometimes, the more bad possibilities we are aware of, the more we will live in fear rather than faith.

   Is this something you can relate to? How and when have you taken your "knowing"—or your need to know more and more—too far?

5. Although trusting God is a topic we'll explore throughout the study, let's touch on it briefly here.

   When it comes to trusting God, I _____.

   Trusting God is challenging because_____.

Sometimes I find I can trust God with one thing, but it's hard for me to trust Him with something else.

I can trust God with _____, but it's hard for me to trust God with _____.

Trusting God instead of controlling is a journey we're taking together. Fill in the blank with a word describing how you'd like to see yourself grow.

By the end of this study, I would like my trust in God to grow by_____

_____.

6. Here are four reassurances to help us during unknown outcomes. With each statement, there are two verses listed. The first of each pair is written out for you. Look up and write out the other verses. I've used the NIV, but feel free to use other translations.

   First reassurance: We belong to God, and He has claimed us as His.

   Psalm 100:3: "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

   1 Peter 2:9:

   Second reassurance: God is the One who strengthens us.

   Psalm 46:1–3: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."

   Isaiah 40:29–31:

Third reassurance: He will help us.

Deuteronomy 31:8: "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Psalm 121:1–2:

Fourth reassurance: He will hold on to us with His righteous right hand.

Psalm 118:15–16: "Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!'"

Psalm 139:10:

In the space below, explain which of the four statements or Scripture verses means the most to you right now. Then, choose some to write out on Post-it notes and display them in a place where you can be reminded of who God is.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 2

INTRODUCTION: I'M NOT A CONTROLLING PERSON, AM I?

Today we are focusing on the introduction in the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book. Please take some time to read it, if you haven't already.

1. Let's start by reflecting on key words of the subtitle of the book: *Find Relief from the Exhaustion of Overthinking, Trying to Fix Others, and Wanting to Figure It All Out*.

   Write down what each part of the subtitle makes you think about. Put a star by the part that most robs you of peace.

   Exhaustion from Overthinking

   Trying to Fix Others

   Wanting to Figure It All Out

2. Exhaustion from overthinking is the hardest for me. In the introduction I give you a glimpse of my swirling thoughts that go from pretending I'm fine, to releasing something to God, to taking it all back and being frustrated and exhausted.

   Here's an excerpt of those thoughts:

   > I'm bone tired.
   >
   > I'm secretly frustrated with people I love. I think I'm getting it right, and I'm baffled they don't listen.
   >
   > I wonder if I'm the only one who sees future consequences and actually cares to prevent them.
   >
   > I fear I'm going to lose it one day.
   >
   > I play out scenarios in my mind all the time of how things might go wrong if I don't keep trying to make them right.
   >
   > I'm surviving my life, but sometimes I wonder if I'm enjoying my life.
   >
   > I sometimes dread the future, because I know I'm going to get caught off guard, and that's one of the worst feelings in the world to me.
   >
   > I know all these mental gymnastics aren't sustainable. The truth is, something needs to

> change. But I often feel too tired to figure out what else to do. So I just keep going through the motions of keeping it all together.
>
> I'm fine. No, really, I'm fine.
>
> Except, I'm not fine. (pages xiii–xiv)

These mental gymnastics can be exhausting, right? I've found journaling where I empty these kinds of statements onto a page that is just between me and God is so helpful in sorting out my thoughts. You might want to give that a try. You can write here or in a separate journal. Just get it out without trying to pretty it up.

These questions might help: What are you worried or fearful about? If you could change this person or situation, what would you want to see happen? How do you feel about God in all of this?

Remember how fortunate we are that God invites our honest thoughts, feelings, and prayers.

> Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. (Psalm 62:8)

3. While I continue to grow, I've struggled through some of the following feelings. Put a check by any below you can relate to when it comes to making peace with what you can't control. Feel free to add your own words.

- ☐ Tired
- ☐ Sad
- ☐ Fearful
- ☐ Disappointed
- ☐ Frustrated
- ☐ Exhausted
- ☐ Overwhelmed
- ☐ Terrified
- ☐ Anxious
- ☐ Doubtful
- ☐ Confused
- ☐ Despairing
- ☐ Hopeless
- ☐ Worried
- ☐ Ashamed
- ☐ Resigned
- ☐ Mad
- ☐ Tense
- ☐ Stressed
- ☐ Aggravated
- ☐ Other: _____

4. The burden we put on ourselves to try to hold it all together, to be the safety net for others, and to be the stabilizing force in everyone's lives is too much. That's why I said in the introduction,

> But if this stability depends on us getting it right all the time and pretending everything is fine, then that's not true peace. That's control. (page xiii)

In what ways have you been trying to hold it all together? Provide a safety net? Be the stabilizing force? Would you say that what you've been calling peace is actually control? Explain.

5. Let's take our eyes off our own abilities and focus on God by looking at the following Scripture verses.

Write out each verse. In the study we're primarily using the NIV translation, but feel free to use other translations. Circle the words that remind you of God's love, strength, security, and safety.

Isaiah 26:3:

Psalm 25:4–5:

Psalm 40:11:

Matthew 7:24:

One of the ways to keep our minds on God's truth is to memorize Scripture. Choose one of the above verses to memorize so that when you feel the pull to control, you can recite this verse.

Let's end in prayer. You can use this prayer or write your own.

Dear Lord, I come to You feeling weary, confused, and worried. I find myself wishing things were different, more predictable, and more certain. I keep replaying and ruminating on thoughts that range from *I'm fine* to *I can't stand the weight of this anymore*. So, I place my concerns in Your hands. Quiet my thoughts and renew my trust in You. I want to move forward in peace. I know that ultimately You are my Peace.

Even though I feel some hesitancy about completely releasing this person or situation to You, my heart's desire is to learn how to do that with increasing trust in You.

I pray right now specifically, knowing that You will give me faith to surrender completely.

Jesus, I release _____ (person's name) to You.

Jesus, I release _____ (situation) to You.

In Your name, amen.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 3

GRASPING FOR GUARANTEES

Today we'll reflect on chapter 1 of the *Making Peace with What I Can't Control* book. Please take some time to read it, if you haven't already.

1. At the beginning of this chapter I told the story of leaving my house and going out at 2 a.m. to find my loved one. I knew I shouldn't do this again, but I loved this person and couldn't stand the thought of what might happen if I didn't step in.

   I knew that if a person didn't want to change, there was nothing I could do to change them. The reality was this person had not shown any signs of changing.

   I knew this with my head, but I couldn't get my heart to sign on. I felt compelled to try just one more time to help them, rescue them, save them.

   Have you ever tried one more time? How did it turn out?

2. I eventually found the person I was looking for and was able to convince them to go home. But I had put myself in danger, and emotionally, I was spent. I sobbed all the way home, thinking, *I can't keep doing this. And I can't not do this. If I don't help them, who will?*

   > My fear response was driving my control response. (page 2)

   What have you feared might happen if you didn't take control of a person or a situation? And as a result, what actions did you take?

3. In the book I wrote:

   > At home after my rescue mission, I got back into my bed, infuriated by this whole deal. And you want to know who I felt most angry with? God. Why was this happening? How would it ever get better? And why was God allowing it to continue on and on for years? (page 3)

Have you ever admitted you're mad at God? While it's not something to hold on to, it's also not something to deny. Write your honest thoughts, doubts, and questions about what God is or is not doing in your situation.

4. As I grasp for guarantees I have to admit something: I don't want to have to trust God through the unknowns. I'd rather make things better myself.

Sometimes doing something feels so much better than trusting God. It feels like we're accomplishing something concrete, and it also might relieve some of our anxiety.

What are some things you've done that relieved you in the short run but didn't solve the problem in the long run?

5. In the book I wrote:

> God reminds us that we are like branches that cannot do anything if we separate from Him, the life-giving vine: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). (page 9)

The English word *abide* comes from the Greek μένω (*menō*), which means to remain, stay, or reside. In a sense what we are being called to in our relationship with God reflects something that is truly reciprocal. There is a part we have to play, and there is a promise of what God will always do. God's part is the promise of His presence, power, and protection. This doesn't mean He will fix everything in our way and our timing, but He will be there with us in the midst of it all.

Our part is to remain or reside in the will and presence of God. This is the safest place for us to be. However, when we start to have control issues, we often try to take things into our own hands, deviate from obeying His Word, and become less and less committed to being in His presence. As we try to control our own situations, we are often no longer abiding in Him.

Considering the verse in John 15 and these reflections on abiding, what helps you abide in Christ? What benefit is there to abiding?

6. In the book I wrote:

> We aren't capable of knowing what's best. Only God has that knowledge. Therefore, only God is capable of steering us toward what is best. Only God is capable of *seeing* what is truly best. Only God *knows* what is truly best. (page 9)

Is the idea that only God knows what is truly best something you know in your head and heart? Or only one or the other?

7. To further our understanding about only God knowing what is truly best, let's look at two Scripture passages.

> In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.
> (Proverbs 16:9)

Look at the first part of this verse. We desire to control and to make our own plans. But the second part of this verse reminds us that ultimately God is in control. There will always be a tension between our free choices and the sovereignty of God. But God works through human freedom to accomplish His ultimate purposes. The irony is that the One who has all control doesn't force His control in the midst of our choices.

What are your thoughts about how God doesn't force His control in the midst of our choices?

Now, let's look at the second passage:

> This is what the LORD says—
> your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
> "I am the LORD your God,
> who teaches you what is best for you,
> who directs you in the way you should go.

> If only you had paid attention to my commands,
> your peace would have been like a river,
> your well-being like the waves of the sea." (Isaiah 48:17–18)

(One interesting note: The sea was culturally understood in the Ancient Near East as an image of chaos and destruction.)

Who teaches us?

If we pay attention and obey His commands, what is the result?

How can you apply these lessons to your own situation?

8. One of the most shocking realizations I've had is "that what I am most afraid of is God" (page 13). Like Solomon expressed in Ecclesiastes 8:16–17, I fear not being able to comprehend what God does and does not allow:

> When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night—then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

If you want to write a response to this realization of being afraid of God, you can do that in the space below. Or you can simply sit with that idea.

It's hard for me to end this chapter on what doesn't feel very positive. So, while I want to wrap up this day of study with a pretty bow, I also don't want to overspiritualize. I hope you, too, will learn to sit with your own wrestling over the mystery of God and the uncertainties

He allows. It can feel so very uncomfortable, but I've learned that being honest with God about my fear, anger, sadness, and confusion is actually an act of trusting Him.

Let's end in prayer.

> Dear Lord, I confess that there have been many times when I've tried to take over instead of truly handing over a situation to You. I've questioned You, doubted You, and even felt angry at You for allowing hard things to happen that don't make any sense to me. But I'm exhausted from living this way. I want to invite You in to calm my mind, provide peace for my heart, and stop my endless striving to make sure things will turn out the way I think they should. I trust You and want to walk with You every step of this journey. In Jesus's name, amen (page 16).

READING DAYS 4 & 5

Use these days to go back and complete any of the reflection questions or activities from the previous days this week that you weren't able to finish. Make note of any revelations you've had and reflect on any growth or personal insights you've gained.

Spend the next two days reading chapters 2 and 3 of the book *Making Peace with What I Can't Control*. Use the space below to note anything in the chapters that stands out to you or encourages your heart.