

Control Issues and Power Plays

Control and power are responsibilities God gives His servants. When used as God gives them, there is great advantage. When used in the flesh, there is great opportunity for destruction. This is an issue to solve before I can expect to have much impact on others.

Let's review the facts:

- God is Sovereign. That means He is in control. The only control I have is what He gives me.
- I am assigned to develop self-control. This assignment is a prerequisite to receiving more assignments.
- I am never to control other people. I am to assist them in cooperating with God's control.
- God is not a God of confusion. He gives me the responsibility of maintaining order. Proper control prevents chaos.

God has made each of us as choice-makers. When I take away a person's responsibility to make choices, I am denying that they are made in the image of God. I control the environment but I give the client a choice in whether to cooperate with that environment. When a person has violated their stay at the Mission, I do not assume that they are to leave because I said so, but because they made a choice to be not in compliance. Since my responsibility is to control the environment of the shelter, I must enforce rules of safety. The client chooses to cooperate to receive the provision.

Staff may have control issues for a number of reasons. If you have a problem with control, check out these possibilities to give you an opportunity to work on this area of your life:

- Heart issues – pride, self-centeredness, fear
- Learned through survival
- Modeled from parents
- Not wanting to be offended
- Not wanting to be judged
- Developed a pattern, habit
- A misunderstanding of who "I" am
- Being dependent on self instead of God
- "I want things MY way"

We begin by developing qualities of self-control, humility, patience, and respect.

Proverbs 25:28

"Like a city that is broken into
and without walls
Is a man who has no control
over his spirit."

We then develop understanding of the role of power and control in our lives. When God created humans, He gave them dominion over certain areas (Genesis 1:28). Learning to exercise that dominion is part of representing God in this world. Misusing that dominion is copying the practice of the enemy.

What controls me is master over me. *“For by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved”* (2 Peter 2:19). Sometimes we give away our control (responsibility) to people, places, or things, by the way we think, speak, or act. We allow addictions, habits, attitudes, people, and even desire, to control us. Paul had the right answer in 2 Corinthians 5:14, *“For the love of Christ controls us.”*

Whether I am tempted to misuse the authority I have been given and get into a power play, or whether I find myself grumbling about someone else trying to control me, I need to check my focus. Do I focus on what others should be doing or on what I can be doing? The best antidote for being upset about feeling controlled is to remember this truth: Other people are responsible and accountable before God, and I am responsible for my choices, my actions, and myself.

We usually label a person with control issues as someone who uses aggressive communication, comes across as bossy, or is abusive. There are many more observable characteristics such as coming across as a know-it-all, being manipulative, not receiving instruction, being a self-pleaser with no regard for others, snapping easily, or being overbearing and rude. None of these characteristics is Christ-like and none is useful in ministry.

Fear Is the Root of Most Control Issues and Power Plays.

When I have to protect my turf, when I feel that I have to always watch over my shoulder for someone who is wanting to diminish my ideas or standing, or when I feel like I always have to fight for my rights, I am impeding ministry with fear. Who is in charge here? Who is in charge of your future? This ministry belongs to Whom? Check some different translations of these verses for your encouragement: Proverbs 21:31 and Psalm 20:7. Study the life of Joshua to see a powerful man who believed God was his protector from his own people and his enemies.

A few years back there was a popular bumper sticker that read, “Question Authority.” It seemed to be a mantra for clients at the Mission. Perhaps the real issue was more about control and feeling controlled. As you learn to use control in a godly way, you will have opportunity to show that authority is God-given (Romans 13:1-4), and includes being accountable before Him for how it is used. We must help clients to see the difference between self-reliance and dependence. Understanding Who is in ultimate control and why He has given us the ability to make choices, allows us to be free of fear.

As staff, sometimes when we want things a certain way, we may discover it has more to do with what we think we do best rather than considering that others have abilities and good ideas. Much is lost in ministry when there is no sense of unity and community. Let it begin with me.

You will from time to time encounter a control issue where the person wants to be controlled. There is accumulated fear of failure, fear of not doing something right. Soon this will result in an opportunity for laziness or a lack of initiative. These folks are people-pleasers, with poor boundaries and no self-respect. You may like working with such compliant people, but they are not who they were created to be. Helping them to see the benefit of being under God’s control is the answer to their freedom. Confidence in who God made them to be improves their quality of life.

Sometimes we do not even recognize our control issues. One way we may try to control others is through manipulation. Manipulation is simply a convenient way of lying and deceiving. Sometimes we

control by using trade or bartering – the “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” attitude. Too often, we display improper control mechanisms with clients when we refuse to put situations in proper perspective, lose patience, and rudely move them out of our way.

As discussed many times in this book, we are empowered to help others with issues in which we ourselves have found some level of victory. As you work with clients, you will see indications of power issues through their comments as well as their actions. Please become alert to opportunities for intervention in faulty thinking. Here are some samples of comments you may hear:

1. The devil made me do it – *an excuse and a lie. No one can make you do something. It is your choice.*
2. He made me angry – *another excuse. We are responsible for our choices/actions.*
3. I can’t make my own decisions here in this mission – *Lie. You can make whatever decisions you want here, but you have to be willing to accept the consequences for your choices.*
4. I cannot remember what we did in class two days ago – *Excuse.*
5. This is messing with me – *Excuse.*
6. Addiction cravings call me – *Excuse. You are putting yourself in the control of something other than God. When you choose to feed cravings, they keep coming back.*
7. Leave me alone. I am taking charge of my own recovery – *Dependence on Christ is crucial to our recovery.*

Part of the control issue for the client is learning to survive in a structured environment. This is perhaps the first time they have come face to face with the difference between being in charge and being in control. This is a time for education and mercy.

So as you wrestle through this area in your life, remember that when God created us, we were programmed for control. Proper control prevents chaos and promotes quality of life. It is a responsibility assigned from God and not to be misused. We have the opportunity to honor Him with our lives when we practice self-control. Rather than trying to control others, we help them to be wise choice-makers.

When you put on the badge that says you are “staff,” you are given a measure of authority and power, assigned a responsibility of control within the workplace. Consider an alternative to your past definitions of power and control, with the substitution of the word, “Influence.” Your best role in the ministry is that of Influencer. Your success in being a person of influence has much to do with the way you use your authority, power, and control.

“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.”- Apostle Paul, Ephesians 4:1-2