
This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

OPEN

Imagine that an appliance in your house is broken. Are you the type of person to try and fix it yourself, or do you prefer to pay someone to do it for you? Why?

Some of us like the convenience of having someone fix our problems, while others of us like to do it ourselves. It's normal to try to resolve issues ourselves—that's not a bad desire. But our need to problem-solve becomes an issue when we start to believe we have unlimited ability to hold everything together. Our propensity to control every aspect of our circumstances only produces more issues. Control has a cost.

In this session, Sharon will discuss the three costs that come with trying to control our circumstances and why we should learn to embrace God's control.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Sharon's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how she answers the following questions.

According to Sharon, what is the most common way we try to control our circumstances?

What are the three costs of controlling our circumstances?

Watch Session 3: *The Cost of Controlling Your Circumstances* (13 minutes).

REVIEW

Sharon opened the session with a personal story about the panic she felt when a hurricane was headed her way. With plans to launch a church plant, she began to obsessively monitor the weather and worry about options to deal with their plans. But in the end, the hurricane never landed in their town. **In what ways can you relate to Sharon's actions? How do you think you**

would have reacted in the same predicament?

One way we try to control our circumstances is through knowledge and information. We think that if we get more information about the problem, then we're better equipped to predict how to fix it. We believe that predictability makes us safe, but only God knows the final outcome. **In what ways has predictability been a comfort for you? Why do you think we feel better when we can assume how things will turn out?**

Emily's son was diagnosed with autism, and she began to overthink all the negative possibilities for his future. Her stress, anxiety, and worry became exacerbated when she focused on all the future problems that could happen and the fact that she didn't know what to do. **In what ways have you experienced stress and anxiety because of a possible future outcome? Why do you think the unknown affects the way we feel in the present?**

Emily's effort to control every possible outcome of her son's diagnosis led her into experiencing stress-induced illness. Not only was her son's health out of her control, but hers was as well. **When have you experienced physical discomfort or illness due to the amount of stress you were dealing with? How did you handle it?**

Emily realized that life can be beautiful even with hard circumstances and the more she tries to control her world, the less in control she feels. God is teaching her how to not worry about the future so that she can enjoy the present. **What could we learn from Emily's story about living in the present instead of the future? How will you address your desire to control your own future with God in prayer this week?**

Sharon discussed the three costs of controlling our circumstances. The first cost is anxiety, which usually happens when we try to control something that we naturally can't. **What kinds of circumstances cause you the most anxiety? Would you say you react to anxiety with control? Why, or why not?**

The second cost is exhaustion. Even though a good

work ethic is commendable, we can't allow our hard work to trick us into believing we can control our circumstances if we work hard enough. **In what ways have you experienced exhaustion from juggling too much?**

How can you cultivate a healthy balance between work and rest so that you're not burdening yourself with things that God is in control of?

The final cost of controlling our circumstances is a powerless faith. Control limits our ability to fully trust God with what we can't see or predict. Having faith requires knowing that God is the one in complete control—not us. **What difference could it make in your relationship with God to remember he is in complete control? How could you remind yourself on a daily basis of his sovereign control in your life?**

Our circumstances are unpredictable. Even when we plan for the unexpected or prepare for a certain outcome, things can happen that are completely out of our control. **What expectations do you have for your relationships, job, or future? What difference could it make if you adjusted your expectations for a particular outcome in those areas of your life?**

Sharon ended the session saying she prays God will reveal to us which circumstances we're trying to control and what it's costing us. **What can you do to surrender the circumstances you're trying to control to God?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Trusting God with our futures can feel difficult sometimes—especially when we have no idea how our current difficulties will play out. But remembering that God has complete control and understands our circumstances can help us walk in peace, day by day.

Read Proverbs 3:5–8.

What are the specific things these verses tell us *not* to do? What should we do instead?

Verse 5 tells us to trust in the Lord with all our heart. Our trust should be placed in God rather than the formulas and checklists we come up with to ensure things happen the way we want. **What has trusting the Lord looked like in your life? In what kinds of situations has it been difficult to trust God?**

Part of the anxiety and exhaustion we feel when trying to control our circumstances comes from our limited understanding of the situation. **What is the danger in trying to control our circumstances based only on our own understanding?**

When we lean on our own understanding, we're relying on a limited perspective. Instead, we can rest in the fact that God understands our circumstances more than we do. **What could you do to remind yourself of God's infinite knowledge the next time you're struggling to understand your situation?**

To acknowledge God in all our ways means that in every circumstance—including the ones we think we can control—we should look to God. As we follow him, he keeps us moving in the right direction. **What does it look like to involve God in your daily decisions and plans? How might trusting him with our daily lives benefit your relationship with him?**

The passage ends by explaining that healing and refreshment are the results of following God's direction. **How could healing and refreshment be beneficial to you in this season of life?**

In the same way that we struggle with future unknowns, we also struggle with our current circumstances—but God is not only a future help but a present one.

Read Psalm 46:1–7.

Verses 1–2 assure us that during times of trouble, God is present with us. We might be less inclined to attempt to control our circumstances if we'd remember that God is already protecting us. **If God is continually present with us, why do you think we struggle to let him have control of our circumstances?**

There is nothing we can do in our power when things like earthquakes, tornadoes, or any kind of natural disaster happen—especially unexpectedly. The psalmist points out that even when nature becomes chaotic and threatens our livelihood, there is no reason to fear because God is with us. **In what ways is it comforting to know that God is with us in unexpected situations?**

Throughout this passage, the psalmist reminds us that even in chaos God is with us and serves us as our help and strength. Life is unpredictable and we can't change the world around us. But when we trust in God's provision of strength, his control of everything, we can have true peace. **When have you experienced the strength of God in a difficult circumstance?**

Many times when we don't see God's strength, we become worried about how God will come through for us. As a result, we focus on what could happen and try to take control from God to feel some stability. **What could it look like for you to focus on the present instead of focusing on what could be? How could focusing on the present help you learn to trust God?**

Difficult and unexpected circumstances are going to come our way. But we can cling to the truth that God is trustworthy even in the midst of hard times. He is with you and will see you through your difficult circumstances. **What situations in your life do you need to trust God with this week?**

LAST WORD

God is in control. No matter how much we may feel like we've got a grasp on life, we must remember that we are called to put our full trust in God—not ourselves. He is the only one who can handle our circumstances without the anxiety, exhaustion, and anger we feel.

What area of your life do you need to trust God more with? This week, say a prayer of thankfulness for God's infinite wisdom and longing to entrust himself to you. Set your mind on intentionally and actively trusting him each day.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read chapters 4–8 in Sharon’s book *The Cost of Control*.

Memorize: Memorize Proverbs 3:5–6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Pray: Consider praying Sharon’s prayer for us at the end of the session. Pray that God would open your eyes to the circumstances you’re trying to control and that you would learn to trust him.

Write: Write down all the areas in life that you try to control. Next to each one, write down what it could look like for you to surrender those areas to God this week.
