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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**

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**When has someone talked you into doing something fun or surprising? What happened? How did you react?**

Being influenced by a friend to make fun or spontaneous decisions can be exciting, especially when it gets us out of our comfort zone. But there is a dark side to influencing other people. If done with selfish intentions, our influence over people can turn into control as we pressure others to do what we think is best for them. Even if our intentions are pure, controlling other people is not only impossible but can also strain the relationship in the long run.

In this session, Sharon will discuss the cost that comes with controlling people: broken relationships and hurt.

## **VIEW**

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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.

**What are the three costs of controlling other people?**

**What were the major outcomes of Abraham and Sarah's story?**

Watch Session 4: *The Cost of Trying to Control People* (16 minutes).

## **REVIEW**

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Sharon opened the session talking about how the British monarchy has always used marriage and relationships to negotiate peace treaties and create leverage. Manipulating family members to marry certain people for political gain was the norm. **What are some examples of how control is sometimes used in relationships? When have you seen or experienced the negative impact of control within a relationship?**

In many ways, our effort to control others only reflects our own selfishness. In our own desire to feel safe, secure, and stable, we think pushing others to make certain decisions will offer us security. **What other reasons do you think cause us to try and control other people?**

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Because we can't truly control the lives of other people, we sometimes blame them when their actions affect us in a manner we don't like. Sharon pointed out that just like Adam and Eve blamed each other when they sinned, we also blame others when they don't do what we want them to do. **Why do you think it's easier to blame someone else when we don't get what we want? When have you ever blamed a spouse, friend, or co-worker for your own discomfort?**

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Lauren's committed and long-distant relationship became strained when she took control of their dynamic. She focused more on making the relationship about what she wanted. **How have you handled friendships or romantic relationships that felt one-sided? Why is it problematic when we try to control our relationships?**

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Lauren talked about her struggles with trying to keep up with the lifestyles and relationship statuses of her friends. When it was her turn to get into a relationship, she was more focused on showing the relationship off to others. She ended up forcing her boyfriend to adapt to her life while neglecting his. **How has control made an impact on your relationships? In what ways have you seen your desire, or someone else's desire, for control harm a relationship?**

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Read Genesis 16:1–6. Sharon explained that Sarah took her life into her own hands and forced her maidservant to have a child with Abraham so Abraham could have a descendent. **How did Sarah's effort to control her situation impact her life? How did it impact the rest of the household?**

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Sharon explained that just like with the story of Abraham and Sarah, our attempts to control other people's lives

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and decisions can come from our impatience. When we're not patient with God and act on our impulses, it causes more harm than we could ever imagine. **What has it looked like for you to be impatient with God? When has your impatience with God ever affected the harmony in a relationship?**

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The other cost of controlling people that Sharon discussed in this session is that it hurts the innocent. When we decide to try to control other people, there could possibly be innocent bystanders who experience the fallout—like Hagar in Sarah's story. **Where have you seen innocent people hurt by the controlling actions of someone else?**

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Our urge to control others can be rooted in our love for them. We see our loved ones struggling with problems and go out of our way to try and fix the situation ourselves. But we have to remember that God loves them too and we can trust him with their lives as well. **What could it look like for you to pray over your loved one's circumstances instead of trying to fix it?**

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**BIBLE EXPLORATION**

Trying to control other people can be messy. Not only does it not work in our favor, but it causes division and distrust within our relationships. We see the relational consequences of control play out with the story of Jacob, Laban, and Rachel in Genesis 29:16–35. At this point in the story, Jacob has fled his home for fear of his life. Jacob arrived at his uncle Laban's home looking for a safe place to settle down.

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First, read Genesis 29:15–30.

**What are your initial reactions to this story? Who do you think was in the wrong, and why?**

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Trying to control relationships has repercussions, as we've explored already in this session. **What similarities are there between this story and the story Sharon told us of Abraham and Sarah?**

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Jacob agreed to work for seven years to marry Laban's

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youngest daughter, Rachel. But instead of being honest, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him Leah. Jacob then had to work another seven years to marry Rachel, whom he wanted all along. **What did Laban’s dishonesty cost Jacob? How do Laban’s actions show us how dishonesty is a form of controlling others?**

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In this story, we see the unfortunate repercussions of what manipulation and control can do to innocent people. Laban switching his daughters for his own personal reasons hurt innocent people, especially his daughter Leah. **What can we learn from Laban’s choice to be deceitful instead of upfront? How have you seen deceit harm innocent people?**

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It can feel scary to be honest with those we love. But being honest with each other is what God has called us to and it helps us maintain healthy relationships. **What does it look like to prioritize truthfulness in your friendships and relationships?**

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Rachel and Leah find themselves on the other side of their father’s effort to control their lives. Laban treated daughters like tools instead of people. **When have you felt used by people? In what ways have you possibly treated people as tools when trying to control a situation?**

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For some of us, a fear of conflict, selfishness, or pride can cause us to try and take control of a situation instead of communicating what we truly feel. In Laban’s case, instead of telling Jacob that he’d have to marry Leah upfront, he deceived him to marry off both daughters and lock Jacob into more work. **When have you chosen control over communication? How was the relationship affected?**

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Laban’s actions not only scarred his own relationship with Jacob but also caused a rift between his two daughters. Our effort to control one person can impact others along the way. **How does this story help you see the ripple effect that control can have?**

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Continue reading Genesis 29:31–35.

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These verses tell us that Leah continued to have children, and each time, she thought it would cause her husband to love her. We do similarly when we think buying gifts or certain acts of service will change the dynamic of a relationship. But our actions can actually be a way to control the relationship. **When, if at all, have you tried to garner affection from someone through specific actions? How did doing so affect your mental, emotional, or spiritual health?**

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In verse 35, Leah gave birth to another child and named him Judah. She decided that she would praise God for her children instead of believing her children could cause Jacob to love her. In other words, she entrusted her children and her circumstances to God. **What relationships are you trying to control? What could it look like to give your relationships—and the issues surrounding them—over to God this week?**

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**LAST WORD**

We learned in this session that it's impossible to control other people. Not only is it harmful, but it causes more division within the relationship than we could ever imagine. Like Sharon said, our control cannot heal what is broken—whatever is happening in our relationships that prompt us to take control should be given to God.

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The next time you find yourself trying to coerce, pressure, or manipulate someone into doing what you think is best, ask the Lord to reveal the motives of your heart. Give your desires for him or her over to God and watch him work.

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**DEEPER WALK**

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**Read:** Read chapter 9 in Sharon’s book *The Cost of Control*.

**Pray:** Ask God to heal any relationships that have been broken due to control. Pray that he would help you implement what you’ve learned in this session in your current and future relationships.

**Talk:** Consider any way that you’ve used manipulation, coercion, or any other form of control within a friendship. Say a prayer of repentance and consider reaching out to that person to ask for their forgiveness

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