

# control girl

Lessons *on* Surrendering Your  
Burden *of* Control *from* Seven  
Women *in the* Bible

STUDY GUIDE

SHANNON POPKIN

# A Letter to Leaders

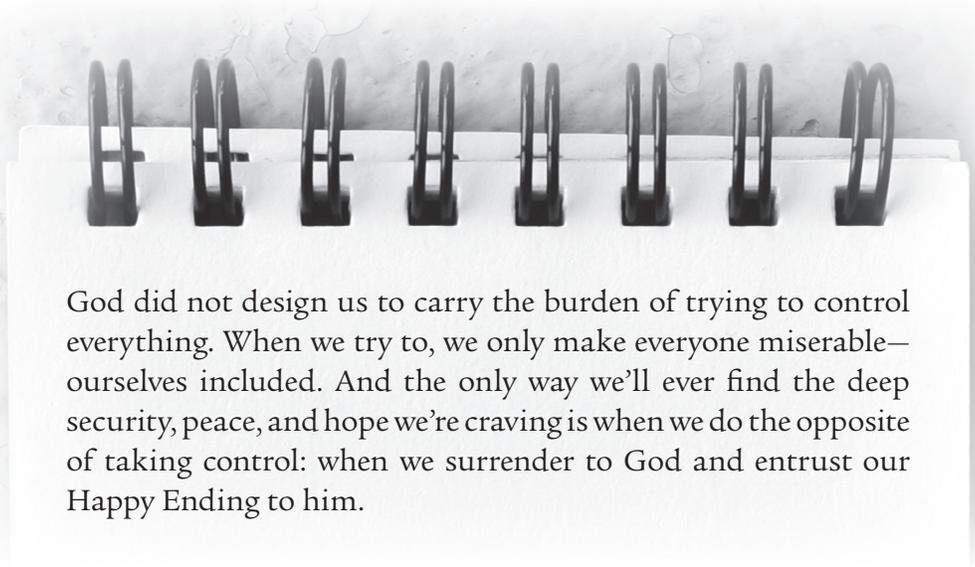
DEAR LEADER,

I'm so thankful for your sweet service to our Lord, and for your desire to lead others to follow him more closely. Your job is so important! Especially as we talk about moving in a new direction: from Control Girls to Jesus Girls.

As we study the stories of seven controlling women in the Bible, we'll be looking for two things:

1. Warnings and lessons for ourselves
2. New insights about God

Yet our goal is broader than just knowing new things. We want to turn in a new direction *because* we see and know and believe what is true. And what is true about this subject of control? Here's a brief summary that you are welcome to share with your group.

A black and white photograph of a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is open to a white page. The spiral binding is visible at the top of the page. The text on the page is centered and reads: "God did not design us to carry the burden of trying to control everything. When we try to, we only make everyone miserable—ourselves included. And the only way we'll ever find the deep security, peace, and hope we're craving is when we do the opposite of taking control: when we surrender to God and entrust our Happy Ending to him." The background behind the notebook is a light, textured surface.

God did not design us to carry the burden of trying to control everything. When we try to, we only make everyone miserable—ourselves included. And the only way we'll ever find the deep security, peace, and hope we're craving is when we do the opposite of taking control: when we surrender to God and entrust our Happy Ending to him.

May the Lord richly bless both you and your group as you step onto this path that leads from Control Girl to Jesus Girl.

Warmly,

Shannon

# How the Book Is Arranged

## CHAPTERS

- Each chapter is divided into lessons. Some chapters have more lessons than others. This is because we want to let the seven Bible women start the conversation, and some have more to say than others.
- **The chapters are best digested one lesson at a time, instead of reading the whole chapter at once.** For example, group members could work through one lesson per day in preparation for your weekly meeting.
- Since there are nine chapters, you can make this a nine-week study. Or if you'd like to include a week of introduction to pass out books and get acquainted, you can make it a ten-week study. Some groups may also want to break up the chapters' supplemental content and make the study even longer. There are many options!

## EACH LESSON CONTAINS . . .

- **Bible Reading:** Each lesson begins with a Bible reading. Please encourage group members to open their Bibles and read the passage before reading the lesson! Reading God's Word is so much more important than reading any author's words. God can use the same verses a thousand different ways if we will only take the time to open our eyes and hearts to the truth.
- **Lesson:** Each lesson includes personal examples and commentary, which help the group consider a warning or lesson for themselves, or a new insight about God, relating to the topic of control.
- **Application Questions:** Several heart-provoking questions are at the end of each lesson to help make the content personal. Encourage group members to journal their thoughts, reactions, and plans in a notebook. Have them bring their notebooks to group meetings, so they can refer to them during discussions. (If you'd like to print "Control Girl to Jesus Girl" labels to go on your group's notebooks, check out the free resources at [www.ShannonPopkin.com/controlgirl](http://www.ShannonPopkin.com/controlgirl).)
- **For Meditation:** Please especially encourage group members to use the meditation at the end of each lesson, which encapsulates the lesson's main truth and offers a correlating Bible verse. We'll never go from Control Girl to Jesus Girl unless we revamp our thought patterns, and meditating is a way to do that. Chapter 1 walks your group through some practical guidelines for using the meditations, which are summarized below:
  - ✿ Instead of emptying our minds like other religions do, meditate by filling your mind with truth. You don't need to sit in any certain position or hum. Just set aside a few minutes each day to read and reread truth in a focused way.
  - ✿ Read slowly, and carefully consider what each phrase means. What do you think God's perspective on this passage is?
  - ✿ Read the truth out loud or pray it back to God.
  - ✿ Copy a meaningful phrase or verse onto a notecard to carry with you and review later.
  - ✿ Picture yourself as you face various situations today, living as though these phrases and verses are true.

## LEADERS, PLEASE TAKE NOTE

This practical guide can be used whether you're leading a small or large group, but it will be most effective for groups of two to twelve people. If your group is larger, consider splitting it.

As you use this discussion guide, please **make note** of the following:

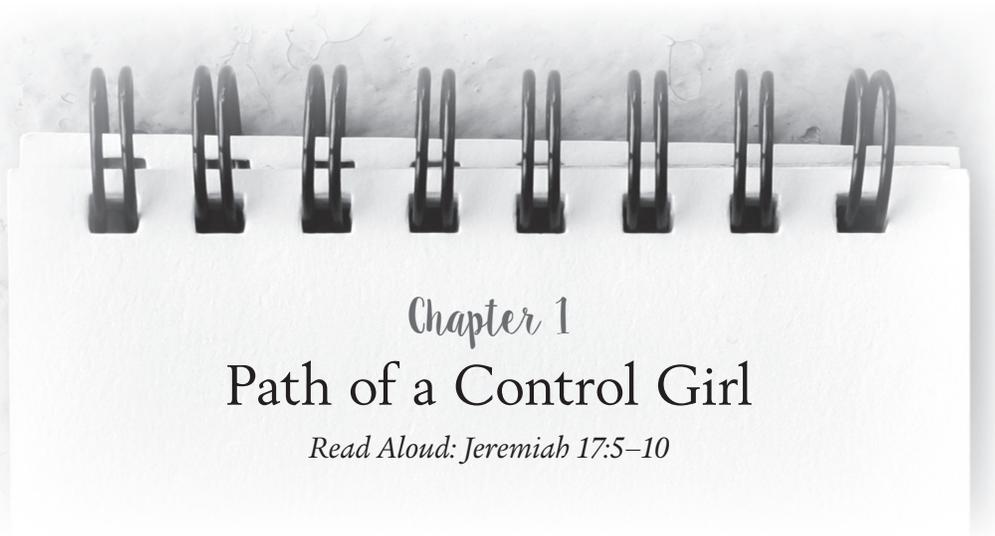
1. **Questions for All:** Questions marked with an \* are good questions for the entire group, since they'll be answerable by everyone and generate unique responses. Having everyone answer draws out your quieter members, and if we've spoken once, we're more likely to speak up a second time. You probably won't have time for everyone to answer each of the \* questions. Each week consider choosing one or two \* questions which seem like a good fit for your group. But be sure to balance personal stories with ample time discussing God's Word and how to apply truth.
2. **Quoted Questions:** Questions in **bold** are directly from the book. You can give your group the provided page number and encourage them to share their journaled responses to the question.
3. **Response Questions:** These questions refer to a section or quote from the book. Give everyone the page number so they can read along as you share the quote.
4. **Open-Ended Questions:** As you work through the lessons as a group, you may want to start each lesson with an open-ended question like, "What was most helpful to you from this lesson?" or "Was there anything you didn't understand here?" or "What did you underline in this lesson?" This will help the conversation flow naturally, which is usually best.

As women are talking, mark the questions that have already been covered so you can circle back to the ones that haven't. If you feel that enough time has been spent on the lesson, move on to the next lesson. If the conversation begins trailing off topic, pull things back on track with a different question.

5. **Printable Chapter Meditations:** This guide includes notes on meditations that can be used by each participant. They provide a helpful framework for the lesson and also offer a nice summary as you wrap up the lesson.

Please let your group know that there are free meditation cards available for each chapter. These pretty 4x6 cards can be printed, saved, or shared digitally, and are available for download at [ShannonPopkin.com/meditationcards](http://ShannonPopkin.com/meditationcards). A printable chapter meditation chart is also available there. Your church may also consider having the color cards printed for participants.

Keep in mind that your discussion guide is truly a *guide*. Please feel free to use it in whatever way is helpful to you! May God richly bless you as you lead others on the path from Control Girl to Jesus Girl.



## CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- \*When was the last time you noticed a controlling woman, whether she was on social media, in a film or TV show, or in your workplace? How did she try to control others? How did others react to her?
- Do you think this woman knows that she was being controlling?
- On a scale of 1-10, how likely do you think it is for a woman to be controlling without realizing it?
- On a whiteboard or in your notebooks, make a list of contrasts:

<b>Shrub in the Desert</b>	<b>Tree Planted by Water</b>

- How could these lists describe the contrast between a Control Girl and a Jesus Girl? Give examples of times that controlling behavior or surrender to the Lord have brought personal drought or prosperity.

## LESSON QUESTIONS

### Introduction: My “Happy” Ending

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- What stood out to you in the introduction? What do you hope to learn from this study?
- Turn to “Can I Control My Happy Ending?” on pages 12-14. \*Share one way you’ve tried to control something, big or small.
- Why do our efforts to control create tension in our relationships?

## Lesson 1: A Rutted-Out Path

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- Recall Shannon's towel story. Have you ever had a deep sense of regret after acting like a Control Girl? Share with your group.
- **Read Proverbs 3:5–6 again, and list any contrast you see between these verses and the path of the Control Girl (p. 22).**
- **\*Take inventory of your life. Are you living as though you're in control or as though God is? What indications do you see (p. 22)?**
- Revisit the story about the video-game controller (p. 18–19). **List any cord-dangling moments God has used to expose your lack of control (p. 22).**

## Lesson 2: Beneath Anger and Anxiety

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- Reread the story about the bees on page 23. What problems can surface in our lives and relationships when we ignore our impulses to control?
- On pages 24–26, Shannon talks about two surface sins, anger and anxiety, which are often tied to a deeper struggle with control. **\*Which of these sins do you struggle with? Can you share an example of a recent episode when your anger or anxiety stemmed from a desire to control?**
- On pages 25–26, Shannon encourages you to begin journaling through your anger or anxiety.
  - ✿ Anger: What am I trying to control? Am I angry because I've lost control of someone or something?
  - ✿ Anxiety: What do I crave having control over? What do I fear losing control of?
- **\*Have you started a journal? What have you learned about yourself?**
- Review what it means to "Hold and Fold" on pages 26–27. How have you seen the truth of this quote play out in your life? "As we try to control things we can't control, we tend to lose control of the one thing we can—ourselves. God invites us to reverse the process, to Hold and Fold" (p. 27).

## Lesson 3: Where Am I Headed?

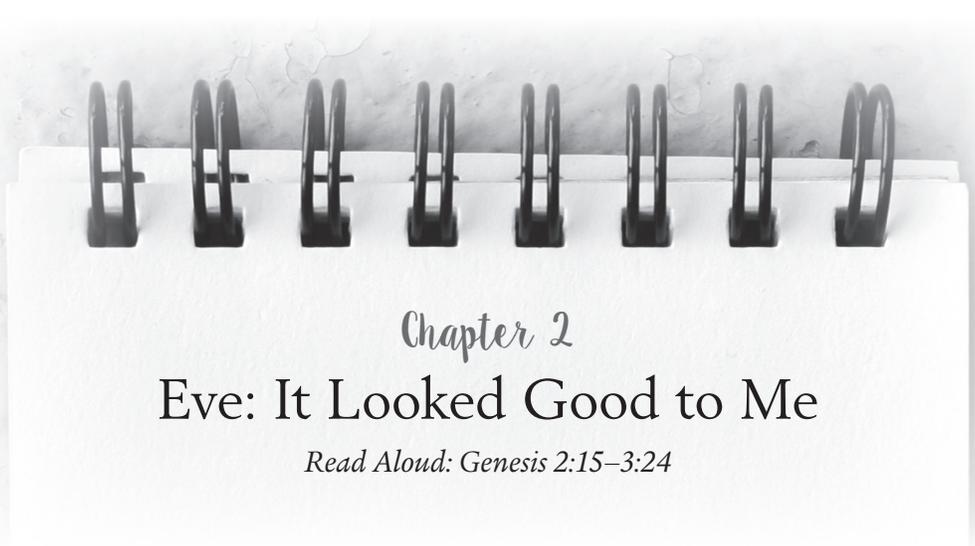
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- On page 28, what was the somber question Shannon posed to her Bible study group? How would you answer that question?
- Read "A New Path" on page 29. What are practical ways that we can cultivate a new demeanor of surrender toward God? How does meditating on truth help with this?
- **Read Psalm 119:15–16. What difference does it make to go into a situation you'd like to control with a mind- set of surrender to God (p. 31)?**
- How would you like to use the meditations at the end of each lesson to prompt transformation in your life? (For suggestions, review this discussion guide's introduction.)

### FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter's meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Proverbs 3:5–6. Rather than letting me continue in my illusion of control, God kindly exposes my lack of control and invites me to trust him instead. *God, thank you for reminding me that you are in control so I don't have to be.*
- Lesson 2: Psalm 37:8–9. My anger and anxiety often indicate a deeper heart-level struggle with control. *Lord, help me to Hold responsibility for myself and, with the things I can't control, help me to Fold my hands in surrender to you.*
- Lesson 3: Romans 12:2. I am naturally bent on control, so surrender is counterintuitive. *God, I will cultivate a new mind-set of surrender by meditating on truth about you.*



## Chapter 2

# Eve: It Looked Good to Me

*Read Aloud: Genesis 2:15–3:24*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How is Eve's story like a fairy tale in reverse?
- What did Eve want to control? Why?
- How did she take control rather than surrendering to God?
- What warnings or lessons do you find in Eve's story?
- What new insights can we gain about God from Eve's story?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: Like Looking at an Eclipse

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- Adam and Eve's eyes were opened (Gen. 3:7). How was this like looking into an eclipse? (For a review on spiritual blindness, look at Eph. 4:18.)
- Look at the contrasts listed on page 36. Give an example of this from your own life or from someone you know.
- Read the last paragraph on page 37. Which of God's ways, detailed in the Bible, does our culture deem most restrictive or narrow-minded? How could deferring to God's perspective on this issue help turn you from a Control Girl into a Jesus Girl?

#### Lesson 2: Kicking at Locked Doors

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- How do you respond to this quote from pages 39–40? "Control Girls crave secret information. . . . We aren't content with what we don't know. We pick locks and steal keys. If we get frantic enough, we kick at the door. Why? Because we want control. If it's hidden, it's out of our control."
- **\*Recall your most recent "But why, God?" moment. How was God asking you to relinquish control of the hidden things (p. 42)?**
- **Read John 20:29. What does Jesus say about those who don't see, yet believe? What would Jesus say about your faith (p. 42)?**

#### Lesson 3: Role-Playing

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- In the story on page 46 about Jennifer's daughter drinking milk, how did Jennifer invite her husband to lead? Are there areas in your home life where you can invite your husband's leadership?

- **\*Do your tone and demeanor invite your husband to lead (p. 47)?** Why or why not?
- **Do you see any correlation between your husband's passivity and your tendency to take control? How can you better draw out the leader in him (p. 47)?**

## Lesson 4: Cursed with a Craving

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- What significance does this phrase from Genesis 3:16 have for a Control Girl: "And you will desire to control your husband . . ." (NLT)?
- Respond to this quote from page 51: "My culture may cheer me on when I'm pushy, independent, demanding, and domineering, but when I turn on my heel and bring these attitudes to my marriage or other relationships, I inevitably drive in wedges. The more controlling I get, the less happy we all are."
- **Compare Colossians 3:12–15 to your closest relationships. How have these relationships been infected by your desire for control (p. 51)?**

### FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter's meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Isaiah 5:20. When I surrender to God's restrictions, I'm free to enjoy life the way he originally intended. *God, I will trust your viewpoint instead of my own on right versus wrong.*
- Lesson 2: Psalm 31:3–5. I can ask God questions, but it isn't my place to make demands. *God, I will stop kicking at locked doors and trust that you are for me.*
- Lesson 3: Ephesians 5:22–23. If I continually take control at home, my husband probably won't fight me for the reins. *God, I will give you control of my marriage by inviting my husband to lead.*
- Lesson 4: Romans 8:20–21. I am infected with a desire for control that leads to misery, not happiness. *God, please reverse the curse of control in my heart and in my relationships. I surrender to your work in my life.*

### NOTES TO THE LEADER

In lesson 3, we touch on gender roles, which is a topic that many Christians disagree on. Help steer your group toward what you *do* agree on—that wives shouldn't control their husbands. You may want to draw attention to this paragraph on page 45:

"Let me also add a note to my friends who embrace an egalitarian perspective of gender roles. Even if you think there should be no distinctions between the roles of husband and wife, the conclusion remains the same. By controlling your husband, you break your own rules for equality. To control him is to put him under your authority, which creates the same erosive tension."

Lesson 4 talks about our culture being reluctant to condemn sinful controlling women while at the same time being quick to condemn sinful abusive men. The point is that both are wrong and hurtful, but for the woman who can only feel her own pain and indignation, this is a difficult lesson. As the leader, please listen with compassion, ask follow-up questions, and try to understand. Remind yourself that people's minds are rarely changed by a good argument, but rather by our good God. Show kindness, not defensiveness. If you need to reset the conversation, you can ask the group to respond to the first two paragraphs on page 50.



Chapter 3  
Sarah: It's All Up to Me

*Read Aloud: Genesis 16:1–6; 18:1–15; 21:1–14*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What one thing in life would Sarah have most liked to control? Why was that one thing so important to her?
- How and why did Sarah try to take control?
- What warnings or lessons do you see in Sarah's story?
- What new insights about God do you gain from Sarah's story?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: God's Barricading Hand

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- Look at the section "Sarah's Humiliation" on pages 54–55. In what ways does our culture send messages that you are inadequate? How have others either combatted or compounded your feelings of inadequacy?
- Contrast the way the two hurting moms on pages 56–57 responded to what they *couldn't* control. What are practical steps you can take to relinquish your pain and frustration into the big, wise hands of God?
- **\*Tell about a way God has wedged his hand between you and a dream. How have you responded (p. 57)?**

#### Lesson 2: God's Voice Versus Mine

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- What did Eve and Sarah have in common (see pp. 58–59)? Is there a time you acted similarly to Eve and Sarah? What was the result?
- In Shannon's "Happily Ever After the Addition" story, she said, "Ken was listening to God, but I wanted him listening to *me*" (p. 60). What are you currently trying to talk someone into?
- **\*How have you badgered someone or pushed for your agenda? How could you encourage this person to be led by God instead of by you?**

#### Lesson 3: Hell Hath No Fury

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- Read the opening section of this lesson on page 63. Have you ever felt incredibly vulnerable in a situation that was out of your control? What did you crave in that situation?
- Recall the story about Catherine on page 64. Have you ever watched someone deflect responsibility and claim victim status—or have you done this yourself? What was the result? How is this a control tactic?

- Read the section “An Abusive Control Girl” on page 65. How did Sarah most likely justify her behavior? Do you see this pattern in your own life?
- On pages 66–67, you were asked to create a plan with a deadline for making things right. As group members feel led, share your plan or the results of your plan with the group.

## Lesson 4: Never Too Old to Become Beautiful

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- With Shannon, have you been skeptical of Sarah’s honorable mention in Hebrews 11:11? Have you put your skepticism to rest (p. 70)?
- **\*What problem seems too difficult, even for God? How would a response of surrender differ from control (p. 71)?**
- **\*How does the end of Sarah’s story reshape your view of God? Does surrender to him seem a little less burdensome? What does your answer reveal about your own faith (p. 70)?**

## Lesson 5: A Family Threat

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- When Sarah sees her little boy being bullied, she finally sees “Ishmael for what he truly is—a threat to her family’s inheritance” (p. 73). Fifteen years before, Sarah invited this threat into her home by being a Control Girl. Has your controlling behavior ever threatened your home?
- Read this quote from pages 73–74:

“I think controlling women produce some of the godliest *looking* families in the church. In our cunning way, we can twist Scripture into a whip on our kids’ backs. We can make our husbands squirm under our condemning glare. We can prod and punish and prompt until our family members cave in to the pressure and eke out the polished Christian personae we had in mind. And what is our goal? We want our loved ones to inherit the future that God promises his children. We want them to have heaven. The threat of family members not joining God’s family ignites our inner Control Girl! But here’s my concern: What if we’re producing slaves, not sons?”

How has your experience validated this? Have you seen a controlling mom’s behavior actually threaten her kids’ spiritual inheritance?

- **\*List several practical ways you can stop trying to control what only God can do in others’ hearts (p. 75).**

## FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter’s meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Psalm 32:8–10. By pushing against God’s hand or going around it, I turn myself against him. *God, rather than circumventing your hand, I will fling myself into your hands and surrender my sorrows to you.*
- Lesson 2: John 10:27. I need to stop talking, badgering, and pressuring with my agenda so that others can hear God’s agenda. *God, I believe that it is far better for \_\_\_\_\_ to hear your voice than mine.*
- Lesson 3: Proverbs 17:15, 20. When I fixate on the wrong done to me, I fail to see the wrong I’ve committed against others. *God, I confess my own sin of \_\_\_\_\_ to you. Please cleanse my heart of control.*
- Lesson 4: Hebrews 11:11. Rather than dreading the dreary, uphill challenge of surrender, I must remember that I’m surrendering to the God who brings laughter to life. *God, I trust that you will use the struggle of surrender to make me beautiful.*
- Lesson 5: Galatians 3:7. By controlling my kids or others, I might produce a pretty convincing imitation

Christian, but I can't produce a true son or daughter of God on my own. *God, I will stop trying to control what only you can accomplish in my child's life.*

## NOTES TO THE LEADER

Lesson 3 touches on the heavy topics of abuse, self-victimization, and deflecting responsibility. Keep in mind that though we want to encourage women to surrender even their most difficult situations to God, we never want to condone or give support to abuse. If someone in your group is in an abusive relationship, alert your pastor and encourage everyone involved to get professional help.



Chapter 4  
Hagar: Out from Under Her Control

*Read Aloud: Genesis 12:10–20; 16:1–16; 21:8–21*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How did Hagar lack control? How was she affected by another controlling person?
- What are some ways that Hagar attempted to take back control?
- What warnings or lessons does Hagar's story offer?
- What new insights do you gain about God from Hagar's personal encounters with him?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: Egyptian Cinderella

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- How was Hagar's contempt toward Sarah a Control Girl tactic?
- **Are you a Control Girl who has capitalized on a power reversal? How would you respond differently if you were putting God in control (p. 82)?**
- **Have you ever been the victim of a controlling person? How have you responded (p. 82)?**
- Read Romans 12:19. Then respond to this quote: "Expressing scorn may gain you some measure of control. It feels good to dish out a look of disdain, a shaming letter, or a vengeful attack on the person you were once forced to look up to. But lasting satisfaction comes from letting God have control, not taking it yourself" (p. 81).
- How is letting God deliver justice different from ignoring what happened or passively caving in to a controlling person? What difference does it make knowing that God sees every abhorrent scene of our lives with perfect clarity?

#### Lesson 2: Two Counseling Questions

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- Hagar and Sarah were two Control Girls butting heads. **\*Which controlling person or situation in your life most gets a rise out of you? How does your reaction reveal your own desire for control (p. 86)?**
- Hagar ran away to escape Sarah, but as it says on page 86, "Sometimes when we strike out on our own to take back control, we lead ourselves into more bondage, not freedom." How has this been true in your life or someone else's?
- Read the section "God's Counseling Questions" on page 85. What dominating, controlling force are you trying to escape? How are God's counseling questions to Hagar helpful for gaining perspective in your life?

### Lesson 3: A Thousand Hurdles

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- Read the opening paragraphs of lesson 3. **How does this part of Hagar’s story reshape your view of God (p. 92)?**
- Read this quote from page 89:

“Like a daddy with his hands on the shoulders of a runaway daughter, God gently rotated Hagar toward the path of both surrender and dignity. . . . Then, like a good coach, God gave Hagar hurdle-shrinking hope. He pointed off into the future, telling Hagar what he planned to do.”

What future hope has God given you? How does this help you surrender to him?

- Recall Dana’s story on pages 90–91. **If God has asked you to quietly endure an injustice, how can you surrender, not just to this mistreatment but also to God (p. 92)?**

### Lesson 4: Mom at a Distance

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- Describe Hagar’s situation when she put her son under a bush in the wilderness. Have you ever been in a similar situation?
- Respond to this quote on page 94: “A good mom does what Hagar did. She helps her child as much as she can, and then she abandons him to God. She leaves her child on the altar and backs away, giving God full control over what happens next. But she doesn’t do it easily.” \*What is one practical way that you sense God wants you leave your loved one at the altar and back away?
- **Are you agonizing from a distance while your child (or another loved one) struggles (p. 96)?** What difference does it make to know that God is leaning in close, even when you can’t?

### Lesson 5: Opened Eyes

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- **What situation pressed you to recognize that you cannot fix every problem your child (or loved one) faces (p.99)?**
- Read the second paragraph on page 98, inserting your child’s (or loved one’s) name. How does saying these words make you feel?
- **How has God opened your eyes to a solution that you didn’t see before? How did this help you see that God is providing, and not you (p. 99)?**
- Read this quote from pages 98–99:

“Why does God sometimes hide a solution and keep me from seeing it? God wants me to stop trusting in myself for solutions to my kids’ problems. He cares even more deeply for my children than I do. He wants to be the one to provide for them and has all sorts of creative ways to do so. He stands by, ready to open eyes, unlatch gates, and release resources. He’s just waiting for me to despair of my own solutions, and cry out—in faith—to him.”

\*What solution do you need to stop trusting yourself for, and start trusting God for? What steps can you take to start this transition today?

### FOR MEDITATION

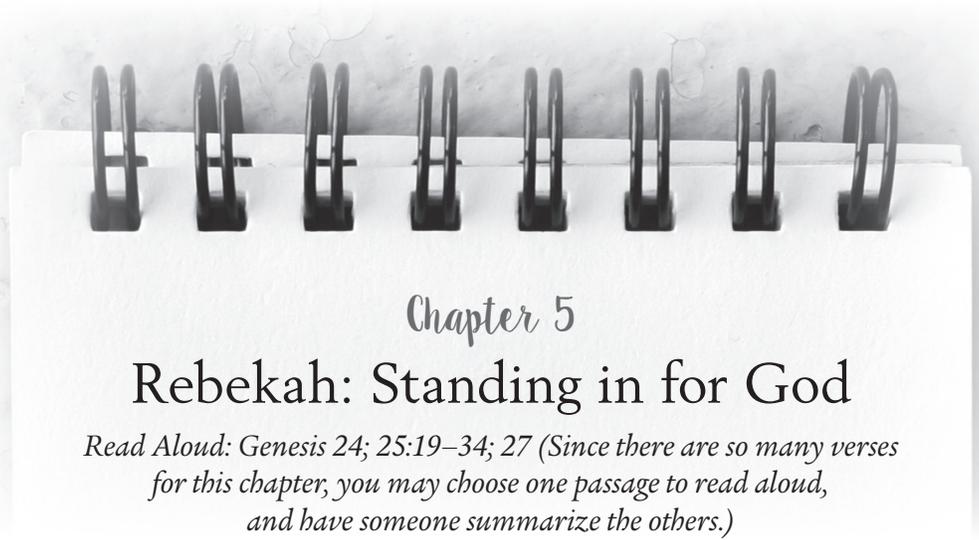
Which of this chapter’s meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Psalm 9:7-9. God has witnessed every haunting scene of my life firsthand. Rather than dishing out my own scorn, I will put God in control of the consequences. *God, I defer to you as the righteous, just judge.*
- Lesson 2: Galatians 4:8-9. When I try to take back control of my life, I often lead myself into more bondage, not freedom. *God, help me to see with new clarity what I am trying to escape, and what I am trying to gain control of.*
- Lesson 3: 1 Peter 2:18-19. God may ask me to endure sorrows or mistreatment for a time. *God, I will press on by filling my mind with who you are and what you have promised.*
- Lesson 4: 1 Peter 5:7. Even when I agonize at a distance while my child suffers on the brink of disaster, God is leaning close, hearing my child's parched cry. *Lord, I surrender and even abandon my child to you.*
- Lesson 5: Psalm 22:9-11. God has all sorts of creative ways to care for my loved ones. Rather than trusting in myself to find solutions, God wants me to cry out to him. *God, I believe that you can open my eyes to provisions that are hidden from me.*

## NOTES TO THE LEADER

Lesson 3 touches on the heavy topic of abuse. Keep in mind that though we want to encourage women to surrender even their most difficult situations to God, we never want to condone or give support to abuse. If someone in your group is in an abusive relationship, alert your pastor and encourage everyone involved to get professional help.

As you lead discussion on Hagar, keep in mind that this chapter has lots of content. Make sure you budget your time well and leave enough time for lessons four and five, since these are such important lessons.



Chapter 5

## Rebekah: Standing in for God

*Read Aloud: Genesis 24; 25:19–34; 27 (Since there are so many verses for this chapter, you may choose one passage to read aloud, and have someone summarize the others.)*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What did Rebekah want to control? What do you think motivated her?
- What were some of Rebekah's control tactics?
- What warnings or lessons do you see in Rebekah's story?
- What new insights about God's sovereignty do you gain from Rebekah's story?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: Threading the Knot

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- What signs of God's providence do you see in Rebekah's love story? How did Rebekah surrender to what God obviously had planned? How can we surrender to God's plans?
- **\*Which providential details in your life cause your heart to swell, knowing that God was in control and cared enough to bring them together (p. 105)?**
- **How has God's providence created pain or cost for you? How does revisiting the providential details from your past help you surrender the cost (p. 105)?**

#### Lesson 2: When One Walks Away

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- What disturbing prophecy was Rebekah given about her twins (p. 107)? What uncontrollable circumstances are in your life or your kids' lives? How do you handle those circumstances?
- Read "A Comforting Truth" on page 108. Do you find it comforting to know that your kids' salvation is not in your control? Why or why not?
- **\*Salvation is God's work. Have you made it your own? List any evidence you see, such as anxiety, pressuring, fretting, or angry reactions to a child's rebellion (p.110).**
- What stood out to you from Mary Katherine's story on page 109? Stop and pray together for any prodigals represented by your group, surrendering control to God.

### Lesson 3: Differences Can be Wedges or Fasteners

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- How were Rebekah's children different from each other? How did Rebekah and her husband contribute to the division?
- **\*Which person(s) have you most tried to change (p. 114)?** What was the result?
- Why does God put opposites together in families and churches? (See "Night and Day Family" on p. 113.)
- Talk about someone close to you who is quite different from you. Why do you think God put you together?

### Lesson 4: Four Ways to Repent of Control

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- Summarize Rebekah's four control tactics outlined in this lesson.
- \*Is there one of these four that you most need to repent of?
- **Make a plan of action. Write it down. List out the ways God is prompting you to build peace between the people you love (p.119).** Share something from your list with your group.

### Lesson 5: Standing for God Versus Standing In for Him

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- Why was Rebekah convinced that God was on her side of the argument with her husband (p. 120)?
- \*On page 120, Shannon says, "The more convinced you are that God is on your side of the argument, the greater the temptation to take control." What example can you give to validate this?
- What did Rebekah do to "stand in" for God and take control? What were the consequences (p. 125)? What would surrender have looked like instead?
- **\*When have you "stood in" for God? How did others react (p. 124)?** How might you have behaved differently if you had surrendered to God?

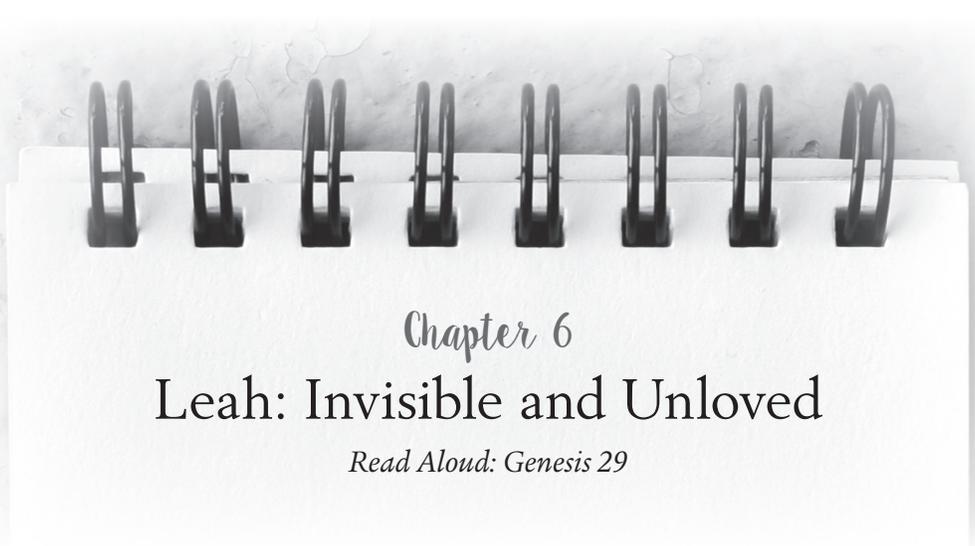
## FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter's meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Proverbs 16:33. God gets the most glory, not when he rips control from my hands, but when I warmly invite him to take it. *God, thank you for your strong fingers, which providentially shape the details that form my life.*
- Lesson 2: Romans 9:16. My child's salvation is in God's wise, capable hands, not my faltering, grabby ones. How terrifying it would be if I *were* in control. *Father, I find comfort in knowing that you are in control of my child's destiny, not me.*
- Lesson 3: Romans 12:5. We are all different by God's design. Those differences are intended to be fasteners, not wedges, in the family of God. *God, I will celebrate others' differences, instead of trying to control them.*
- Lesson 4: Proverbs 6:12-19. By eavesdropping, pitting people against each other, being deceitful, or ignoring the risk of collateral damage, I create a miserable ending, not the happy one I envision. *Father, I will turn back now, and stop using controlling tactics.*
- Lesson 5: 1 Peter 3:1-2. I cannot railroad anyone into surrendering to God. *Lord, I commit to stop trying to stand in for you.*

Notes to the Leader: Lesson 2 touches on the theological debate of humanity's choice versus God's sovereignty, which are both taught in the Bible. Let your group know that it is OK to disagree. Focus the group on what everyone can and does agree upon. If you need to reset the conversation, go to "A Comforting Truth" on page 108.

As you lead the discussion on this chapter, keep in mind that it has lots of content. Make sure that you leave time for lessons four and five, which are such important lessons.



Chapter 6  
Leah: Invisible and Unloved

*Read Aloud: Genesis 29*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What did Leah have no control over?
- How did Leah try to regain a measure of control over her life? How did this turn out?
- What lessons or warnings about control do you see in Leah's story?
- What new insights do you gain about God from reading Leah's story?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: An Invisible Bride

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- Which part of Leah's wedding story would have been most devastating to you?
- Read the first three paragraphs on page 130. How have you (or someone you know) tried to ward off feelings of worthlessness by
  - ☼ putting up walls and withdrawing;
  - ☼ becoming rigidly independent; or
  - ☼ becoming a producer, perfectionist, or more attractive?

How do these attempts contrast with and look different from surrendering to God and letting him determine our worth?

- On page 131, how did Natalie come to recognize that God had seen her all along? What difference did this make to Natalie? What difference would recognizing this truth make in your life?
- **Think back to the darkest moments of your life. Now, picture God looking on with eyes filled with love. How does this make you feel (p. 131)?**

#### Lesson 2: An Unveiled Bride

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- **How does your fear or agitation in the mirror indicate a deeper struggle for control (p. 136)?**
- **Are you plagued by perfectionism, anxiety, depression, or eating disorders? Are you obsessed with fashion, fitness, or anti-aging techniques? How has your desire for control begun to control you (p. 136)?**
- Contrast our selfless bridegroom, Jesus, with Leah's selfish groom, Jacob (see p. 135). What are practical ways that you can remind yourself of Jesus's selfless love to quiet your fears and agitation?
- Read "A New Mirror" on pages 135–136. How does God want to melt your insecurities?

## Lesson 3: Before I Can Give God Control

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- How was Leah giving Jacob, not God, the role of deciding her worth? In what ways do you give others the power to decide your worth?
- Have you had experiences which validate the following quotes?
  - ✿ “By staking our worth in what others think, without realizing it, we’ve let them control us” (p. 138).
  - ✿ “The more desperate we are to be accepted, the more control we give to others” (p. 138).
- Read Audra’s story in “A Controlling Mother” on pages 138–139. What did Audra have to do first to give control to God? Why?
- **Who are you controlled by? How does this keep you from fully surrendering to God (p. 140)?**
- **What steps do you need to take to break free from the control of others (p. 140)?**

### FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter’s meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Isaiah 43:4. Other people might look right through me, but I will let God be the Daddy who determines my worth. *God, I believe that you see me, value me, and love me.*
- Lesson 2: Hebrews 10:22. I don’t have to live under the rejection and humiliation of the world’s mirror. When I settle myself in front of the mirror of God’s Word, my insecurities melt away, and I become beautiful. *God, I give you control by letting you decide my worth.*
- Lesson 3: Revelation 5:12. I am not free to fully surrender to God until I stop letting the opinions of others control me. *Lord, I surrender to you by making your opinion (not \_\_\_\_\_’s) matter most.*

### NOTES TO THE LEADER

In lesson 1, we touch on abuse and self-deprecation, which are very weighty topics. Keep in mind that though we want to encourage women to surrender even their most difficult situations to God, we never want to condone or give support to abuse. If someone in your group is in an abusive relationship, or is struggling with suicidal tendencies, alert your pastor and encourage everyone involved to get professional help.

In lesson 3, we talk about breaking free from controlling relationships. Please encourage balance with this. On the one hand, we don’t want to let the opinions of others matter more than God’s, but on the other hand, people are important! Remind group members that carelessly disposing of relationships is really another control tactic. Instead, God calls us to find our hope in him, surrender the outcomes to him, and work through relational challenges as they come.



Chapter 7  
Rachel: When She Has More

*Read Aloud: Genesis 29:16–30:24; 31:33–35; 50:17–20*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What did Rachel have no control over? What *did* she have control over, which she used to her advantage?
- List the ways Rachel tried to gain control.
- What lessons or warnings do you see in Rachel's story?
- What new insights about God do you gain from Rachel's story?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: Family Demands

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- Have you experienced anything that validates this quote from page 145? “God wired us to long for meaningful, lasting family relationships. It’s why we care so deeply and tug so insistently on the people we love. But when our tug becomes a yank, and our request becomes a demand, rather than drawing everyone in, we drive them away.”
- In what ways did Rachel turn to everything but God in her urgency to have children (pp. 146–147)? In what circumstances do you find yourself urgently turning to something other than God?
- **Would your loved ones describe you as someone who serves cheerfully, or one who applies pressure and tries to control (p. 148)?** What practical steps can you take to encourage healthier relationships with your loved ones?
- **\*What is your personal version of “hell on earth”? What pain do you dread most, and who or what do you believe will “save” you from this (p. 148)?** Share your response with your group.

#### Lesson 2: Compared to Her

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- Read “Tug of War” on pages 150–151. Why did Rachel feel like God was against her? How do you think Rachel was misinterpreting God? When have you felt God was against you? How did that situation resolve?
- How was Rachel's response of envy the opposite of relinquishing control to God? Who or what do you envy in your life? What would it look like to relinquish that to God?
- **\*Do you struggle more with superiority or inferiority? How has Satan used this against you (p. 154)?**
- On page 154, you were asked to write out a prayer, first listing the things God has given you and the things he hasn't, then surrendering these things to God. As group members feel led, read your prayers to the group.

## Lesson 3: Thirsty Moms

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- How does Rachel respond when God finally gives her a baby (see p. 155)? Have you or someone you know responded to God's blessings like this?
- Do you know of a situation which validates this quote on page 155? "Grasping for control never brings the peaceful satisfaction we imagine it will. It only causes our hearts to chafe against the one who truly is in control: God."
- **\*What are you continually thirsty for? Is there a chance you might always be thirsty for more? What can you learn from Rachel (p. 158)?**
- Recall Amy's story on page 157. **How is fear keeping you from relinquishing control of a situation or person you love (p. 158)?**

## Lesson 4: A Chunky Board Book

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- Read the fourth paragraph of page 160. If you could talk to Rachel as she paced in front of her empty crib, what would you say to her?
- Read "The Author of All" on pages 160–161. How do you think God's perspective on a difficulty you're facing might differ from yours?
- Read this quote from page 161. "When I see that God's plot underlines every part of my story, I have less to worry about and less to control." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- **\*How will you make your life story more about God and less about you, in the next month (p. 162)?**

### FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter's meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Psalm 16:11. When I clamp onto my family, demanding that they meet my needs, they resist. When I serve unselfishly, they are drawn to me. *God, I trust you with my deepest fears and cravings.*
- Lesson 2: James 4:7. Envy is the opposite of relinquishing control to God. Satan wants to pit me against other people. *God, help me to stop comparing and be free.*
- Lesson 3: Psalm 16:5. When I fearfully try to pull in and fence off what is mine, my thirst is never quenched. *Father, I want to know the freedom of entrusting my life and my children back to you.*
- Lesson 4: Romans 8:28. My life is a story about God and his family, not me and mine. *God, I believe that your pen is poised over the details of my life, and that you are writing a more satisfying ending than I can even fathom.*

## Chapter 8

# Miriam: Take the Lead

*Read Aloud: Exodus 2:1–10; 15:19–21; Numbers 11:4–35; 12*  
*(Since there are so many verses for this chapter, you may*  
*choose one passage to read aloud, and have*  
*someone summarize the others.)*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What did Miriam sense that she was losing control of? Why?
- How did Miriam try to take control? What were the results?
- What lessons or warnings can we take away from Miriam's story?
- How did God show himself to be in control in Miriam's story? What insights do you gain about God? Lesson Questions

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: Gifted to Lead

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- How did God position and gift Miriam for leadership? What did it look like for her to exercise her gifts to God's glory?
- **\*Are you gifted for leadership? How did these gifts surface? How has God particularly positioned you to serve him (p.169)?**
- **Have you made God's ministry into your ministry? How can you release control (p. 169)?**

#### Lesson 2: In the Lead

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- It's easy to see how Miriam might have felt slighted or underappreciated. Yet were her responses the right ones? Discuss the ways she attempted to leverage control.
- **\*Think about a current situation or person you are passionately resisting or taking a stand against. Are you harboring any pride, jealousy, arrogance, fear, or stubbornness that contributes to the conflict (p. 171)?**
- **What do you talk about incessantly and refuse to let go of? Consider "muting" yourself on this issue for a time and turning exclusively to God (p. 172).** If you have made a commitment toward this, consider sharing it with your group.
- **How have you ever taken a stand against your church leaders, and recruited support for your viewpoint (p. 173)?** How might this be the opposite of surrendering control to God?

## Lesson 3: Sharing Leadership

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- What lesson from the “Graves of Craving” did Miriam seem to be immune to (see p. 175)? Discuss a time you noticed a fault in someone else that you also struggle with.
- How did Moses and Miriam react differently to the two prophets (see “Newbie Leaders” on p. 176)?
- **Do you feel threatened by others who do what you do? How can you surrender your “turf” to God, rather than defending it (p. 178)?**
- **\*What has God put on your “serving platter”? Are you content with this (p. 178)?**

## Lesson 4: Healing a Control Girl

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- How did God involve Moses in Miriam’s healing? How did God humble her? How did God move her to the sidelines? Why do you think this method was helpful for Miriam’s healing process?
- Read this quote from page 179:

“God could have dealt with Miriam one-on-one, but he involved her brothers in both her correction and her healing. We need to adopt Miriam’s new vantage point. Self-sufficiency is a façade. We are *not* OK on our own. God has meticulously placed us into the body of Christ. We need each other, especially for correction.”

If God has brought some of the decay of your heart to the surface, how can you involve others in your healing?

- Review Shannon’s story about how God used her conversation with Annette on pages 180–181. \*Do you see God using a current situation to humble you and show you your control issues?
- **What have you been sidelined from? How has God used this to draw you near (p. 182)?**

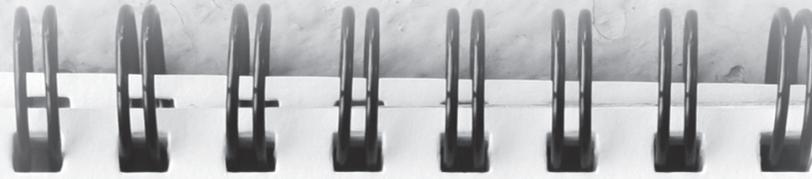
## FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter’s meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: 2 Timothy 2:24. When I make God’s ministry into my ministry, I take credit and control, which both belong to God. *God, I know that my gifts are from you. May my service lift up your name, not mine.*
- Lesson 2: Hebrews 13:17. I would be lost without God’s direction, and he uses my leaders to give it. *God, I don’t want to be a “rattling lid” that you must silence. Help me bring my frustrations directly to you.*
- Lesson 3: Philippians 2:3–7. Rather than defending my turf or obsessing over how many followers I have, I will face forward and follow God. *Lord, I surrender my cravings for honor and recognition to you.*
- Lesson 4: Isaiah 30:15. God wants to bring my sin to the surface so he can shave off my calluses of pride. *God, thank you that you use the sidelines in life to pull me closer, not push me away.*

## NOTES TO THE LEADER

In lesson 2, when we talk about taking a stand against church leaders, there is great potential for doing the very thing we’re warning against—verbally undermining those God has placed in leadership. Please encourage group members to share about their own heart struggles, but refrain from shooting verbal bullets at others. If you need to reset the conversation, you can point the group to the last question on page 173 about Hebrews 13:17.



## Chapter 9

# Control Girl to Jesus Girl

*Read Aloud: 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; Galatians 5:22–26*

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Are there ways in which you have made Jesus your king but are still living like a Control Girl queen?
- Which direction do you think your life is headed—toward Control Girl or Jesus Girl? What evidence do you see?
- How has your life shifted directions during the course of this study? Is there anything holding you back?

### LESSON QUESTIONS

#### Lesson 1: Reverse of the Curse

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- What gift do we have that Control Girls of the Old Testament did not (see p. 187)? What difference is this making in your life right now?
- \*Do you have a Big Arrow moment, when you gave God control in some big, life-altering way?
- Do you agree with this quote from page 189: “If I only give God control of the indefinite future and never the next five minutes, I won’t be transformed”? Why or why not?
- Galatians 5:25 talks about keeping in step with the Spirit. These steps are little, moment-by-moment prompts by the Spirit to walk in a new direction. Which Small Arrow (see p. 189) do you think has the most potential to transform your life?

#### Lesson 2: Tame Your Tongue

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- Did you take the challenge at the bottom of page 191? If so, what did you find out? If not, what held you back?
- **How have your controlling words proved futile (p. 194)?**
- Page 193 reads, “The Spirit doesn’t act like a filter over our tongues; he changes our hearts, where our words are first formed. Matthew 12:34 says, ‘For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.’” **How does privately fuming or venting with a desire for control set an inclination for your heart and words (p. 194)?**
- How could God use this practice of holding your tongue rather than controlling people with words to change you from a Control Girl to a Jesus Girl? Have you already noticed any changes?

### Lesson 3: Cap the Red Pen

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- \*Did you take the 5 C Challenge (pp. 195–196)? Report how it went to your group.
- Read the first paragraph under “Controlling in Red” on pages 196–197. Can you share an experience that illustrates this?
- Read the last paragraph of the lesson on page 198. What are the situations which presently tempt you to grip your red pen rather than trust God?
- How might God use this practice of putting your red pen down to transform you into a Jesus Girl? Have you already noticed any changes in yourself?

### Lesson 4: Live Within Limits

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- What real-life experience can you offer to validate this quote? “The Spirit’s arrows always point us back inside the limits. True freedom is found in exercising self-control, not in boundary-free living. So the Spirit gives us the power to say no to ourselves” (p. 199).
- \*Do you tend toward reaction one or reaction two on page 200? Give an example.
- How is perfectionism a way of seizing control rather than relinquishing control to God? (See the top of page 201.)
- **What limits do you sense God offering as a way to train your heart? How could God use these minute-by-minute limits to turn you into a Jesus Girl (p. 202)?**

### Lesson 5: Be Respectfully His

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- Read this quote on page 203: “Sin always feels like sin when it’s done to us. But sin rarely feels like sin when we’re doing it to someone else.” How has this been especially true in your marriage?
- **How do you control your husband? How does this communicate disrespect (p. 205)?** What practical steps can you take to relinquish control of your husband and communicate respect?
- How could God use this process of respecting your husband rather than controlling him to transform you from Control Girl to Jesus Girl over time?

## FOR MEDITATION

Which of this chapter’s meditations do you want to focus on, going forward?

- Lesson 1: Galatians 5:25. During the small moments of the day, I either gratify my craving for control or give control to God. *Holy Spirit, thank you for laying down arrows of guidance for me. Please remake me to be like Jesus as I yield, moment by moment, to you.*
- Lesson 2: Psalm 141:3. Words are both a primary way I control people and a primary way I give control to God. *Lord, may my words today be formed by a heart that practices cheerfulness and gratitude rather than grumbling and fuming.*
- Lesson 3: 2 Timothy 2:25. Capturing and correcting the hearts of people is God’s business, not mine. When I correct, I’m often trying to control. *God, I believe that no amount of red ink from me can accomplish what one nudge from your Spirit can.*
- Lesson 4: Galatians 5:16. Godly self-control is the fruit of the Spirit, not a product of my perfectionism. God weaves daily limits into my life as training for my heart. *Holy Spirit, please use the limits I encounter today to cultivate in me an attitude of surrender.*
- Lesson 5: Ephesians 5:33. By trying to control my husband, I send inherent messages of disrespect, which might not feel sinful to me, but are. *God, out of respect for you, I will treat my husband with respect today.*