

Text: [Psalm 27:1-5 \(CEB\)](#)
Date: February 2, 2025
Title: Overwhelmed: When Hanging on Means Letting Go – Week 3
“Letting Go of Control”
Theme: We can learn to let go of control only when we hold on to God’s presence.

1

I will confess that from time to time I’ve struggled with my own
tendencies to want to control everything
That may or may not surprise you, depending on how well you
know me

I remember a time, years ago, when we had begun a new project
at one of the churches I served
It was a really big undertaking
We were coordinating almost 100 volunteers at 8 or 10 different
sites for a day of service in the community
I did a lot of the pre-planning and setup, lining up partners,
handling publicity, and finding sites to work

As the day approached, I realized there was a lot of last-minute
prep to do
Signs to make, registration forms to print off, directions to the job
sites to copy, a website to update
People kept asking, “Do you need me to do something?”
And I foolishly kept saying, “No”
I thought I had it all “under control”
Even though I had to stay late the night before to figure it all out

But on the day of the event, I was totally frazzled
Things didn’t go as planned
More people showed up than I thought,
but then some groups didn’t show at all

They all needed to be registered, and assigned to sites
People were dropping off donations
Folks had tons of questions
There was a prayer time I was supposed to be leading before we
started

I was absolutely beside myself trying to manage it all
And yet, when people would try and help me:
“Can I do this for you?”
I struggled to let each piece go
Because I knew how I wanted it done

I was fortunate that day
To have a few folks who knew me well enough that they could be
more forceful
And say, “Joe, I’ve got THIS. You go do THAT.”

Those folks were the only thing that saved me from a sense of
being totally overwhelmed
An experience that I had 100% brought on myself
Because I couldn’t let go of control and let others help me

Has anybody been there?
I can’t imagine I’m the only one

And even if you don’t recognize YOURSELF in my story
You probably recognize someone you’ve worked for or been
connected to
Our need for control rears its head in a lot of ugly ways

2A

Why are we like this?
I mean, it’s crazy, right?

Well, not so fast

Humans *crave* control NOT because there's something inherently wrong with us

But because it's actually an essential part of our psychological well-being

There's an interesting experiment I read about this week

Where older folks in a nursing home were divided into two populations

One group was given more choices and more autonomy over certain dimensions of daily life

Basic things like which movies to watch and what type of plants they wanted to grow in their rooms

The other group was treated, well, like your typical nursing home patient

With very limited choice in their day-to-day

Guess which group had a lower mortality rate?

Those who had *more* control had *significantly* better health outcomes

Those with less control had nearly DOUBLE the mortality rate over the 18-month study¹

So control – at least a degree of *perceived* control – of our situations is good for our health and happiness

2B

In part, it's because control helps us feel safer & more secure

Being out-of-control can feel really risky – like a walk in the dark

So being able to control at least *some* of our circumstances offers us a sense that we'll be protected

But taken to the extreme, that desire for control can also be a source of frustration and overwhelm

Like what I did at that clean up day

We often think that our ability to handle tasks on our own says something about our competence and self-sufficiency
I think it's more often about control

Not wanting to compromise – or even have to NEGOTIATE our vision for something

Not trusting others to do it as well as WE can

Not wanting anyone else to get even a sliver of the credit

And not wanting anyone else to mess up and make us look bad!

I have a feeling that A LOT of the unhealthy desire for control stems from our need to be seen by others in a certain way

3

So let's turn to the Psalms to see what we can learn from King David about letting go of control

Psalms 27 is traditionally attributed to David, as are many of the psalms

And here again, if you don't know this scripture, it's one you should keep handy – particularly these first few verses

“The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Should I fear anyone?

The Lord is a fortress protecting my life.

Should I be frightened of anything?”

This is a psalm that promises God's protection and care

In a way that balances what it means to be both in-control and out-of-control

A model that I think is very healthy for us

Because in our tradition as Methodists

We do very much believe that God gives us free will for a reason

So that we are free collaborate with God in the transformation of the world

We're never forced, instead we're invited into a partnership with
our Creator to pursue God's work
But that kind of collaboration requires us to constantly navigate
this balance between being in-control and out-of-control

When we're completely in charge of our own lives
We may feel safe and secure and in-control
But we're likely missing out on some blessings that God has for
us
If we'd just loosen our grip a little bit, and be willing to step off the
path sometimes into the places where God is working

If being out-of-control feels like walking in the dark
God promises to be our light
To guide us so that we can keep making choices to move forward

But there's another promise here in the scripture
That when things feel totally chaotic and out-of-control
Because of circumstances or what people around us are doing
"When an army camps against me"
"When war comes up against me"
"When evildoers come at me"
We can trust God to provide us with "shelter"
With a "hiding place"
With safety up "high above" the fray

So that we experience God's presence,
BOTH in the daily guidance we need to walk our life's path
AND in God's protection when things go south

4

If you've been feeling overwhelmed because you've been trying to
manage it all

Trying to control it all

Trying to manage people's perceptions of you

Maybe even in trying to manage people's relationships with one
another

Know this: you can't

You CAN'T control it all

A lot of the time, let's be honest, even the control we THINK we
have is an illusion

Like sand that just slips through our fingers

Ask anyone who's ever faced a life-threatening diagnosis or life-
changing accident

Now, we can either allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by THAT
realization

Or we can turn in faith to the One who has promised to be with us
in it all

"The Lord is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone?"

"The Lord is a fortress protecting my life. Should I be afraid?"

5

The challenge today is perhaps the greatest challenge of faith

To trust enough to relinquish control

To "let go and let God"

So I want you to think about this

And if you struggle with control, this challenge is for you

Think about things in your life that are causing you worry and anxiety right now

Things you spend a lot of time TRYING to control

And consider, honestly and prayerfully – do you ACTUALLY have control over them? or NOT?

Maybe your control is ONLY over your response, not over the thing itself

If you find that there's something you've been trying to control that you just CAN'T, then I want you to pray on a few questions:

Ask God – “How can I act differently here?

Do I need to do anything at all?

Or is this all yours?”

Because that's the other part of this psalm

“I've asked one thing from the Lord, it's all I seek:

To live in the Lord's house all the days of my life.”

We can let go of CONTROL

only when we hold fast to God's PRESENCE

That's the message at the heart of Psalm 27

It's the presence of God who leads and guides us

It's the presence of God who overcomes fear

It's the presence of God who offers protection

The good news is that God's presence is something WE can practice

In regular worship, prayer, and Bible reading

We can let go of control

only when we hold fast to God's presence

When the path is clear, when it's unclear

When things are under control or out of control

If you feel overwhelmed, maybe it's time to let go

Amen.

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¹ https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_losing_control_make_you_happier