

**I am not in charge!** Not of the world, not in charge of my circumstances, not in charge of my family or even in charge of own life – how long it will be and when it is over. It's not like I've never been forced to realise this before – 12 years ago when I was ill with depression it was a big chunk of the learning I went through, so I shouldn't be surprised. Being in Charge is God's job, not mine and that's the way He likes it. "Be still and know that I am God" He says in Psalm 46 and perhaps he should have added: "remember that you are not!"

Have you noticed how lots of people have been having difficulty with giving up control just now and accepting the reality of their new situation? From presidents to peoples' response to the pandemic we are seeing shock, denial, anger, blame, in fact many of the usual initial reactions to loss. (Even the author of the slogan "take back control" has left Downing Street this week.)

What do you do to cope when it looks like you are losing control? I remember when I was dealing with stress many years ago re-organising my underwear drawer – it was possible to get my socks and pants tidy when other things were harder to deal with.

Of course the illusion that we are in control is the sort of nonsense that I might believe because I have a lot more security in my life than someone living in poverty in the UK or a country with an unstable government, changing climate, threat of war or persecution. Covid 19 has reminded us not to take anything for granted. Maybe that means we are closer to the situation of much of the world and indeed the early church.

"Control" is an issue that has been on my list to deal with for some years and has been pretty resistant to my attempts to get it off the pedestal, even having been through lots of health stuff. Here are a few of the circumstances that have helped make the problem more obvious in recent years:

- Our children growing up, learning to drive and drive with me as a passenger!
- then leaving home and going off to study
- recently our daughter leaving the country and getting married far away,
- dealing with the US travel ban, being unable to host or even be at the wedding, or make the cake.

All quite painful stuff. What can I do to cope? Rage at the situation? Blame the people who make the rules? Reorganise my underwear drawer?

There isn't one easy answer but I have a choice in how I respond – either I can see it as losing control or as choosing surrender and I can ask God to use the pain to deal with the idol on the pedestal. Not to accept the bad thing as such, but to accept that He is God in the middle of it and ask Him to do something good, something different than I was hoping for. It might be quite a difficult prayer: "If not what I want, then it's got to be something better." Maybe that's a bit like Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke: 22:42)

I find that it's easier to trust God when things are going the way I want them, than when it's not according to my plan. I doubt and wonder why God didn't do it my way, especially when I may have made some pretty good suggestions which I thought were consistent with His general way of doing stuff. At this point it is not attractive to see this as an opportunity for me to learn to trust God more fully, but if I don't, I end up carrying responsibility which is not mine and I can't cope with, so that's a waste of time. Paul found that life didn't always go the way he wanted it to either, and yet he talks about both **glory** and **hope** in this list from Romans 5:

*we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)*

### **Things that don't help and things that do**

- It doesn't help to tell anyone else how they should be feeling or reacting when they are feeling they are losing control and quoting Romans 5 at them is likely to either annoy or depress someone. If you can get your head around it yourself though it can save you from a downward spiral of misery and self-pity.
- It does help to **talk to God** honestly about how we are feeling, to remind ourselves of **God's goodness** (even through gritted teeth) and to **thank Him**:

*pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:17-19).*

- It helps to choose **praise and worship** which operate as an antidote to self-pity and develop hope which sustains us through the struggle.
- It is good to choose to **make time for other people** and saying or doing a kind thing for someone else is probably more refreshing to our souls than tidying your drawers. The Holy Spirit will have great ideas on how to do this if we ask Him. It might be that we need to be nice to ourselves too if this is something we aren't good at. In lots of little ways we can be seeing God's love "poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" expanding our hearts so we have room for others and making our emotional resources stronger and greater.

If any of that seems relevant for you just now, you might want to make this prayer yours:

### **Prayer**

**Lord – show us what you are saying to us about control and if there is something for us to surrender. I am sorry for holding onto the illusion of control and taking your place as God. Thank you for being in charge and for being big enough and good enough to look after everything that seems such a mess. I would like to hand over the responsibility for the things I can't change and be able to hear from you what is my job. Thank you for the freedom that brings and for your gift of hope that you promise. Please pour your love into my heart so that it gets bigger and I am able to love others in turn. Amen**

Romans 5:3-5

*we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*