

Being Out of Control

To an audience full of order-oriented, if not up-tight Presbyterians, my former boss, Harold Kurtz, with a big smile on his face, used to describe various people group movements for Christ around the world as "The Gospel is out of control, and that is a good thing." Being out of control for most people is a frightening adventure to be avoided at all costs. For "control freaks," being out of control can be a nightmare. For all of us, giving up control in our lives is not easy. God is begging us to do it, but we don't like to relinquish being in charge. After all, why would anyone want to give up control of his or her life?

As we enter the Easter season, let us consider that no one who has ever lived on this earth has given up more control of his or her life than Jesus of Nazareth. And it was only after Jesus wrestled intensely with God in the Garden of Gethsemane that he was willing to walk to the excruciating pain and finality of dying on a cross for the sake of humanity. The most dramatic moment in history resulted from it. Jesus gave up control of his own life in order to open the way to everlasting life for not only himself, but for all of us who place our faith in him as well.



Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane

New worlds of possibilities, beauty and love open to us if we give up control of our lives to God as Jesus demonstrated. By holding on too tightly to anything, we risk choking out the grace of God in our lives and all the blessings that can flow from it. It is not an easy process to wrestle with God and give up control. It certainly was not easy for Jesus and it is not easy for us. Listen again to the words of the Gospel writer, Matthew; "Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, 'Sit here while I go over there to pray.' He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them, 'My soul is crushed to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, 'My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.'"(Matthew 26:36-38)

Not giving control of our lives to God can be extremely stressful, for each of us as well as those around us. I do not know how atheists or secularists do it. If there is no God, as they say, then we are alone to fend for ourselves.

There is no greater example of a control freak than the current dictator of North Korea, Kim Jong-un. He was recently elected permanent leader of North Korea by 100 percent of the vote. Not one North Korean, supposedly, opposed him. In return, Kim Jong-un executed his uncle, Jang, for treason. Uncle Jang disagreed with his nephew's current governmental policies. Kim Jong-un is in total control of his life, as well as all other lives in North Korea. Stalin, also, was in total control.

When there is no God, as Communism asserts, humans must carve out their own destiny and fend for themselves. There is no greater government, Communists argue, than human government. To prove his point, Stalin killed over 7 million people who disagreed with him.

Kim Jong-un has jailed Christian missionaries from South Korea, Australia, and America, to name just a few of the countries that are praying for North Korea. Tragically, 33 North Koreans who were associated with the South Korean missionary were executed. These missionaries, and many from China as well, are brave souls. They are not trying to harm North Korea; they are trying to help its citizens to discover the true king, the loving leader and creator of our world, Jesus Christ, who came to earth not to condemn us, but to save us from ourselves and the evil in our world.



Kim Jong-un

Recently, a most fascinating paper was written, soon to be a book, by a researcher named, Robert Woodbury. You can read about his work in the magazine, *Christianity Today*. Woodbury just completed years of study and research concerning the effects of Christian missionary activity, primarily in Africa and Asia, during the 19th century. His results have been startling. Many people today want to point out mistakes missionaries have made over the years, and certainly mistakes have been made. But Woodbury successfully demonstrates that in countries where missionary activity was most active and free to express itself, improved health care, more mature democratic processes in government, and greatly enhanced educational systems have taken root. Effective missionary activity included widespread printing capabilities, education for the poor and women, and other empowerments for ordinary citizens. Life in these countries is much better compared to neighboring countries that did not allow such missionary activity to take place.



19th century missionary to India, William Carey

For the past four years, as many of you know, I have been recovering from non-Hodgkin lymphoma cancer. In fact, many of you have helped me enormously in my recovery with your prayers and assistance. Certainly, increased exercise and better nutrition have helped in my recovery. In addition, I was told to avoid stress, pursue relaxation and get adequate sleep as much as possible to strengthen my immune system. As a result, daily quiet time, prayer and Bible reading have become essential activities in my life.

God wants to be intimately involved in our daily lives. Life is far less stressful and harmful to others if we take time to pray and talk with God about our anxieties, burdens and dreams on a daily basis. One of my favorite Bible verses is Proverbs 16:9: "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps." In other words,

yes, we must make many important decisions every day, but with God's guidance and help, our decisions can become wiser and less stressful. By following the wisdom of this Proverb, our will and God's will become less distinguishable every day.

As we enter the final days of Lent and leave behind the colder days of winter, may we find the courage to be honest with ourselves. Are we willing to give up as much control over our own lives as Jesus did over his? Pursuing God's will for our lives can be scary; it will certainly make us feel uncomfortable at first. But, if we can learn to walk through these uncertainties and fears, a glorious resurrection of our souls awaits on the other side of the cross. From our family to yours, Happy Easter, the Lord has risen!