

# The Control Freak

By Lucy Ann Moll

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ARE YOU a control freak? Do you know one? Perhaps the control freak in your life is your mom or your dad. Perhaps he is your husband.

Whoever he or she is, chances are you feel confused. *Am I the problem? Is he? I must be doing something wrong, or why else would he act like a brute or say those mean things?* You may feel angry. Understandably angry. A control freak stomps through your God-given boundaries, pushing, pushing, pushing until he gets his way.

If you're the controlling person, you may wonder why people can't see why your suggestions are best or why they dismiss your advice.

## **The Control Freak, defined**

In his book, *The Control Freak*, Les Parrott gives this definition: "Control freaks are people who care more about you do about something and won't stop at being pushy to get their way." Each of us has preferences. A wife may prefer Italian food while her husband goes for Chinese. Preferences are normal and good. But controlling behavior is not.

Controlling behaviors show up in different ways.

According to Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *aggressive controllers* run other others' fences like a tank. They are sometimes are verbally abusive and/or physically abusive in an attempt to get others to change. *Manipulative controllers* may use guilt messages, trickery or persuasion to get others to do what they want.

Controllers are "undisciplined people," Cloud and Townsend write. "They have little ability to control their impulses or desires." They are not happy people. People stay with them out or fear, guilt or dependency.

Sometimes controlling behavior is short-lived. For instance, a health problem may trigger controlling behavior like guilt messages. When the person's health improves, the controlling behavior dissipates. When controlling behavior persists, you need help.

## **Say, You're the Controller**

If you're the control freak, chances are a loved one, an employer, or a friend told you that you're controlling and you want to change your ways. Now what?

In short, begin to respect other people's "no." For instance, if your boss says calling her at home is unacceptable, do not call her at home. If a family member says you may not drop F bombs around the family, then tame your tongue.

## RESOURCES: CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR

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Or, if your husband says you nag him and he wants you to stop then stop. But it's difficult to change controlling behavior.

Controllers learn this behavior in childhood. A boy may have felt out of control while growing up in an alcoholic or abusive home. Now he tries to find happiness by insisting it's my way or the highway. Or, a girl may have parents who failed to let her reap what she sowed. When she messed up her room, they cleaned it and did her laundry, even though she was an able-bodied teen. Now as an adult, she expects them to pay for her apartment and groceries.

### **What If You Married a Controller?**

Living with a control freak is a pain. He's pushy. He tells you how to wash the dishes, mow the lawn, balance the budget, and drive the minivan. You feel angry, frustrated, and even depressed. What should you do?

It depends. If he is abusing you, you need to get help. Domestic abuse is not about one specific behavior like hitting. It is about any behavior used to intimidate or coerce their partner into getting what he wants. Types of abuse include emotional (including mind games, stalking, public humiliation), physical (including pushing, tripping, restraining), sexual (including rape, unwanted sexual jokes, pornography), spiritual (including misusing scriptures to manipulate), financial (including requiring an account of every penny), verbal (including name-calling, the silent treatment, shouting, threats).

If you sense that you or your children are in physical danger, go to a safe place immediately, such as the home of a relative or a friend or battered women's shelter. If you aren't in danger now but fear you may be in danger in the future, make an escape plan for the possibility of physical danger. The plan should include contact phone numbers and the address of a place to stay, along with needed items like prescribed medication for you or your children.

Of course, all of us have done or said something abusive. This doesn't make everyone an abuser.

So how do identify an abuser?

Ask yourself this question: Does he have a life pattern of abuse or occasionally acts abusive. Neither are OK. In the latter case, you and your husband may need help from a pastor, counselor or a friend. Here are other resources:

Helpful Podcast:

[Sisterhood of Beautiful Warriors radio show — Are You a Control Freak?](#)

Are you a control freak? Listen to this interview with [Sharla Fritz](#), an author, speaker and pastor's wife, who shares her story of how she became a controlling person and what she did to release control to God. Inspiring. Funny. Insightful.

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### Helpful Websites:

[www.SettingBoundaries.com](http://www.SettingBoundaries.com)

Allison Bottke and her team have put together an excellent website helping parents of dysfunctional adult children, the children of aging parents, and (coming in 2011) anyone who deals with difficult people.

[www.armsonline.org](http://www.armsonline.org) (Abuse Recovery Ministry & Service)

This is a Christian agency that has resources to equip pastor and other caregivers to help them understand domestic abuse and to deal with it effectively.

### Helpful Books:

*[The Control Freak: Coping with Those Around You, Taming the One Within](#)* by Les Parrott III (Tyndale, 2001). Description: They're pushy. Forceful. Impatient. Always in a hurry. And they're usually ready to tell others how to do their jobs "better." Control freaks. Maybe you know one. Maybe you *are* one. What are you to do? Psychologist Les Parrott (a recovering control freak) helps readers relate better to the control freaks around them. And if *you* are a control freak, Les will help you become willing to lose the control you love.

*[Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life](#)* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend (Zondervan, 2001). Description: In order to call themselves good Christians, many people have drawn overly flexible boundaries (unwilling to say no, always accommodating others' needs) or overly rigid boundaries (to the point of being righteous and judgmental). Psychologists and inspirational speakers Cloud and Townsend show readers how to set reasonable boundaries in order to follow the true path of Christianity.

*[Divine Design: 40 Days of Spiritual Makeover](#)* by Sharla Fritz (Concordia Publishing House, 2010). Description: This eight-week Bible study leads you through a transformation of attitude. Using the imagery of a closet and clothes, Fritz helps you hang up the field marshal uniform (her metaphor for control) as well as other negative attitude, including worry, selfishness, pride, bitterness and envy.