

Stop Doing Everything on Your Own

✖ This is what Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer who asked them, “What must I do to be saved?” This is what salvation really means—giving ourselves up to God, taking ourselves out of our own keeping and entrusting ourselves into His keeping.

God wants to take care of us. He can do a much better job of that if we will avoid a problem called independence, which is really self-care.

The desire to take care of ourselves is based on fear. Basically, it stems from the idea that if we do it, we can be sure it will be done right. We are afraid of what might happen if we entrust ourselves totally to God and He doesn’t “come through” for us.

The root problem of independence is trusting ourselves more than we trust God. We love to have a back-up plan. We may pray and ask God to get involved in our lives, but if He is the least bit slow in responding (at least, to our way of thinking), we are quick to take control back into our own hands. What we fail to realize is, God has a plan for us too—and His plan is much better than ours (see Jer. 29:11).

Overcoming a Spirit of Independence

God puts wisdom into us in the form of His Holy Spirit for us to walk by that wisdom step-by-step. But the Lord wants us to know, recognize and acknowledge Him. He wants us to be aware of His Spirit and to walk in quiet confidence, trust and obedience to Him (see Prov. 3:5-7).

It is insulting to God when we go through life planning everything without consulting Him or caring what He thinks,

yet expecting Him to make everything work out as we envision just because it is what we want.

Like pride, independence is a sin. Independence displays a lack of trust in God. It says, "I want to take care of myself because if I do things my way, I know they will get done right." It doesn't trust God's way of handling something to be better than the person's own plan.

How many of us are like that? We don't want anybody to help us because we don't want to become dependent on anyone. We would rather do things on our own than ask for help. That's exactly why God gives each of us only a part of the answer, so we will have to work together to accomplish His will in our lives.

If we want to do the will of God, we must be willing to get involved with other people. For some of us with strong, independent personalities, that is a real problem. Usually the stronger our personality, the more weaknesses and inabilities God has to leave in us so we have no choice but to lean on Him and on others.

We must remember it is not our gifts that matter; it is God's anointing. God usually doesn't call people because of their great wisdom, knowledge or ability; rather, He calls them because of their foolishness, ignorance and weakness so that all the glory will go to Him and not to them.

If you have been betrayed or mistreated, as I was during my childhood, you may feel everybody is out to harm you, abuse you or use you. You may think, as I did for so many years, that the only way to protect yourself and assure you are not taken advantage of is by keeping total control over every aspect of your life.

If so, when God asks you to give up that control to Him, you may find it almost impossible to do so. But you may also fail to realize that your refusal to cast your care upon the Lord and entrust yourself to His keeping is just another form of

childish rebellion.

A Weakened Wall

Isaiah 30:1-2 contains the pronouncement that woe will come upon those rebellious children who turn from trusting in the Lord to take counsel of themselves, carry out their own plans and look to the arm of the flesh rather than leaning on the arm of the Lord.

When you and I make our own plans or run to other people instead of trusting in the Lord, we leave weak spots in our walls of divine protection. At a time when we least expect it, the enemy will break through those weak spots.

God does not want us to have weak spots in our lives. He wants us to rely on Him and be obedient to Him so our walls will remain strong and thick and our lives will be blessed and full.

The more we depend on God, the more He can do through us. But sometimes we go through brokenness before we enter into blessings.

Once for about a year and a half I thought I was going mad. All I could do all day long was walk around in my house praying, "Help me, Lord!" I didn't even know what kind of help I needed or for what.

Now as I look back on that experience, I know what was happening. The spirit of independence in me was being broken. God was bringing me to the point of realizing I could do nothing apart from Him.

I remember one night as I was getting ready to go to sleep, I had a visitation from God. For about 45 minutes I sat there on the edge of my bed and wept.

Finally the Lord spoke to me and said, "Anything good you do has nothing to do with you. I am the One who is good. When you

see yourself doing anything good, it is only because I have wrestled with you to get your flesh under subjection long enough to allow My glory to shine through it.”

Sometimes before God can promote us, He has to remind us of our places. In my own case, my ministry was just about to experience a sudden spurt of growth. God was preparing me in advance by telling me, “I’m going to do something marvelous in your life and ministry, and when it happens you must remember that it is I and not you who is bringing it to pass.”

Our Will or God’s Will?

When the Lord visited me in my bedroom that night and gave me that message, it was because I had been engaged in a wrestling match with Him for a long time. It had been a battle of wills. I had been doing things the way I wanted them done, according to my plan.

When we are baby Christians, we often make our own decisions and follow our own courses. To demonstrate His providential care, the Lord blesses our plans and lets them work. But when we grow up and become mature Christians, we sometimes have to do things we don’t particularly want to do in the natural realm, in obedience to God’s directions.

At the time of the Lord’s visitation, I had been asking God for a huge ministry. In His visit He said to me, “Joyce, if I asked you to go down to the riverfront here in St. Louis and minister to 50 people for the rest of your life and never be known by anyone, would you do it?” My response was, “But, Lord, surely You can’t really be asking me to do *that*!”

It seemed God was asking me to give up the very work He had assigned to me—work through which He blessed many others as well as me. But God wasn’t asking me to give up that ministry. He was just asking me to lay it on the altar, as He had asked Abraham to lay Isaac on the altar before the Lord.

We must not let anything—even our work for God—become more important to us than God Himself. To keep that from happening, from time to time God calls upon us to lay it all on the altar as proof of our love and commitment. He tests us by asking us to lay down our most treasured blessing.

In my case, the Lord brought me to the point where I had to say, “Yes, Lord, I’ll do it. If that’s what You want, I’ll go down to the riverfront and minister to 50 people for the rest of my life. I love You enough to do that.”

I was weeping when I said it, but I meant it. I fell to my knees and cried out in tears, “Lord, I have nothing to give You but myself, my will and my love. Your will be done, not mine.”

When we get to the place where we can honestly make that kind of commitment, God will begin to honor us and work out His plan for our lives.

Trust God to Provide

God may not always do everything exactly as we would like it done. But whatever He does will be right, the thing that is best for each situation.

One time I was invited to preach in a certain church and was assured I would receive a love offering at the end of my series of meetings. Later, just before the meetings were to begin, the church suddenly called and informed me I would receive an honorarium, but no love offering.

Although I didn’t say anything to the church, I got upset and began to mouth off to my secretary: “If those people think for one moment they’re going to pull that kind of thing on me, they’ve got another think coming! I won’t go! You can just call them back and tell them that!”

In just a few moments the Lord spoke to me and said, “Yes, you

will go, and you will not say anything about this matter. You will not be concerned about the money. You will go and minister as you promised, and you will do it sweetly and kindly. You will trust Me to take care of you.”

I thought the offering would be larger if all the people got the opportunity to give. But God wanted me to trust Him with the entire matter and believe that He was able to get to me whatever He wanted me to have no matter how He did it.

As a minister of the gospel, my job is not to spend time trying to figure out how to get money to pay bills and erect buildings. My job is to teach and preach, to pray and bless people.

It is God’s job to bring my provision to me. My part is to share the Word with people concerning giving, let them know our needs, trust God to work in their hearts and believe He will get to us enough to meet every need we have.

If we become concerned with looking out for ourselves, we will fail to do what we are called to do, which is to minister to the needsof others. Whatever happens to us, however we may be treated or mistreated, we must continue to do the work God has set before us. We must give ourselves to Him totally and completely, trusting Him to justify us and vindicate us, to protect and provide for us, to help us and keep us.

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