“This book is the gift your soul has been desperately seeking.”
—Ann Voskamp

It’s All Under Control

A journey of letting go, hanging on & finding a peace you almost forgot was possible

Jennifer Dukes Lee
This woman is incomparable. Jennifer’s words here are like being wrapped up in the kindest embrace of tender grace and handed a steaming cup of tea for your parched places. These pages will deeply comfort you, make you laugh—and let you just exhale and feel the relief of not having to carry it all. We are loved and cupped and carried in the most perfect hands of all—His—and He’s got the whole world in His hands and under His trustworthy control. It’s All Under Control is the gift your soul has been desperately seeking—to feel how His arms of love are under you, carrying you through it all.

ANN VOSKAMP

New York Times bestselling author of The Broken Way and One Thousand Gifts

It’s as if Jennifer has been inside our heads. She knows what a trap control is, and with practical steps, humor, and insightful study of Scripture, she leads us to a biblical view of how to release control in our everyday lives to a very real and reliable Savior.

RUTH CHOU SIMONS

Artist and bestselling author of GraceLaced; founder of GraceLaced.com

If you’re a control freak like me, beware: this book hits hard. I speak from experience when I say that this book will get up in your business and unwrap your white knuckles from around all the things you’re trying to micromanage. And it will be the very best thing that’s ever happened to you.

LISA-JO BAKER

Bestselling author of Never Unfriended

We all have our camouflage techniques, our clever disguises, and our well-formulated justifications about why the world just won’t spin quite right if we resign as Fixer of Our Own Universe. Thank God that Jennifer has read our proverbial e-mails and written a compassionate road map to lead us out of our infernal striving, moving us from inner exhaustion to trusting rest. And
she doesn’t point the way from her lofty theological perch. She takes our hearts gently as a trusted friend and guide. If you’ve ever needed a place to send in your resignation as Queen of Making Sure Things Totally Beyond My Control Still Turn Out Right—start here.

ANITA RENFROE
Author and comedian; recovering control freak

I’ve tried so hard for so long to be the perfect wife, mom, and friend—only to feel empty and desperate. We can give up control and discover a new way of living and loving. Sounds easy, but how? It happens one brave step at a time. Page after page in Jennifer’s book spoke directly to my heart. If you want change, this book is a perfect first step.

LISA LEONARD
Jewelry designer and writer

We live in a time when there seems to be a way to control and track every move of our lives. Jennifer Dukes Lee understands just how overwhelming this can be for the hearts of today’s Christian women. When it feels like the weight of the world is on our shoulders, It’s All Under Control offers hope for the woman who wants to entrust it all to the hands of Jesus. For the woman who feels like it’s up to her to make sure everything goes well, for the woman who struggles to say, “I need help,” for the woman who is so busy, loving her family so well, that she feels like she is rushing right past Jesus, this book is a practical and powerful guide to living free.

BECKY THOMPSON
Author of Hope Unfolding, Love Unending, and Truth Unchanging

Jennifer is a weaver of words and a master of metaphors—and she’s done it again in her third book. If you constantly carry around anxiety and stress because you’re afraid something won’t go according to plan, this book is for you! In her gentle
but powerfully convicting style, Jennifer gives you tools and inspiration to help you let go of your need to try to control and micromanage your life and everyone else’s life. In this refreshingly honest book, you’ll discover how to find freedom from being a control freak.

CRYSTAL PAINE

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Say Goodbye to Survival Mode*;
founder of MoneySavingMom.com

If you’d asked me, I would have said I don’t struggle with control. And I would have been wrong. This book gave me a key I didn’t even know I needed, one that has helped set me free from stress, pressure, and anxiety. Jennifer’s wise, powerful, encouraging words are a must-read for every woman who has ever felt weary or overwhelmed—especially if you don’t understand why or what to do about it.

HOLLEY GERTH

Bestselling author of *What Your Heart Needs for the Hard Days*

Jennifer Dukes Lee uncovers a pressure-relieving revelation few of us have ever considered—that we don’t need to hide, squelch, or alter who God created us to be, but instead rechannel our gifts and our desires in order to experience unprecedented, profound inner peace. *It's All Under Control* shows us how to stop pushing, proving, hustling, and controlling so we can begin partnering with God to honor the beautiful plan He has for our lives. It is a life of meaning, peace, purpose, and love that far surpasses anything we could have ever planned on our own.

RACHEL MACY STAFFORD

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Hands Free Mama, Hands Free Life,* and *Only Love Today*

In a world where hustle is king, the healing words on these pages are a breath of fresh air. It’s a poignant reminder to take God off your to-do list, make him a part of your every day, and
learn to let go—living life according to his plan. *It’s All Under Control* will turn you inside out, check your heart, change your perspective, and help you discover that it *is* all under control because God’s got this.

**KARIANNE WOOD**

Author of *So Close to Amazing* and *You’ve Got This (Because God’s Got You)*

Control is an illusion. That was the message I heard as I began this book, and it’s the message God confirmed again and again through Jennifer’s words in *It’s All Under Control*. I wasn’t three pages in before I was overcome with Holy Spirit chills. For every woman who is paralyzed by fear of the future or overcome by anxiety trying to orchestrate today, *It’s All Under Control* is convicting, life-changing, and peace giving.

**ERIN ODOM**

Author of *More Than Just Making It* and *You Can Stay Home with Your Kids!*, creator of *The Humbled Homemaker* blog
It’s All Under Control

A journey of letting go, hanging on & finding a peace you almost forgot was possible

Jennifer Dukes Lee
To Scott,

my favorite farmer, the one who taught me that, no matter what, “God’s got it.”
Contents

Introduction xi

1. Invitation 1
   The Help Your Weary Soul Longs For

2. Illusion 23
   The Reason We Are the Way We Are

3. Awesome 43
   When Being “In Control” Gets Out of Control

4. Superpowers 61
   Uncovering Your Strengths, Your Kryptonite, and That Line We All Tend to Cross

5. Hang On 75
   Finding the Courage to Do Really Hard Things

6. Let Go 93
   Finding the Strength to Open Your Hands

7. Switcheroo 115
   Why Every Control Freak Needs to Take God Off Her To-Do List

8. Clueless 133
   What to Do When God’s To-Do List Makes Zero Sense
I wrote this book for a woman I know.

She wants a life of meaning. She wants to know her purpose. She wants to love and be loved.

But she is tired.

What exhausts her? Directing outcomes, overhustling, and managing the impressions she leaves on people. She can’t let go of a nagging fear about her future and the prevailing belief that she needs to be the most responsible person in the room.

She is tired, yes, but she doesn’t know how to stop.

This is what she does—she keeps it all under control, and she is under control, thank you very much. Smiling, even in the trenches. And always, fine, just fine.

“I got this,” she says. And a lot of people believe her.

But she doesn’t “got” this. Her outward fine does not match her inner fatigue.
As long as she can remember, this is who she has been. The one who fixes. The one who helps. She is a yes-girl. She believes that the opposite of control is confusion. She doesn’t know yet that the opposite of control is faith.

She is busy, busy! She thinks this makes her a complete human. But sometimes it makes her half a human—a partial zombie wearing cuffed jeans and fair-trade earrings. She hopes this disguise will hide the chaos you don’t see.

She’ll tell you in a soothing tone that she’s got it all under control. But to be honest, life feels out of control. And the more out of control it all gets, the more she wants to control it.

She tries to unwind—throwing a Lush bath bomb in the tub and sinking in—but this rest is an illusion. Inwardly, she is still managing, formulating, anticipating.

Yes. She is beginning to sense the spiral here. Yet she knows that some things can’t be opted out of. She can’t simply fire her life.

But—and this is really important—let’s see her for who she really is. She loves fiercely. She is trying to hold it all together—not primarily because of her affinity for an ordered life, but because she loves deeply. Really, really deeply. She is an earnest defender of her family, her neighbors, the homeless guy on the corner, the starving
child on the other side of the world. She pours out her life, like an offering, because she loves Jesus.

Yet she feels distant from all of them. She has gotten so busy caring, working, serving, and doing that she can’t hear God’s voice anymore.

She has lived by fear, instead of by faith.

She worries about things more than she prays about them.

She wants to let go, and she doesn’t.

Can someone show her where to start? This is her life. She wants to live it.

She is me.

And maybe she is you too.
If you asked me five years ago, I naively would have told you that I didn’t struggle with control. I would have said that I was a fully surrendered disciple of Christ. I mean, seriously—as long as everything went exactly the way I wanted it to, I was totally flexible.

I didn’t intend to manipulate God by engaging in the most futile act known to humankind: trying to control one’s life trajectory. And it’s not that I wanted to control other people either. (Okay, so I might have been that take-charge kid in your high school class who led all the group projects and told you what to do—then resented everyone for not pulling their weight.)
Mostly, I wanted to control myself. If I ever had high expectations of anyone, it was of me. I wanted to present the self-assured, together version of my whole being. Which means I craved control over my face, my emotions, my body, my food, my words, my house, my schedule, my yard, my future.

My preference was a tidy, predictable, safe life where no one got hurt, where my kids remained in one piece, where there was no pain for anyone ever again, amen. My appetite for painlessness had me constantly minding the store. I hung on tight, so I could get life right.

Yet those old systems of coping weren’t working. Not long after I hit forty, I couldn’t shake the truth that something needed to change. My desire to obsessively orchestrate what happened next was burning me out.

I ran out of gas.

Maybe the empty tank was God’s way of bringing me to a dead stop, so I would finally pay attention. It worked. God got my attention, and maybe he’s trying to get yours too.

Imagine that it’s you who’s run out of gas. Maybe that doesn’t take much imagining after all, because like me, you’re tired of trying to hold it together. You want to keep it all under control, but things aren’t working out the way you planned.

If that sounds like you, picture it unfolding like this: You’re at the wheel, driving on fumes, pushing hard to get where you need to go because everyone is counting on you. The needle drops below E, and your car sputters to a
You are miles from where you want to be. You rest your head on the steering wheel. It was only a matter of time. Here you are now. Empty. But you are not alone.

Along comes a man, walking down the road toward you. The closer he gets, the more familiar he seems—the warm expression on his face, the worn hands, the creases around his eyes. You roll down the window, and he gives you an invitation, rolled up like a scroll. He waits, hands on his hips, smiling, because he’s finally got your attention.

The hand-lettering reads: “You are cordially invited to embrace a new way of living. Help is here.”

Sitting at the wheel, you feel your heart beat fast, as if a geyser has erupted inside your chest. You rarely ask for help, though let’s be honest, you’ve needed help for a long time.

The man’s eyes twinkle when he tells you that he can help you slow your frenetic pace to discover the life you were actually made for—a life of meaning, depth, and purpose.

Who wouldn’t want this?

Your soul begs you to say yes. Because everywhere you go these days, you’re pushing too hard. You’re always in a hurry, eyes straight ahead, missing all the scenery. You arrive everywhere exhausted, with the tank near empty. Remember the days when you used to run your race feeling like a million bucks? You were driven and energetic; you made things happen. You were on your game, and nobody could stop you. You ran your race well, didn’t you, girl? But lately, you feel
like you’re dragging a one-hundred-pound sack of bowling balls with you.

What if this invitation offers a way to travel lighter and be who you were meant to be, deep down?

You want to say yes, but you’re scared of what this might cost you. Because you are the girl who is laser focused and responsible. You are never needy. So many people count on you. If you say yes to the invitation, what will you have to say no to? Whom will you disappoint? If you let go of everything you’re holding on to, what might break? This all feels new and out of control, an unsteady, shifting place for a woman who has managed to make everyone believe she’s got it “all under control.”

The invitation is beautiful—but it isn’t safe.

The man at the window is Jesus. You knew that.

Look, he won’t force you to leap into the life you were made for, but he will shamelessly entice you. Come, he says. I want to help.

This is your invitation, the help your weary soul longs for. Will you say yes?

The Relentless Ways of Jesus

I said yes.

I would have been crazy not to—and you can’t convince me otherwise, now that I know what I know.

But I didn’t know any of that at first.

I’m the mom who habitually runs our Ford Explorer’s gas
tank ridiculously close to empty. My record low on the digital
gas gauge is an impressive two miles to empty.

I have managed my life the same way, running on fumes.

When I finally ran out of gas in my life, I saw Jesus com-
ing down the dirt road.

He had been relentless for years, let me tell you. He deliv-
ered his invitation during a dozen Bible studies, countless
nights of bed-tossing uneasiness, and those sermons that
suddenly had me sitting up straight in my pew, like I’d been
captured in the act.

I should have RSVP’d way back when, but I kept pushing,
kept trying to hold it all together.

My condition: control.

Jesus spent years trying to tame my rather robust inner
control freak. That side of me emerges at the mileposts of life,
and also in the everyday moments: when team members in a
project don’t fulfill their obligations, when parked cars take
up two spaces in the Target lot, when an airline pilot’s youth-
ful appearance leaves me with the sudden urge to research
his credentials. Just last week, my inner control freak was
triggered at the outdoor water park, where a whole army of
shrieking kids were bobbing around in too-deep water as
their Coppertone-slathered mothers worked on their tans.
Like every other mom, I had come to the pool for fun, with
a short stack of books and a foldable chair. But I couldn’t
find my chill anywhere. I was suddenly responsible for all the
kids, and all the water, and all the possible pee in the pool.
I had appointed myself chief of all the diving boards, all the
slippery walkways, and all the sunscreen application. *It’s all up to ME! Everyone’s life is in my hands!*

So, yes, even there, Jesus encountered me, striding up sandal-footed next to my leopard-print flip-flops. He delivered that hand-lettered invitation poolside, a way of saying, “It’s not all up to you, baby.”

Oh, the indefatigable ways of Jesus. He slipped the invitation under the office door and under the pillow, between the pages of my too-full calendar and into my dream life, where my subconscious self always seems to be the first to know that I’ve stretched myself too thin, even as the rest of me fakes some semblance of fine. You know the kind of dream I’m talking about. It’s the one in which you show up to college graduation, and only then do you remember that you forgot to attend all the required classes.

The invitations kept coming, and it was always my choice whether to RSVP.

I didn’t say yes at first because of my vigorous control freakery. I didn’t know what to do with that kind of invitation.

Here’s why:

I like to gather up all the parts of my life into a neat pile, strategize exactly how they should turn out, and then ask God to bless my plans.

If I said yes to the invitation, what would it actually look like to let God take control? After all, I couldn’t simply hand God my life and walk away while Jesus folded my husband’s underwear and took all my calls.

So much of life clearly can’t be opted out of. People
depend on me. I have kids to feed. A house to manage. Books to write. Committees on which to serve.

Most people can’t simply fire their lives and move on when it all gets too chaotic. We need something more tangible than a slick phrase like “Just give it over to the Lord.” Jesus calls us to something more sacrificial than running from responsibility. Following Jesus takes real work. Raising kids takes actual effort. We can’t stop managing a household, cancel all our appointments, and spend the rest of our days on a floatie in the middle of a lake.

There are parts of my life where I don’t get to throw my hands in the air and say, “I quit, God! This is all on you!” Believe me, there are times I want to. There are areas where I do want to channel my inner Elsa and “let it go.” There are times I want to give it all to him—a complete handover—and spend the rest of the year hiding under the covers while eating entire bags of BoomChickaPop kettle corn.

But Jesus shows up at the foot of the bed and says, “Come on out, girl. You can do this. I am with you. Do. Not. Give. Up.”
Spiritual surrender is more complex than any Christian platitude. And it’s far more uncomfortable. I knew that if I said yes to his invitation, this partnership with Jesus would ask something of me. It would ask for all of me.

It will ask for all of you too.

The Comfort of Control

Confession: I have loved the steady comfort of control—even though it was only an illusion.

Control had become a coping mechanism to numb myself from the pain of life. I believed that even if I couldn’t control the big things, I could at least try to control the little stuff: what I put in my mouth, how many steps I tallied on my Fitbit, my gray hairs, the vacuum lines in the carpet, how I scheduled every minute of every day, what you thought about me when I talked with you.

This has made me very busy, of course, and probably fairly annoying.

I’ve generally been able to handle a lot of tasks at once, and I’ve always been an achiever who won’t easily back down from a challenge. Hard work has never scared me. But I can’t begin to tell you how much my inner achiever propels me into dangerously high gear. I can’t begin to tell you how I willingly withstand the mental pressure of believing I have to be “in control,” reliable, on top of all the things—and how often that self-pressure completely breaks me. I’ve learned to hide the fractured debris of my overworked life. You will rarely find me confessing my anxiety. Why? Because that
would make me appear too needy. You will never see me posting about it on Facebook with one of those cryptic messages: “Unspoken prayer request.” Sadly, for a long time I didn’t even ask my closest friends for prayer. I wouldn’t have told them about the times my stress was so high that I would tremble and feel unable to breathe.

I kept saying I was fine.
But I wasn’t fine.

I wanted help but didn’t know how to ask for it. I said I trusted God but had reached the point where I realized I actually didn’t. As a Jesus girl, this shocked me.

I had built my image as the helper, not as the helped. My life looked like this: *Here, let me write you another blog post. Here, let me send you an encouraging text. Sure, I can donate to your cause. Sure, I’ll fill the spot on the committee. Sure, I can speak at your event.*

I was generally good at all of those tasks, but every yes became another drain on the internal gas tank. I had made myself indispensable and needed, and when insistent people handed me more responsibility, I stuffed it in the trunk of the car and forged ahead on the journey because “it was all under control.”

All of this doing and striving was supposed to bring me happiness. With great surprise, I realized that it wasn’t working out that way at all. Trying to wrap my arms around everything and everyone felt like attempting to herd baby kittens.

I turned around to face my life and realized that the woman I’d become wasn’t someone I wanted to be around.
My calendar was crowded, and my body felt drained, pressurized, and frayed. I felt so much guilt because no matter what I was doing, I thought I should be doing something else. No matter what I did, it never seemed enough.

I began to ask myself questions like:

*If I’m doing so much for others, why do I feel so distant from them?*
*If I’m so busy, why am I not more productive?*
*How can I begin to truly trust a God whom I cannot see?*
*What is surrender anyway?*
*When do I let go, and when do I hang on tighter than ever before?*
*If I’ve always been capable in the past, why does life feel so chaotic now?*

The answers to those questions became the book that you’re holding in your hands.

I realized that I, the woman who had it “all under control,” wasn’t in control after all.

At last, I said yes to Jesus.

I accepted his frightening, exquisite, life-altering, outrageous invitation.

This book is my yes. I am writing every word of this book as if I were sitting next to you, at the side of a road, with your own gas-gauge needle on E.

Jesus is with us. He’s handing you the same invitation that
he gave me: “You are cordially invited to embrace a new way of living. Help is here.”

**Strip Off Every Weight**

I’m not the only one who needs help.

I know I’m not the only one because I’ve heard your pain. I’ve cried with you. I’ve read your e-mails in my in-box. I’ve watched you burn brightly, then flame out because you took on way too much. I see how you never say no because you can’t handle the idea of disappointing anyone.

Underneath all of that “fine,” you are in emotional pain. These are the sources of your distress:

- Some of your pain came because of all the things you’re trying to do. You are tired.
- Some of your pain came because of all the things that happened to you. You are broken.

I saw life knock you down when you thought it was all under control. I attended your son’s funeral. I cried with you after you found out about the affair. I held your hand after the miscarriage. I sat with you after you got the diagnosis. I drove you to your first appointment with your counselor.

This is who we are: We are women who are trying. Trying to hold it together for the sake of the family. Trying to give our best to our churches and jobs. Trying to be there emotionally and physically for the people we love. Trying to help our grown-up kids make good choices and then trying not
to feel hurt when they tell us, “You’re not helping, Mom; you’re meddling.”

I’m not the only one, and friend, you’re not the only one either. So many things blindside all of us every day, and we can’t control any of it.

The weather. Delayed flights. Our health. That awful text message. The traffic. The paths our kids choose. Our fertility—or lack thereof.

We ask for a map to deal with all of this, but instead Jesus gives us a compass and says, “Follow me.”

Without a well-marked map, we try to draw our own. We execute plans to control this out-of-control life because we fear what will happen if we don’t.

Along comes the invitation.

I have important news about this offer. It won’t ask you to be someone you’re not. It doesn’t come with some unrealistic demand that you are suddenly going to stop being the incredibly brave and brilliant woman that you are. This invitation appreciates God’s remarkable design in you. You’re the capable kind of woman who reaches for the stars and gets things done. Do you know what a wonder you are?

You don’t settle. You are the sort of woman we can count on to meet a work deadline, organize a food drive, take in the neighbors’ kids during an emergency, drive your coworker to chemo, counsel a friend at 3 a.m. by text message, keep track of everyone’s appointments, and make sure we’re all wearing seat belts before you drive us on the three-day adventure that you single-handedly arranged. You’re the one standing next
We ask for a map, but instead Jesus gives us a compass and says, “Follow me.”
to me at the pool, ready to rescue any swimmer in distress. Solidarity, my friend.

We need you. We need capable, take-charge, charitable women like you as doctors and nurses in operating rooms where details like “proper disinfectant” matter. Let me tell it to you straight: If you have an inner control freak, I’m hoping you’ll let her bust loose like nobody’s business if someone I love is on your operating table. We need responsible women like you to control all the bleeding.

We also need you in charge of schools, nonprofits, and Fortune 500 companies. We need rock-star women like you to show us that surrender isn’t “lie down in a pile.” It’s “march forward like a warrior.” Sometimes surrendering to God will require you to do the hardest work you’ve ever done in your life: take in another foster child, fight for your marriage, kick cancer where the sun don’t shine, or refuse to capitulate to the persistent drubbing from Satan.

Girl, listen up. We count on you. You are a woman fervently devoted to God’s calling on your life, not only in your work but also in your relationships.

We need you because—let’s face it: You save our behinds all the time. You are glue, holding your tribe together. Also? Your life reveals the source of true power: the Holy Spirit.

When you are at your best, you are plugged into the limitless resurrection power of God, who pulses through you with tremendous force. God created you for great things, and when you live as one empowered, you do those things really well. Standing ovation, sister!
But when you are under stress, you are probably like me: running dangerously close to empty a lot of the time. It’s hard for you to tell the difference between what’s essential and what’s unimportant, so you do it all. You wrap your arms around everything, just in case. Without proper fuel, you try to generate your own strength—as if you can propel your car with your feet, like Fred and Wilma Flintstone. This leaves you worn out and calloused.

See if this resonates: You need to get your control under control. (Ask me how I know.)

Jesus is asking you and me to grab hold of this invitation so we can develop better habits and make choices that align with God’s best for us. Saying yes to this invitation will teach us how to do things that, if we’re honest with ourselves, we don’t do well right now. Things like waiting, delegating, trusting an unseen God, being still, and yes . . . surrendering.

If you choose to accept this invitation, you can drive the route that’s yours to drive, and drive it well, without the extra baggage and responsibility that you were never intended to carry.

Invitation

Things My Girlfriends Said When I Told Them I Was Writing a Book on Control

- “I don’t struggle with control. As long as everything goes according to plan, I’m super chill.”
- “I’m not controlling, but can I show you the right way to write this book?”
- “Control isn’t an issue for me. I just like having things go my way.”
- “I don’t need that book. I already know how to control everything.”
Hebrews 12:1 gives us a clear picture of what this should look like:

Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. (NLT)

It’s like this: Let’s say life is a car ride. A lot of us are carrying a little too much junk in the trunk, you know what I mean? We need to “strip off” that extra weight, as the writer of Hebrews tells us.

Stripping off extra weight looks a lot like surrender. You unload unnecessary baggage from the trunk and move forward with the best. You discard what isn’t yours to carry so you can hang on to what is.

I’m right there with you. Let us strip off every weight that slows us down: our sin, our pride, our false sense of control, our need for approval, our badge of busyness, our belief that it’s all in our hands. And then we can rise up with endurance to run the race God has set before us.

In our homes. In our churches. In our ministries. In our friendships. In whatever place he brings us—to a place of surrender.

What Surrender Actually Means
Here’s what surrender is: Surrender is willfully accepting and yielding to God’s plan for your life—no matter the cost.
When you live surrendered, you still have a job to do. There’s nothing passive about surrender. Surrender isn’t an act of weakness but of extraordinary strength that will propel each of us into the “race God has set before us.” Don’t think about surrendering control as giving up. Think of it as giving in to a greater power.

This is what’s in store for us on this journey. Together we will:

- Stop playing God, and start becoming a partner with him in the life he’s set before us.
- Let go of what God has not asked us to do, so we can shine at what he has.
- Learn that surrendered living is much more than “doing less.” It’s being more of who God created us to be.
- Rise up to do the incredible work of making better what God has put within our reach.
- Crack the “control code” so we can live with meaning and intention, rather than thinking we have to run the whole show.
- Stop burning bridges with people we love by giving them the freedom to live their lives without our constant supervision.
- Leave behind our frazzled lives and find a peace we almost forgot was possible.

If something doesn’t change, our frenetic pace will become our new normal. We will continue banging our heads against
the same brick wall, expecting something to change, while bleeding from the same old wounds.

My prayer is that every page of this book will whisper God’s deep love for you, and that by the end, you’ll be more peace-filled, more connected to God, and more present to the beautiful life you long for.

Perhaps you were hoping your guide would be someone who no longer struggles with issues of control, someone who consistently waits for God to act before leaping into action. Instead, you get me: a woman who is still learning how to let go of what doesn’t matter, so she can build a life on what does.

In the pages ahead, you’ll see that I rolled up my sleeves and asked God to help me redirect my misdirected paths. My favorite part is what happened when I lifted my whole life up to Jesus and said, “Here, can you help me untangle this?” Together, we’re loosening the knots.

Can you imagine partnering with Jesus in this way? Jesus is still standing on that dirt road by your car, hands on his hips. I imagine him smirking a little because he finally got you to slow down enough to pay attention. Isn’t he clever?

Up ahead, you see an old Honda.* Jesus wants you to leave that empty tank behind and climb inside his car.

Of course, as Carrie Underwood will sing to you, Jesus is definitely taking the wheel. But make no mistake: There are times when he’s going to ask you to do some driving.

*Scholars seem to agree that Jesus drove a Honda, but he didn’t talk about it publicly. “For I did not speak of my own Accord” (John 12:49, niv). So there you have it: a Honda. I don’t know exactly who first made this startling discovery, but I learned about it on the Internet, so it must be true.
Don’t think of Jesus as your chauffeur; he is more like your driver’s ed coach. He’s there to teach you his rules of the road.

Friend, do not fear the wheel. You have been equipped to drive—and Jesus is beside you when you steer the wrong way. Hopefully he will pull the emergency brake if necessary, and I’ve personally put in a request for roads lined with padded walls.

The windows are rolled down, the music is cranked, the tank is full, and there’s something that looks like freedom on the horizon. Today that’s where I am—driving into freedom, with one hand on the wheel and the other hand shot high toward the sky.

Out on the open road, may you feel the reassuring love of Jesus. I think it’s safe to say he’s glad you said yes. On this journey, you’ll discover that, at last, it really is all under control: God’s.
Cracking the Control Code

You have likely invested a lot of time into your lists, your schedule, your retirement savings account, and your children’s college fund. You have all kinds of ways to be efficient in your work. You are a master of many things. Now you get to apply those skills toward rearranging your life in a way that aligns your priorities with God’s.

This will require a plan. That’s why every chapter of this book offers you a way to take action by “cracking the control code.”

What is the control code? It is the system of ideas, rules, and behaviors that we have set for ourselves to keep our lives in order. We want to crack that code so we can understand why we operate the way we do. Then we can replace those old systems with healthy living.

In order to crack the control code, each chapter invites you to consider new practices and new ways of thinking. This will require an investment of your time. It will take energy. Change does not happen automatically. This book is going to ask something of you as you move to another level in your spiritual maturity. To enhance this experience, consider obtaining the It’s All Under Control Bible Study: A 6-Week Guided Journey.

Why all the work? Because you are not a grape; you do not mature just by existing.

We cannot function as if spiritual maturity is programmed into us. We would never operate that way in other areas of our lives. We would never leave our jobs to chance, our finances unplanned, our babies in anything less than a five-point harness car seat. But often, we have no strategy for the most important role of our lives: that of a disciple who truly trusts the Leader enough to follow where he’s going.
INVITATION

Take heart: If anyone can do this, it is us. We are the women who aren’t afraid of a challenge. Let’s do this.

The First Step: Running Smarter

You have a race to run. But first you must strip off every weight that slows you down from running the course God has set out for you. Consider everything you feel responsible for at this time in your life—the good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly, the hard, and the effortless. As you take an honest assessment of where you are now, consider your work, household duties, children, relationships, volunteer assignments, church commitments, personal struggles, and aging parents, for instance. Also consider other “weights” that you carry. Are there areas where you’ve said yes because you don’t want to disappoint people? Are there weights you carry simply because you are trying to please people? Do you employ coping mechanisms—such as exercise, food, addictive substances—to give you a sense of control?

Now you’re ready to begin creating your list. You can download a free printable journaling sheet designed specifically for this exercise from my website at www.ItsAllUnderControlBook.com/Resources, or you can make your own with the following instructions:

1. Write this Bible verse at the top of the page: “Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us” (Hebrews 12:1, NLT).
2. Draw two columns. Label one column “My Race”; label the other “Junk in the Trunk.”

3. As you consider every weight you identified, ask God to help you discern what you were meant to carry and what you weren’t.

4. Under “My Race,” list the items that you sense are yours to carry on this journey with Jesus. This list will likely include many things you love. It will also include items that feel especially heavy right now—responsibilities that you can’t avoid or difficult circumstances that you are facing today, such as grief, that you must carry for a time.

5. Under “Junk in the Trunk,” list items that you were never intended to carry. These are items that God may be calling you to “strip off” because they slow you down. This list may take longer to compile, and it will require ruthless honesty with yourself. The items on this list may include coping mechanisms, toxic relationships, approval-seeking behaviors, duties that are no longer yours to perform, and commitments that exhaust you.

6. Look over your two lists. As you do so, thank God for the race you’re running. Praise him for the beautiful parts, and ask him to help you deal with the hard parts. Then seek his help in removing the junk in the trunk, bit by bit. This is where the real change begins.

   Let us strip off every weight that slows us down. We have a race to run.