

So you want to be a Christian: Surrender

Do we have any inner resources at the moment we are accosted by the Holy One . . . ?
Immediately our credentials of independence vanish and we cease to carry ourselves with the swagger of the executive who knows what's up and has all under control; we become aware of innate poverty, our next-breath dependence, and a numbness that invades the roots of our littleness and realness. – Brennan Manning

We crave control. Some of us can hardly stand it when we have to let go and allow someone else to control a situation. I experience this worst when flying. Of course I don't know how to fly but the notion that I trust myself to someone at 35,000 feet seems wrong for some reason.

Control issues are stronger in some than in others, depending upon temperament.

History is a record of the will of men and women – what people have wanted and what people have obtained measured in terms of power. This is going to be tough because some of you are going to scream denial in your head. There is no way you consider yourself hungry for power. My guess is that you may not even be conscious of how your will expresses itself or tries to shape the people and circumstances around you.

In the book, *The New Rebellion*, the writer suggests this exercise: “Is it hard for you when the car in front of you won't turn into traffic, even when there plenty of space for it to pull out? Do you find yourself angry or cynical when God doesn't answer you prayers when and how you want? Or how about this one: Would your friends ever consider you compulsive about cleaning or organizing or talking or reading the news or . . . ?

Most people feel driven in some area of their lives. Driven to sleep, driven to eat, driven to work. Even when a person is labeled as a workaholic, there is usually an underlying admiration being expressed. People's drive to be productive almost always brings great reward and affirmation. But whether society rewards or rejects it, drivenness is usually an expression of the soul's desire for power and control. And it usually finds itself opposed by God, who retains power and control for Himself.” (pg. 86)

What is the solution? Submission and surrender

Submission begins with understanding what people and circumstances are your responsibility. Parents are responsible for their family; employers are responsible for their employees. What we must resist is the notion and urge to push and pull people into what we think is right for them.

Submission looks like obedience to both God and to the authorities in your life.

Submission to proper authorities requires resistance to wrongful authorities, namely the devil. God has made it very clear that He will not share control with any other being, natural or spiritual.

The one power God has given us, a measure of freedom if you will, is often referred to as free will. We have the power to choose and the choices we make are the difference between heaven or hell, influencing earth as well as your eternity.

In *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

“The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Let God be God. Let go and let God do what He wants in and with your life.

For a biblical example of surrender and submission we are going to look at an incredible story of the Old Testament. It is the story of a woman named Ruth.

She lived in the country of Moab, probably during the thirteenth century BC. Moab was historically an enemy of Israel but Ruth married the son of an Israelite couple who were living in Moab due to famine. After Ruth’s husband died, her mother in law Naomi, decided to return to her home in Bethlehem, but she urged Ruth to remain in her own land where she was known and where she would have the greatest opportunities for remarrying. In fact there were two daughters in laws that lost their husbands, Ruth and Orpah, Ruth stayed by Naomi’s side and Orpah went back to her family.

It is at this point that we find one of the most amazing statements in the Bible from one person to another.

¹¹ But Naomi replied, “Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? ¹² No, my daughters, return to your parents’ homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? ¹³ Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has raised his fist against me.”

¹⁴ And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. ¹⁵ “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more. Ruth 1:11-18 NLT

There are three characteristics of Ruth's submission that I think we can find help in effecting our own attempt to submit ourselves to God's will for our lives.

1. Our surrender must be anchored in relationship:

Unusual

The relationship between Ruth and her mother-in-law was unusual to say the least. It is rare to find a completely loving and understanding relationship between the wife and the mother of her husband. Of course that is not always true, but it does seem more common than the other way around. This ancient woman is a glimpse into the mind of God when He envisioned the virtue of surrender.

Ruth was loyal to her mother-in-law with a remarkable loyalty, especially since she would be a foreigner in Israel. Her only reward for going as far she knew was to serve and help support Naomi. With conventional wisdom screaming for her to remain in her own country with her own people she rebelled against the "normal" and surrendered her life to an unknown future.

Why would she do this? It was all about the relationship she had with her mother-in-law. The depth of relationship between these two women (often unusual) was the motivating force for Ruth's surrendered life.

The bottom line is that she gave up her own life to serve and love someone else.

Verses sixteen and seventeen have a long history in my family. Story of parents proposal and my mothers response. (picture)

The success of our life will be measured by the depth of our relationship and surrender to God.

Our depth of surrender will be rooted in and characterized by the quality of our relationship with Him on a daily basis. This truth is so simple that we often just totally overlook it or we may choose to ignore it. The result is that we miss out on the blessing of an authentic Christian life.

In fact without a vibrant daily relationship with Christ you are just fooling around and fooling yourself. To not live for God 100% is to make a mockery of the depth of Ruth's exemplary love. Worse yet it makes a mockery of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

2. Our surrender will be expressed in obedience:

Unconditional

It must have been an intimidating thing for Ruth to leave her own land and people. She not only embraced a different culture but she took on the Jewish faith and traditions of her mother-in-law. How odd it must have been for her. In this foreign land she followed the daily instructions of Naomi and did what she was asked to do.

Day after day she served Naomi, helping her with the daily chores and finding food for her. Let's take a peek into a day in their lives.

One day Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, it’s time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for.² Boaz is a close relative of ours, and he’s been very kind by letting you gather grain with his young women. Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor.³ Now do as I tell you—take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor, but don’t let Boaz see you until he has finished eating and drinking.⁴ Be sure to notice where he lies down; then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do.”

⁵ “I will do everything you say,” Ruth replied.⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor that night and followed the instructions of her mother-in-law.

⁷ After Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he lay down at the far end of the pile of grain and went to sleep. Then Ruth came quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.⁸ Around midnight Boaz suddenly woke up and turned over. He was surprised to find a woman lying at his feet!⁹ “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she replied. “Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer.”

¹⁰ “The LORD bless you, my daughter!” Boaz exclaimed. “You are showing even more family loyalty now than you did before, for you have not gone after a younger man, whether rich or poor.¹¹ Now don’t worry about a thing, my daughter. I will do what is necessary, for everyone in town knows you are a virtuous woman.¹² But while it’s true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am.¹³ Stay here tonight, and in the morning I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, very well. Let him marry you. But if he is not willing, then as surely as the LORD lives, I will redeem you myself! Now lie down here until morning.” Ruth 3:1-13 NLT

Everything in this scripture was customary in those days. There was nothing inappropriate in Ruth’s actions. In fact I would suggest you sit down today and read the whole book of Ruth. It is only four chapters and it is an incredible story. In Chapter 2 you will find the first encounter between Ruth and Boaz.

In her new life, Ruth was utterly powerless and dependent on God. She didn’t just surrender to her mother-in-law but she had made Naomi’s God her God. She was now dependent on God. In her new Country and vulnerable state she chose to obey Naomi in everything, which became the crucial factor in her meeting and finding favor with the man who would eventually marry her.

Surrender to God is voluntary.

Surrender to God is not partial.

Surrender to God releases your gifts and strengths to Him for His use

Surrender to God allows Him to lead you to find your destiny

Surrender to God is the ultimate act of worship. We worship Him with our lives.

True biblical worship so satisfies our total personality that we don’t have to shop around for man-made substitutes. William Temple made this clear in his masterful definition of worship:

For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.

I have said it over and over but nobody in this room will ever know true joy and even happiness without living a life of total surrender to God. The true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ has always been a call to self-sacrifice and not self-fulfillment.

Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage.” Matthew 20:27-28 The Message

We must learn to accept God’s will and way for our lives as being the way we need to live.

Let’s suppose that I purchase a brand new John Deere lawn mower. I didn’t but let’s pretend I did. With the mower came an instruction book, the truth which sets the mower free to do that for which it was created. Now suppose that I want to give my mower a special treat, since I am proud of it and want it to really cut well this summer. So I fill the gas tank with chocolate syrup. We all know that chocolate syrup is more fun than gasoline—it tastes better; it’s a real treat. But the John Deere will be destroyed. Why? Because its freedom to perform requires submission to the law of lawnmower liberty.

Our ability to live on this earth in the center of God’s will requires our surrender to His laws for our lives and those laws produce liberty.

3. Our surrender will be rewarded with unexpected abundance: Unexpected

In this story there is an incredible outcome. Ruth came to a foreign Country to live with and take care of her mother-in-law. She was faithful and obedient to the customs and her faith. Because of this an unexpected thing happened in her life.

So Boaz took Ruth into his home, and she became his wife. When he slept with her, the LORD enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son.¹⁴ Then the women of the town said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel.¹⁵ May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!”

¹⁶ Naomi took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own.¹⁷ The neighbor women said, “Now at last Naomi has a son again!” And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David. Ruth 4:13-17 NLT

Do you know what this means? It means that surrendering to God not only shapes our personal destiny but it also releases the larger purposes of God in the world.

God never forces you to surrender. He calls you to surrender, motivates you toward surrender, but it must be voluntary.

The choice to lay aside your futile and weak attempts to control your life in exchange for His wise and loving rule is what makes ordinary people world changers.

Let me ask you a question. Is there anything in your life that you have set as off-limits to God? Our relationship with God requires great openness on our part. It is a foolish game to think that we can somehow segment our lives or compartmentalize our Christianity and relationship with God. It is truly all or nothing.

Total abandonment requires total trust. It means trusting your Heavenly Father more than your own senses. What you and I feel, hear, taste and smell does convey information but it cannot always be trusted. We hate it when something is taken away from us, yet God may periodically know that the good is the enemy of the best and take something away from us. Can you and I surrender to that kind of expression of God's love?

Jean-Pierre de Caussade wrote: "With God, the more we seem to lose, the more we gain. The more He takes materially, the more He gives spiritually. We love Him partly for His gifts. If they are no longer visible, we come to love Him for Himself alone."

Pause for silent prayer

Billy Graham tells the story about a little child that was playing with a very valuable vase. He put his hand into it and could not withdraw it. His father too, tried his best to get it out, to no avail. They were thinking of breaking the vase when the father said, "Now my son, make one more try. Open your hand and hold your fingers out straight as you see me doing, and then pull." To their astonishment the little fellow said, "O no, dad, I couldn't put my fingers out like that because if I did I would drop my dime."

Smile, if you will but thousands of us are like that little boy, so busy holding on to the world's worthless dimes that we cannot accept liberation. Drop the trifles in your life. Surrender! Let go, and let God have His way in your life.

Listen carefully. God has so much to give you, and sometimes you don't know how good the gift really is because you are expecting something more know or tangible. Yield to Him, and the rewards of surrender will be yours.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. ⁷ Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil. Proverbs 3:5-7