

The Freedom of Surrender



The Freedom of Surrender

Finding Peace When Life Is Beyond Your Control

Introduction

The Exhausting Need to Be in Control

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that sleep cannot cure.

It comes from carrying responsibilities that were never meant to rest entirely on human shoulders. It comes from rehearsing conversations that have not happened, anticipating disasters that may never arrive, managing other people's reactions, worrying about tomorrow, and trying to arrange life so carefully that nothing unexpected can break through.

Control promises security. Yet the tighter it is held, the more fragile peace often becomes.

Modern life makes that temptation especially powerful. A person can customize a news feed, choose exactly what appears on a screen, track a package across the country, check tomorrow's weather in seconds, monitor financial markets from a phone, and receive information from around the world before getting out of bed. Technology has placed extraordinary amounts of information and influence within reach.

Yet greater access has not produced greater certainty.

There will always be something that cannot be managed. A diagnosis arrives. Someone changes his mind. A relationship ends. A storm changes direction. A child makes a decision a parent cannot prevent. A company restructures. An opportunity disappears. The economy shifts. The carefully constructed plan falls apart.

And suddenly the illusion becomes visible:

Control was never the same thing as security.

Scripture offers a radically different path. It is called submission.

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That word can sound uncomfortable because submission is often confused with weakness, passivity, inferiority, or allowing another person to cause harm. Biblical submission is none of those things. At its deepest level, submission is the deliberate surrender of the right to rule life independently of God.

It is strength placed beneath divine authority.

It is the soul saying, *God knows what cannot be known, sees what cannot be seen, and controls what cannot be controlled. Therefore, life does not have to be held together by human hands.*

Proverbs captures the tension beautifully:

“A person’s heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps.”

— *Proverbs 16:9 (CSB)*

Planning is not the enemy. Responsibility is not the enemy. Wisdom is not the enemy.

The burden comes when planning becomes an attempt to guarantee the future.

There is another way to live.

It begins by opening the hands.

Chapter One

Everyone Surrenders to Something

Independence is one of the great ideals of modern culture. People are encouraged to build their own identities, determine their own truth, pursue their own desires, and resist anyone who attempts to tell them how life should be lived.

But complete independence is an illusion.

Everyone lives beneath the influence of something.

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For one person, it may be achievement. For another, approval. Some surrender their peace to money, career advancement, relationships, comfort, political identity, physical appearance, sexual desire, anger, addiction, or the need to be admired.

Even the person determined never to submit may eventually discover that the refusal to surrender has become its own master.

Something always gets the final word.

That means the deepest question is not, *Will there be submission?*

The deeper question is:

Who or what will be trusted enough to receive it?

This is where Christian surrender becomes profoundly different from simply giving up. God does not call people to surrender to an impersonal force or an unpredictable ruler. He calls them to entrust themselves to the One who created them, knows them completely, and loves them perfectly.

The biblical story begins with humanity receiving remarkable dignity. Men and women are created in God's image and entrusted with purpose and responsibility. Yet even in Eden, human freedom existed beneath divine authority. God remained God, and humanity flourished by trusting His wisdom.

The tragedy of sin began when humanity reached for autonomy—when created beings decided that their judgment should outrank the wisdom of their Creator.

That ancient temptation remains remarkably modern.

It whispers, *Life will finally be safe when everything happens according to the plan.*

But the plan can become a prison.

Solomon possessed wealth, influence, pleasure, accomplishments, knowledge, and opportunities beyond what most people could imagine. Yet Ecclesiastes records the emptiness of attempting to

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extract ultimate meaning from things that cannot bear its weight. Eventually, the conclusion becomes beautifully simple:

“When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands.”

— *Ecclesiastes 12:13 (CSB)*

Freedom begins when the soul stops trying to occupy God's throne.

The safest place for a human life is not in control of everything. It is under the care of the One who is.

Chapter Two

The King Who Surrendered First

Christian submission can never be properly understood apart from Jesus.

Jesus did not stand at a distance and demand a surrender. He was unwilling to demonstrate. Submission marked His life.

The astonishing truth is that this submission did not come from weakness. The Gospels portray Jesus with extraordinary authority. He forgave sins. He healed the sick. He commanded storms. He confronted spiritual darkness. He raised the dead. He received worship. He spoke of Himself as the resurrection and the life. He declared His unity with the Father.

And this same Jesus chose the path of obedience.

Jesus explained that He did what pleased the Father. In the garden, as the cross approached, His surrender became unmistakable. The Son willingly embraced the Father's saving purpose even when obedience led through suffering.

Philippians describes the downward movement of Christ's humility:

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“He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.”

— *Philippians 2:8 (CSB)*

That changes the meaning of submission.

Submission cannot automatically mean inferiority, because Jesus submitted without becoming less divine. It cannot automatically mean weakness, because the One submitting possessed extraordinary authority. And it cannot mean worthlessness, because Christ's humility never diminished His identity.

Submission is not the absence of strength. It is strength surrendered to the will of God.

Then Jesus invites His followers onto the same road:

“If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

— *Mark 8:34 (CSB)*

Self-denial is not self-hatred.

Christianity does not teach that a person has no value. Scripture teaches precisely the opposite: human beings possess enormous value because they bear God's image and because Christ gave Himself for their redemption.

Self-denial means surrendering the demand that life must always bend toward personal preference.

There is an old picture of a sculptor working on a block of marble. To an observer, the hammer and chisel appear to be destroying the stone. Pieces fall away with every strike. Yet eventually something beautiful emerges that had previously been hidden.

Spiritual formation can feel similar.

God removes pride, self-sufficiency, bitterness, unhealthy desires, and the relentless demand to get one's own way. Some pieces fall easily. Others are held tightly.

But the Sculptor is not destroying His creation.
He is revealing what grace is forming within it.

Chapter Three

Stop Fighting God

James gives one of Scripture's clearest invitations to surrender:

"Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

— *James 4:7 (CSB)*

Notice the order.

Submit to God. Then resist what opposes God.

Many spiritual battles become unnecessarily exhausting because that order is reversed. Enormous energy is spent resisting temptation, circumstances, people, discomfort, and uncertainty while the deeper resistance—to God's authority—remains untouched.

Sin is more than making an unfortunate choice. At its root, sin says, *God has spoken, but another way seems better.*

Submission ends that argument.

It says, *God does not need to agree with human preference. Human preference must come beneath the wisdom of God.*

That sounds restrictive until the burden of self-rule is considered.

Being one's own god is exhausting.

Every outcome must be managed. Every threat must be anticipated. Every unanswered question becomes dangerous. Every delay feels intolerable because there is no larger wisdom to trust.

But James does not merely command surrender. Immediately around that command is the language of grace and nearness.

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“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

—James 4:6 (CSB)

God does not demand perfection before offering grace. Grace is given to the humble—to those willing to unclench their fists and admit their need.

This is where submission becomes freedom.

The person who must always win cannot rest.

The person who must always be recognized cannot rest.

The person who must control everyone's opinion cannot rest.

The person who believes everything depends upon personal ability cannot rest.

But the surrendered heart can say, *The responsibility is to obey God. The outcome belongs to Him.*

That is not passivity. A surrendered person still works, plans, prepares, apologizes, forgives, seeks wisdom, makes decisions, and takes responsibility.

The difference is that obedience replaces control.

Surrender does not mean doing nothing. It means refusing to pretend that everything depends on you.

Chapter Four

When Control Disguises Itself as Peace

Anxiety and the desire for control can become closely intertwined.

When uncertainty feels threatening, the mind naturally searches for ways to reduce it. Planning can help. Preparation can help. Wise routines can help. But these healthy behaviors can become something else when they are used to create a guarantee life cannot provide.

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A person may repeatedly check details, overprepare for every possibility, struggle when plans change, rehearse every possible negative outcome, or become deeply frustrated when other people behave unpredictably.

Beneath these behaviors can be a quiet belief:

Everything will be okay if everything goes according to plan.

The problem is that life refuses to make that promise.

Other people have free will. Weather changes. Bodies become sick. Economies fluctuate. Children grow up. Traffic appears. Plans collapse. People disappoint one another.

The attempt to control uncontrollable things eventually produces more fear, not less.

Scripture does not promise a life without uncertainty. It points instead toward a God who remains sovereign within uncertainty.

Psalm 46 describes upheaval, conflict, and instability before arriving at one of Scripture's most familiar commands:

“Stop fighting, and know that I am God.”
— *Psalm 46:10 (CSB)*

Other translations render the opening words as “Be still.” The picture is larger than physical quiet. It is an invitation to cease striving—to recognize that God remains God when the world feels unstable.

This is the spiritual power of surrender.

It separates responsibility from sovereignty.

There are things human beings are responsible for: choices, attitudes, obedience, words, preparation, work, repentance, forgiveness, and faithfulness.

Then there are things only God can ultimately govern: tomorrow, other people's decisions, unforeseen circumstances, the timing of opportunities, and the countless events no person can predict.

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Anxiety often tries to cross that boundary.

Submission returns the soul to its proper place.

This does not mean every experience of clinical anxiety is simply a spiritual failure or can be resolved merely by trying harder to surrender. Anxiety can involve psychological, biological, environmental, and situational factors, and appropriate professional care can be valuable. Biblical surrender addresses something different but deeply important: the spiritual burden created by believing that peace requires control.

Peace does not require omniscience.

It requires trust.

Faith is not knowing what happens next. Faith is knowing who remains God when it happens.

Chapter Five

From “Me” to “Us”

Submission changes more than a person's relationship with God. It transforms relationships with other people.

Many conflicts are not really about the issue being discussed.

Beneath the argument sits a quieter struggle: *Who gets his way? Who wins? Who receives recognition? Who gets the final word?*

Pride turns relationships into competitions.

Submission turns them into opportunities for love.

Paul writes:

“Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.”
— *Ephesians 5:21 (CSB)*

Biblical relationships are not built upon one person becoming insignificant so another can become important. They are shaped by

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the example of Christ, in which strength becomes service and love willingly sacrifices for another's good.

This is why submission can transform marriages, families, friendships, churches, and communities.

It allows a person to listen without immediately preparing a defense. It makes an apology possible. It allows someone else to receive credit. It permits a preference to be surrendered without interpreting the loss as a personal defeat.

Not every hill deserves a battle.

Not every disagreement requires victory.

Not every preference deserves protection.

Some of life's deepest relational freedom comes from discovering how many things can simply be released.

Imagine what would happen if relationships were no longer governed primarily by the question, *What do I want?*

A better question would emerge:

What serves the mission God has given this relationship?

In that sense, submission becomes sub-mission—placing personal preference beneath a greater mission.

The marriage becomes larger than the argument.

The family becomes larger than one person's preference.

The church becomes larger than a preferred style.

The mission becomes more important than being recognized as right.

Pride asks, “How can this serve me?” Love asks, “How can this serve us?”

That is not weakness.

It is Christlike strength.

Chapter Six

Submission Is Not Blind Obedience

Because submission has sometimes been distorted, an essential distinction must be made.

Biblical submission does not require participation in evil.

It does not mean remaining silent when someone is being abused. It does not mean surrendering moral discernment. It does not give another human being God's authority. And it does not require obeying a command that contradicts God's commands.

The apostles themselves demonstrated this boundary.

“We must obey God rather than people.”
— *Acts 5:29 (CSB)*

Scripture teaches respect for legitimate authority, but human authority is never ultimate authority.

God is.

Therefore, submission requires discernment.

When human authority encourages what is good, submission can honor God. When human authority commands what God forbids—or forbids what God commands—faithfulness to God takes priority.

This distinction is especially important because surrender and passivity are not synonyms.

Jesus submitted perfectly to the Father, yet He confronted hypocrisy, defended the vulnerable, challenged corrupt spiritual leadership, and spoke truth courageously.

True submission has a backbone.

It is humble without becoming morally silent.

It is peaceful without becoming passive toward evil.

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It is willing to yield preference but unwilling to surrender truth.

This creates an important question whenever submission becomes difficult:

Is resistance protecting God's truth, or merely protecting personal preference?

Sometimes courage means standing.

Sometimes courage means yielding.

Wisdom is knowing which moment requires which response.

Chapter Seven

The Freedom of Open Hands

Imagine living tomorrow without having to control tomorrow.

The alarm sounds, and before the flood of responsibilities begins, the heart makes a quiet decision:

Whatever God allows today, His presence will be enough.

The schedule may change.

Someone may disappoint.

A door may close.

An unexpected opportunity may appear.

A difficult conversation may become necessary.

The future may refuse to cooperate with the plan.

Yet none of those things can remove God from His throne.

This is why submission is ultimately not about losing freedom. It is about discovering a freedom that control could never provide.

Freedom from always needing to win.

Freedom from managing every opinion.

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Freedom from having to know everything.

Freedom from forcing every outcome.

Freedom from believing that peace will arrive only when circumstances become predictable.

The apostle Paul describes transformation as something beginning in the mind:

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

— *Romans 12:2 (CSB)*

The surrendered mind learns a new vocabulary.

Instead of *What if everything goes wrong?* it learns, *God will still be present.*

Instead of *How can every outcome be controlled?* it asks, *What does faithfulness require today?*

Instead of *Everything depends on this plan,* it remembers, *God's purposes are larger than this moment.*

Instead of *There must be certainty before there can be peace,* it discovers, *Peace can exist in uncertainty because Christ is present there too.*

Jesus modeled this life completely. He served. He withdrew into solitude. He surrendered to the Father. He walked toward the cross with perfect obedience and emerged from the grave in victory.

The downward road of surrender became the road to exaltation.

That same pattern continues in the Christian life. What appears to be loss can become liberation. What feels like giving up control can become receiving peace. What looks like weakness can become the deepest form of spiritual strength.

Perhaps the great question is not whether life can finally be brought under control.

Perhaps the better question is:

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What would happen if it no longer had to be?

The hands can open.

The argument with God can end.

The future can be entrusted to the One already standing in it.

And the exhausted soul can finally discover that surrender was never the prison.

It was the doorway.

A Prayer of Surrender

Father, reveal every place where control has replaced trust.

Expose the fears hidden beneath the need to manage every outcome. Give wisdom to recognize what requires responsible action and faith to release what belongs only to You.

Where pride insists on being right, give humility. Where fear demands certainty, give trust. Where relationships have become battles of preference, give Christlike love. Where authority becomes destructive, give courage and discernment.

Renew the mind. Quiet the striving heart. Teach the soul to obey without fear and to rest without knowing every detail of tomorrow.

May the life of Jesus become the pattern: strength surrendered, love poured out, truth held firmly, and the Father's will trusted completely.

The future belongs to You.

The outcome belongs to You.

The heart belongs to You.

Amen..

