

Part Four

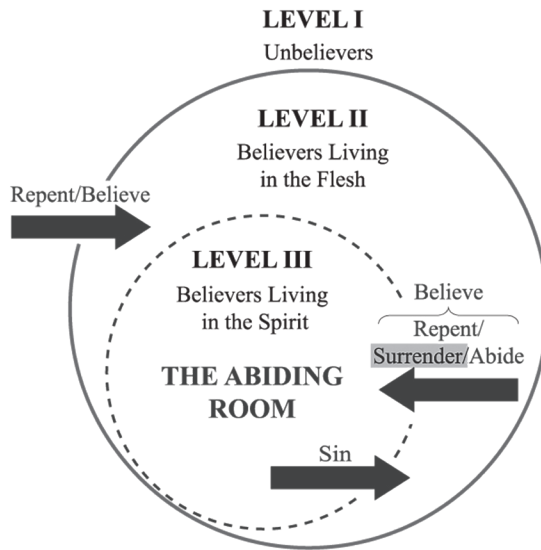
SURRENDER





CHAPTER 10

Surrender Your Will



“Not my will, but yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42)

As we begin the chapters on Surrender, the word “Surrender” is shaded in the diagram.

We now know the key to being filled with the Holy Spirit is abiding in Jesus. This means the reason so few Christians are consistently experiencing the abiding, Spirit-filled life is because they aren’t abiding in Jesus. Why is that? I believe the primary reason is simply very few are aware abiding exists and what it entails. Hopefully, the information presented on these pages will help enlighten and inspire many in that regard.

First, it’s important to explore what prevents us from abiding. I think two primary barriers exist for most of us: (1) living for ourselves in the

flesh, and (2) sin. Before we can truly abide in Jesus, we must address the effect the flesh and sin have on our lives. The remedy for living in the flesh is surrender, which we will explore in the next three chapters. After that, we'll consider the remedy for sin, which is repentance.

Before we proceed, let's briefly look at the words we'll be using. While most things in our spiritual lives exist in varying degrees, in the next few chapters we'll use absolute and direct terms to make the point about the importance of the abiding, Spirit-filled life. The assumption is that experiencing the full, consistent blessings of the abiding, Spirit-filled life explained in the *preceding* chapters is only possible if we are obedient to the instruction on surrender and repentance in the *upcoming* chapters.

In some cases, we'll be speaking as if the area being addressed is either all or nothing. We will say things along the lines of, "If you want to receive the full benefits, you must pay the full cost." The hope is that, in our making direct and absolute statements, you will experience an increase in the quality of your life and, ultimately, greater eternal rewards.

Therefore, keep in mind we are using emphatic words for only one purpose: to experience more of the abiding, Spirit-filled life now, and in anticipation of the day when Jesus says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (see Matthew 25:23).

In addition, it's worth noting we'll use the term "surrender" to refer to the surrender of our will to God's will *after* our salvation. Surrender is the ongoing, repeated, daily act of surrendering our will to the Father's will. Surrender may be known by other names, such as abandon, release, relinquish, or yield. All these terms imply the giving up of ourselves and our rights to Jesus and trusting in his indwelling Holy Spirit to bring about the desires of our hearts in his time and his way.

What might the absolute surrender of your whole heart look like? Let's explore the possibilities.

The Ultimate Surrendered Life

The ultimate example of a surrendered life, of course, is Jesus. Perhaps as amazing as the fact that Jesus *lived* a perfect life, is that he *left* a perfect life. He surrendered his rights and left his perfect life in heaven to be

nailed to a cross for us on earth. He did not consider himself first. In fact, he did not consider himself at all.

The Bible describes Jesus' surrender to God the Father this way:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied himself**, by taking the **form of a servant**, being born in the **likeness of men**. And being found in human form, **he humbled himself by becoming obedient** to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3–11)

As we humble ourselves and surrender our will to the Father's will as Jesus did, our hearts come into alignment with his plans for our lives. Then we can fully know the joy of living out the purpose for which God created us.

Remember, God wants you to experience him in fullness even in the seemingly minor moments of the day. These minor moments are the pathway to the major plan he laid out for you since the time he chose to create you!

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

God's Way or Your Way?

Too often my plans, strategies, and tactics take me off course and bear little fruit. This occurs because of my independence from God rather than

the perfect will of God playing out as a result of my surrender and dependence on Jesus.

In many ways, our ongoing spiritual battle is the opposite of a physical battle. In physical battles, you throw all your effort into pummeling the enemy into submission until they surrender and the battle ends. In contrast, to win the spiritual struggle between our flesh and the Spirit, we must *begin* with surrender. Victory in the spiritual battle within us is assured when we surrender at the outset.

As you follow the example of surrender Jesus modeled, and surrender your rights to self, you can trust the indwelling Holy Spirit to do the work in and through you. Giving up your independent ways sets you on the path leading to victory over your flesh.

Surrender Your Comfort

The fullest blessings of God follow the person living in wholehearted surrender. God sees our hearts as surrendered when they are emptied of our self-centered plans and in a state of ready obedience to his will. Surrender often means leaving the comfortable present circumstances we know for the unknown future God has planned for us.

Let's look at two biblical examples of people whose surrender meant leaving the life they knew to follow God wherever he led them. The first example is Abraham in the Old Testament, and the second is Peter and the disciples in the New Testament.

The earthly blessing Abraham and the disciples received was the result of abandoning their agendas and accepting God's invitation to follow his plan for their lives. While we don't know exactly what they gave up, we do know they couldn't have experienced the blessings God had in store for them if they had clung tightly to the safety of their present circumstances. These principles of the blessing of surrender are still true in your life today.

We might not even know Abraham's name (which was Abram at the time of God's invitation) if he hadn't left behind the life he knew for the unknown life God invited him into. Because Abraham trusted God, he became the father of the Jewish nation:

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and **I will bless you**; I will make your name great, and **you will be a blessing.**” (Genesis 12:1–2 NIV)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, **not knowing where he was going.** (Hebrews 11:8)

It’s also unlikely we would know the disciples’ names if they hadn’t left behind the lives they knew for the unknown plans God had for them. In a dialogue found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the apostle Peter expressed the disciples’ surrender to Jesus in this way:

And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”
(Luke 18:28)

Jesus responded to Peter with this affirmation of their surrender and the blessings that follow it:

And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Luke 18:29–30)

Acknowledge God Is in Control

Years ago, a Christian woman working in our office told me she’d observed God’s blessing on our financial planning practice in ways I hadn’t realized. When I took the time to look, I saw she was right. God was doing a far better job of marketing the business than I was.

Going against all my tendencies to devise my own plans, I decided to surrender control of my attempts to grow our small business and made God our “Director of Marketing.” Though I had not yet reached my goals for where I hoped the business would grow, I made some moves to trust God to take it wherever he wanted it to go.

Those were the days when the internet was in its infancy and had not yet become the means of promotion it is today. Yellow Pages advertising had proven a very reliable means of obtaining new clients with no effort at a reasonable cost. But the Holy Spirit seemed to be telling me that, as a step of faith, I should discontinue Yellow Pages advertising and rely solely on God. I canceled all of our ads and trusted God to continue to bring in new clients however he wished.

Not only did God bless this trust and surrender of my strategies by bringing in additional high-quality clients, but without any effort on my part, he blessed us further by providing new staff with unique skills and qualities on whom I could place greater reliance. I was able to focus more of my attention on our clients' and staff's needs and felt a great burden lifted off my shoulders.

It sounds a little silly, but because God did such a great job as Director of Marketing, I did something I should have done at the beginning: I surrendered all aspects of the business to him. I acknowledged what had been true all along—God owned the business, and I was his worker. As I yielded to God's direction, I became more relaxed, and the work became more enjoyable for both my staff and me.

For the first time, my work took on the form of "tentmaking," which is a term the Bible uses to describe how the apostle Paul provided for his financial needs (Acts 18:3). He made tents. Instead of focusing so intently on my role as a small business owner, my attention was freed up for the kingdom work God had planned for me outside of the office.

Surrender Daily

What might surrender look like in your life? Is it possible Jesus is the Lord of your life but not the Lord of your today? Is it possible you turn to him for the big, insurmountable obstacles that occur occasionally in your life but don't give him all the little things that are occurring every moment of the day?

Surrender can look as simple as beginning each day with heartfelt attitudes and prayers, such as:

Lord, this day is yours. I'm going to trust you for everything today.

Lord, not my will, but your will be done today.

Lord, I have no idea what this day looks like, but you do, so I'm giving it to you and trusting you for it.

Lord, I surrender control of this day to you. Take it and use me for your glory.

Lord, show me how to be your hands and feet today.

An attitude of surrender sets your heart and mind on trusting God to guide you through the upcoming day. A surrendered heart keeps your chocolate milk stirred up. What a wonderful blessing it is to live with a heart fully surrendered to and trusting in Jesus!

Fasting from Self

When we're in the flesh, we're very likely motivated by our desire to be esteemed, noticed, admired, and respected by others. Sometimes we long to be the center of attention. With the immense influence of social media today, many sources encourage us to put the focus on ourselves in an attempt to portray ourselves in a positive light. This can become habitual.

As you may know, when the Bible speaks of fasting, it means going without something for a period of time in order to focus on God, to pray about something in particular, and to listen to and hear from God. As I've disciplined young men, an exercise I've found enlightening is what I call "Fasting from Self." For three days, the young men try to fast from self by doing as little as possible to draw attention to themselves in both writing and conversation. I encourage you to try this too.

Here's what it involves:

- Don't tell anyone you're taking the challenge.
- For three days—if possible, including the weekend when you're more likely to be around friends and family—don't talk about yourself.

- Participate in conversations, but don't express your own opinions.
- If the conversation turns to you, respond briefly, and, without being too obvious, turn it back to others.
- If someone expresses an opinion that's the opposite of yours, hold back from expressing yours.
- Humble yourself and be genuinely interested in anyone and any topic. Don't redirect the conversation to something that interests you, even if you are bored and you completely disagree with what's being discussed.
- If you find yourself in a discussion that seems to have no end in sight, or participating in something that is completely disinteresting to you, stay engaged and enjoy it.
- Last, take a break from posting anything on social media.

Based on my experience personally and on the experiences of others who have tried this, you may be very surprised at what occurs. Many people stumble at the outset and simply quit. One young man's experience was quite humorous. He was with his adult siblings at a family weekend event and didn't get past the first hour before his siblings noticed the difference in him, pointedly asking, "What are you doing?" When he focused his interactions on others, it was noticeable to those who knew him best!

If you feel led to try this, you may be surprised at how many times you want to express an opinion or draw attention to yourself. It can be a challenge to yield yourself to such a seemingly easy task, but it may reveal something that will bless your obedience in practicing surrender.

Surrender to God's Plan for You

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

Although this beloved message from God is directed to the Israelites as a people group, Jeremiah 29:11 describes God's heart for all his

children. God has a unique plan for you too. And if you look in the rear-view mirror of your life, you can probably see how God has blessed you when you listened to his directions in the past. You celebrate when you think about these times of trusting him.

But you may also remember choices you've made to go your own way that brought regret. Everyone can look back and see both types of experiences. Take a moment to recall some choices in your past, both good and bad.

You undoubtedly also remember times when the Holy Spirit gave you whispers, hints, and nudges, telling you which way to go. Sometimes you chose to listen to them, and sometimes you chose to ignore them. These experiences remind you of the value of listening to the Spirit's guidance.

When you completely yield your life to God and abide in Jesus, you can hear the Holy Spirit more clearly as he guides you in the next direction you should go. The view out the front window is not always clear. That's the point. You have to trust God for where he is taking you and listen to instructions for the next turn. As a follower of Jesus, when you come to a decision point in your life, you can have confidence that the Holy Spirit living within you will guide you in the right direction and help you make the right choice. In those moments, it's reassuring to know other names for the Holy Spirit are Helper and Comforter!

God created you to live a surrendered life so you can enjoy intimacy with him. As you increasingly surrender your life to God, you'll experience the plan he has intended for you from the beginning. It's a life filled with joy, peace, and the power to live for his glory.



ABIDING TRUTH

To experience the fullest blessings of the Spirit-filled life,
surrender your will to God's will.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

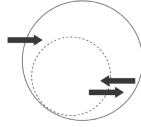
1. What does the word “surrender” mean to you? How can this be a potentially difficult concept to grasp/accept?
2. What did Abraham need to surrender to God? What did the disciples need to surrender to God?
3. Can you recall a time when you surrendered something specific to God? If so, how did you see God use your surrendered will to make a way for him to work in your life? If not, is there a time when you should have surrendered something to him? What was the outcome?

SONG SUGGESTIONS

“Control” by Tenth Avenue North

“Make Room” by The Church Will Sing/Community Music

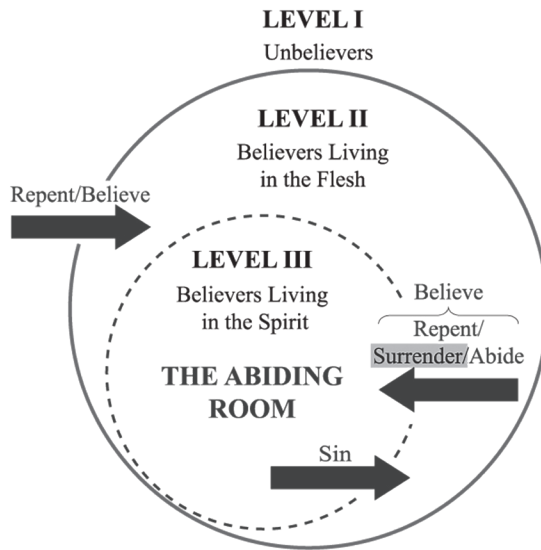
“I Surrender All” by Jadon Lavik





CHAPTER 11

Surrender Your Self-Effort



“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28 NIV)

Do you ever find yourself working to the point of exhaustion? Does it feel like you often check two things off your to-do list, only to find three more have been added, which leaves you feeling overwhelmed? Do you often feel hurried and worried? Do you feel the frustration of doing it well, but knowing it could have been done better? Do you have trouble saying no to the many good things you could do, and as a result, you don't have the energy to do the best thing? Do you find yourself irritated at others who, in your mind, aren't giving 100 percent to the cause?

You're not alone! Many well-intentioned followers of Jesus feel exhausted. We all need to continue to learn to put into practice the reality that following Jesus also means resting in Jesus.

If we know only striving, we are missing out on the abiding life. And if we aren't abiding in Jesus, sadly, we're very likely too familiar with exhaustion. Serving in our own strength will not only wear us out, it will also result in not bearing "much fruit" (John 15:5, 8). Thankfully, when we fully surrender our striving and self-effort, and our hearts are fully connected to Jesus, we can experience rest *and* the bearing of much fruit!

Doesn't that sound contradictory—less effort leading to more fruit? That's because, in many ways, the surrendered life is the opposite of what today's world teaches—if we want better results, we must try harder. This counterintuitive nature of the abiding, Spirit-filled life likely helps explain why a minority of Christians today are experiencing it.

When, however, by faith, we give Jesus our absolute surrender, he graciously reaches out, inviting us to abide in him and receive the fullness of his life and Spirit! We discover Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life to not only eternal salvation, but to contentment in this life as well!

Martha the Tireless Worker

An excellent example of the contrast between abiding in Jesus and relying on self-effort is found in the story of Jesus with Mary and Martha. This is the same Mary we referred to as Mary the Abider of Bethany in chapter 9. Both Mary and her sister Martha were devoted followers of Jesus, but they demonstrated their loyalty in different ways. Let's look again at how Martha put her faith into action.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **But Martha was distracted by all the preparations** that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. **Mary has chosen what is better**, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42 NIV)

As we read this story, we need to understand Jesus wasn’t condemning Martha. He was fully aware she was working hard out of her desire to serve him in the best way she knew. Yet he was gently instructing her that there was a better way.

Martha was giving it her all. She was fully invested, all in, sold out. She fully recognized Jesus was the Son of God, and she was serving him with all her heart. Because of how she was living out her faith, however, she was missing out on the very best of Jesus in her life. In spite of her passion, she was operating in the flesh and floundering in frustration in Level II. Her focus on the task was distracting her from being teachable. Martha needed to embrace the rest found in abiding in Jesus by surrendering her self-effort.

Jesus was telling her there was rest available in him, and she could put aside all the world’s ways of working in her own strength by instead choosing to simply abide in him. Jesus was pointing Martha to abiding *in* him rather than striving *for* him.

Nothing on Our Own

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord**, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise ... **I can do nothing on my own.**” (John 5:19, 30)

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you **I do not speak on my own authority**, but **the Father who dwells in me does his works.**” (John 14:10)

Jesus described his life as letting God the Father live in and through him. He was not only describing how he lived, but foreshadowing how we

are to live—by letting the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit do in and through us what we cannot do ourselves.

Realizing we are operating in our own strength is not always easy. Similar to Martha, we may have good intentions, but our method is misplaced. While the deeds of the flesh (such as fits of rage, jealousy, and envy) may not describe your typical daily attitude, the fruit of the Holy Spirit (such as joy and peace) may not seem to describe your daily experience either. You may find yourself caught somewhere in the middle.

That middle is the wilderness of Level II living. Do contentment and restful satisfaction seem to elude you as you follow Jesus? Instead of experiencing the freshness of the fruit of the Spirit, do you find yourself fatigued, disillusioned, and, at times, even hopeless? Jesus, who knows your heart, compassionately lets you know he understands. He tenderly instructs you that, regardless of how hard you strive, feeble branches like you and me cannot bear fruit all alone. He says, “The branch cannot bear fruit **by itself**” (John 15:4). Even our best efforts cannot produce the authentic spiritual fruit such as joy and peace that come only from the life of Jesus flowing through us.

Thankfully, it does not have to be this way! Just like Martha, the solution is right next to you—Jesus. He invites you to surrender your reliance on your own strength and instead, rest, trust, and abide in him. He will accept even your smallest act of faith in turning to him, lovingly take your burden upon himself, and walk alongside you.

Three Key Verses Regarding Self-Effort

Three verses taken from three letters written to three churches nicely fit together to encourage us to live by the Holy Spirit and guard against self-effort.

1. Colossians 2:6 tells us, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him” (NIV). You’re instructed to *continue* to live your life in Christ Jesus *just as you started*. How did you start your life with Jesus? You received Jesus as Lord. You did not achieve salvation; you received it.

2. How did you receive Jesus and were saved? Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” It was by God’s grace, through faith, not by your works, that you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior. So, referring back to Colossians 2:6, you are to *continue* to live just as you started—by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus, not by your own self-effort (or works).

The phrase “not by works” means not by your own self-effort. Nevertheless, it is extremely easy for us to slip into doing works by self-effort. Remember, we said self and flesh are essentially the same. While it may not be intentional, it’s very common to try doing good works in the flesh. Self-effort is doomed to failure because your no-good flesh cannot bear much fruit. Apart from Jesus, we cannot bear as “much fruit” as we can when we are resting, or abiding, in him.

3. In Galatians 3:3, the apostle Paul addresses the Galatian church in a very direct manner regarding self-effort creeping into their lives. “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” Paul is saying they started well by receiving the Holy Spirit at salvation, but they’ve veered off course. They’ve gone back to the old ways of attempting to do good works and live righteous lives through fleshly efforts. Our intent may be genuine, but, as the Galatian church, too often the means we use to attempt to accomplish it are flawed. Our self-effort to reach the commendable goals of living a life that pleases God is as flawed as our flesh.

Just as you received, not achieved, the gift of salvation, so do you continue to *bear* fruit, not *produce* fruit. The bearing of much fruit is not accomplished through your well-intentioned reliance on yourself. Bearing fruit is accomplished by trusting God, surrendering your self-effort, and letting the Holy Spirit do his work in and through you as you abide in Jesus.

As we connect these three sets of instructions from Paul, we see they give us guidance for how we're to restfully follow Jesus.

Living in the Spirit Vs. the Self-Effort of the Flesh

Too often in our desire to carry out good works, we do so while forgetting the One who inspired us to do them in the first place—Jesus. If we begin with the abiding relationship with Jesus, we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide, direct, and empower us to complete our work.

God created us for a life of purpose that flows from our relationship with him. If our priority becomes more focused on obedience rather than on the relationship, we end up getting less of both. But as we abide in our relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit fills us (The Great 2 for 1), and we discover that, not only does the will of God become clearer to us, but the work of God becomes easier for us too.

It's as C.S. Lewis wrote: "Put first things first and we get second things thrown in; put second things first and we lose *both* first and second things."¹ Meaning, if we make our relationship with Jesus our top priority, the good works flow naturally from that relationship. However, if we get things out of order, and thrust forward into attempting to carry out the work in our own strength, we'll experience less of both Jesus and fruit.

Let's compare the difference between attempting to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit through our self-effort and watching it appear naturally as we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.

First, what does it look like to attempt to live out the fruit of the Spirit in the flesh of self-effort? If you get up in the morning and effectively say to yourself, *Today I'm going to do all I can to be loving and joyful and peaceful and patient and kind and good and faithful and gentle and self-controlled*, you may find (1) at some point you'll stumble, and (2) at some point you'll be exhausted. Why? Because you can't produce those things in the flesh.

The tree of the flesh can produce some meager levels of fruit for a while through self-effort, but eventually a storm will arise that washes away the topsoil and reveals the root of these things is the flesh. You may discover the fruit vanishes, and the deeds of the flesh such as anger,

frustration, harsh criticism, and their accompanying fatigue and discouragement appear.

On the other hand, if you get up in the morning and acknowledge, *Lord, I surrender this day to you. You know what is ahead, and I know I can't exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in my own strength, so I am trusting you to do it*, then you can likely count on three things: (1) that the fruit of the Spirit that appears is genuine, (2) at some point you may still stumble, and (3) if at the point of stumbling you quickly acknowledge to Jesus that you messed up and simply start over by surrendering again, you can trust you're back on track, abiding in Jesus.

We *will* mess up, and Jesus will not be surprised because he knows we're in constant training. The Holy Spirit will let us know when we're off-track, but Jesus is not waiting to condemn us. Rather, he's eager to encourage and guide us. At this point, our faithful friend Jesus will gently say to us what he said to the apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As you begin each day, isn't it comforting to know that Jesus' grace is constant? His grace is present at the start, the middle, and the end of the day. His grace is present during both your successes and failures. We can rest during the events of the day, knowing it's no longer us attempting to do things for God in our own strength, but Jesus living out his life through us by the Holy Spirit. The secret is to remain connected to Jesus, not to chase perfection.

Life in the Spirit doesn't eliminate the problems and difficulties the fallen world brings into our lives, but if somebody else is doing the work, we won't become nearly as exhausted. By consistently living by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we have Jesus' assurance of bearing much fruit. That's because it's not us striving to produce the fruit; it's Jesus living in us who is doing the work.

Surrendering our self-effort doesn't mean we spend all day napping and expecting things to get done. God didn't save us for leisure and laziness but for kingdom purposes. As we live by the power of the Spirit, we can know what to do and can enthusiastically embrace God's plan for us, experiencing the Spirit's presence and power throughout the day.

Here's how Paul described the transforming work of the gospel in and through him:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, **I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God** that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Abide during the process, obey at decision points, and trust God for the results. Over time, you will have fewer and shorter detours in the flesh. And what is even more exciting is that as you increasingly walk in the Spirit, you can be confident that, step-by-step, you are becoming more like Jesus!

Surrendering My Hope in Self

After my dish-smashing incident in 1999, Juli noticed I was no longer angry, harsh, and critical. She was cautiously optimistic that some change had occurred in me. But because she knew I was capable of suppressing my critical nature for short periods of time, she didn't get her hopes up too high. Too many times she'd seen me temporarily will myself to be kind to her after we'd had a long discussion or a fight, only to be disappointed when I returned to my old, harsh, critical, mean self.

We had gone to marriage counseling several times to, as I called it, "Fix Kevin," and I would realize I needed to be kinder and gentler. For a while I would work hard at being that way, but I was still doing it in the flesh, so eventually I would go back to my old ways.

But this time, when I was truly broken by seeing my sin as God saw it, it wasn't self-effort that changed me, it was surrender. I wasn't trying to be kind; I surrendered my right to be angry. I wasn't trying to be gentle; I surrendered my right to be harsh. I wasn't trying to control, suppress, avoid, or eliminate my natural tendencies. I had come to the realization such efforts would eventually prove fruitless, just as they always had, and I would again be headed toward failure.

Although I didn't know God would do such a life-changing work,

it began with me surrendering my typical reliance on self-effort in the hope that God would save me from myself. And to his glory, through no self-effort of my own, God filled my emptied heart with his Spirit and began changing our lives.

But that wasn't completely the end of my anger. We went back to biblical marriage counseling a few more times as I began to learn more appropriate behaviors and ways to respond to events that displeased me. More importantly, now I had a better understanding I could control my anger only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Love You Had at First

“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken **the love you had at first**. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.” (Revelation 2:2–5 NIV)

Jesus gives us an invitation, saying, “Come to me, all you who are weary” (Matthew 11:28 NIV). Does this describe you? If so, he invites you to surrender your self-effort and rest in him.

Do you remember the freshness of your faith when you first came to Jesus? You knew so little; yet you knew all you needed to know because you knew Jesus. You knew your childlike faith alone was enough. Jesus says everyone, no matter their gifts or experiences, must come to him as a child.

When Jesus calls you friend, he gently invites you to leave behind your self-effort and enjoy his company. Friends don't require our performance; they just enjoy our presence. When you're with your best friend, you're relaxed, rested, smiling, laughing, and enjoying their company. Your friend Jesus is inviting you to throw away your attempts at pleasing him with your self-effort and simply come alongside him and abide.



ABIDING TRUTH

To experience the fullest blessings of the Spirit-filled life,
surrender your self-effort and rest in Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

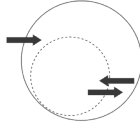
1. What are some ways you like to relax? How can you connect those ways to spiritually resting in what Jesus has done for you?
2. How did Jesus describe the contrast in how Martha and Mary lived out their faith?
3. Why is it so difficult for us to grasp the concept of resting in what Christ has already done for us? What societal or cultural norms might stand in the way of this being easy to accept?

SUGGESTED SONGS

“Dear God” by Cory Asbury

“Just Be Held” by Casting Crowns

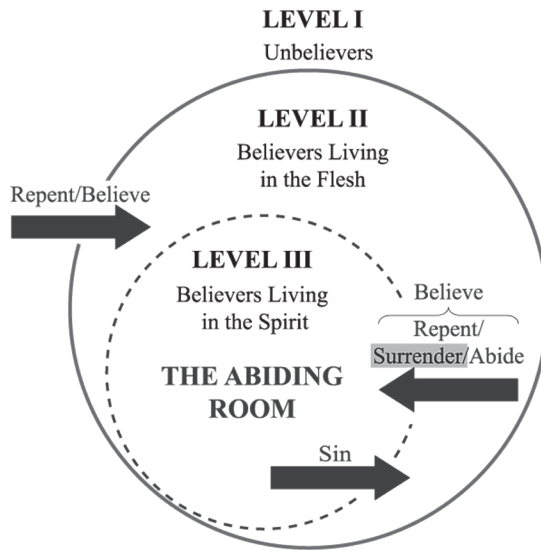
“Truth Be Told” by Matthew West





CHAPTER 12

Surrender Your Worldliness



You may remember the Bible passage below from the three types of people described in chapter 2. This passage is used to describe the worldly person living in the flesh in Level II. The NIV translation uses the word “worldly,” while the ESV translation uses the word “flesh.” That’s because the words “worldly” and “flesh” are interchangeable in describing our hearts, as shown in the ESV version below.

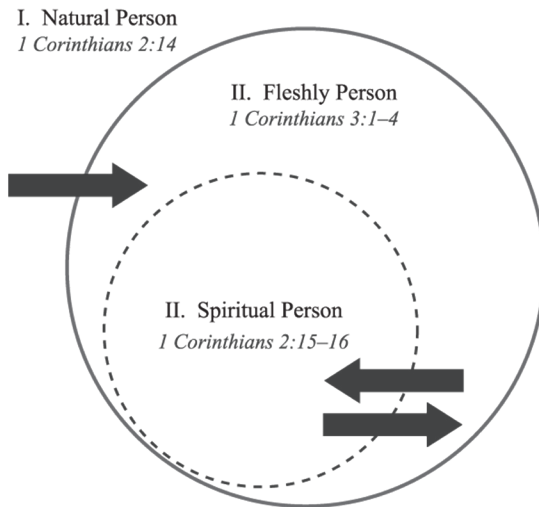
Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still **worldly**—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still **worldly**. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not **worldly**?

Are you not acting like mere humans? (1 Corinthians 3:1–4 NIV)

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the **flesh**, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the **flesh**. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the **flesh** and behaving only in a human way? (1 Corinthians 3:1–4 ESV)

When we're living in our no-good flesh, the behavior that flows out of our hearts is worldly. When we're living fleshly, worldly lives, we're choosing to live in Level II. We are wandering in the wilderness rather than thriving in the Spirit in the Abiding Room.

Here's the Abiding Room diagram illustrating these verses again:



The apostle Paul laments he couldn't even talk to the Corinthian church in spiritual terms because he was too busy addressing the problems of jealousy and quarreling arising from their operating in the flesh. It seems safe to assume Paul would much rather be celebrating the spiritual victories that would have been occurring in their lives if they had been living in the Spirit.

I wonder how many pastors in churches today can relate to Paul's disappointment. They long to teach us the deeper things of Christ, but they are too occupied solving the problems caused by our fleshly, worldly hearts. If it's true that few of us are consistently living in the Spirit, then unfortunately, it is quite likely many pastors can empathize with Paul.

How do we expect to hear from the Holy Spirit when we are choosing to live in a worldly fashion in the flesh? Just as Paul was sad that he couldn't address the deeper spiritual things to the members of this church, today the Holy Spirit is often grieved that he cannot speak to us in a deeper spiritual language because we're living in the flesh.

How, then, do we begin to get out of the rut of worldly, fleshly living? The answer once again lies in the word "surrender."

Surrendering Worldliness

In just two verses, Romans 12:1–2 packs a great deal of instruction regarding surrendering our worldliness. This includes the exciting promise that the blessing of this surrender is to know God's will:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **Do not conform to the pattern of this world** but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. **Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is**—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1–2 NIV)

This passage instructs us to surrender our whole selves. When the apostle Paul says to offer your body as a sacrifice, he means to give God all of you—your heart, mind, and soul. But also give him your calendar, your checkbook, your ambition, your relationships—*everything*. Give God your complete, absolute surrender. Surrender precedes the outpouring of the blessings of the abiding, Spirit-filled life God the Father has planned for you.

Surrendering your worldliness is an ongoing, lifelong process. It involves developing an attitude of wholehearted release of your life to

God every moment of each day. Expect God to lovingly and repeatedly reveal worldly attitudes of your heart you hadn't noticed. Embrace these new moments of awareness as growth opportunities to yield your heart and your life to Jesus.

These verses instruct you to not be of the world but to be encouraged that by surrendering your life to God, you will be able to discern God's will. Note the word "then." "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is." The word "then" connects your surrender to the promise you will receive a greater capacity to know God's will.

This passage explains there is a prerequisite to clearly knowing the will of God. This requirement is that you do not align your priorities with what this world says is important. The beginning of the blessing of knowing God's will is the surrender of your worldliness.

The Message paraphrase of Romans 12:1–2 says this for us in everyday language:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

When we let go of our desires and passions for the things of this world, we can fix our minds on the things of God. This is part of the gradual process of being "transformed" to be more like Jesus. We change from the Level II fleshly person who craves what this world has to offer to the Level III Spirit-led person whose thinking is guided by the mind of Jesus as described in 1 Corinthians 2:15–16:

The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ. (NIV)

Surrendering Your Worldliness—a Recurring Biblical Theme

It’s up to us whether we live Level II lives, conformed to the world and living by the flesh, or Level III lives, transformed by God and living by the power of the Holy Spirit. At its heart, worldliness is having any worldly god rather than the one true God. Those worldly gods are idols.

God has always been serious about our choosing him above worldly idols. In the Old Testament, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments before they entered the Holy Land, telling them he was to be their first priority.

Here are the first two commandments:

“You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Exodus 20:4–6)

Surrender calls on us to align our priorities with those God has for us. One of my favorite verses is a rather obscure one in the Old Testament. The prophet Jonah spoke it while inside the big fish, and it speaks of the enormous cost of loving the things of this world: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs” (Jonah 2:8 NIV 1984).

God's grace lavishes us with many, undeserved blessings. However, when our ambition is to love, pursue, and cling to the things of this world, such as recognition, money, and power, we miss out on many of the blessings God intends for us. But when we abandon these temporary worldly trinkets that distract us from God, he pours out his grace on us.

The apostle John describes surrendering our worldliness in the New Testament:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15–17)

Surrender is the remedy to worldliness. To leave behind the wilderness, you must leave behind your worldliness.

Our resources of time, talent, and treasure are truly from God, and we're blessed when we devote them to his plans and purposes. As has been said plenty of times: look at your calendar and your checkbook and you'll know your priorities.

Let's look at those two areas of surrender—time and money.

Surrender Your Worldliness—Time

When you surrender your worldliness, your desire will shift from serving yourself to serving others. You will become a radiant blessing to your community. The needs of those around you are endless. Through community service, you can establish new friendships and learn to better understand the needs of others.

Serving others will broaden your perspective and contribute to your spiritual maturity. You can trust the Holy Spirit to guide you into opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus to those who don't yet know him. If you attend church but are still not feeling connected to others, I have a simple, one-word recommendation for you—serve!

Surrendering your worldliness includes ignoring the world's message to be independent, and instead choosing to be engaged in a local church. The world tells us to live for self and make our own way, but God has chosen and gifted us to be part of a local church body.

The Bible puts it this way: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up **meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV).

In today's world of technology, there are plenty of opportunities to fool ourselves into thinking we can be part of a church solely through online worship. But God intends us to be interrelated. When we gather together, we're able to encourage each other, sharpen each other spiritually, and join together in fellowship and service to bless others using our gifts within and outside of the church.

A wonderful part of being connected to Jesus and living the abiding, Spirit-filled life is enjoying all the blessings that arise from fellowship in Jesus' body, the local church. Colossians 1:18 tells us Jesus is the head of the church: "And he is the head of the body, the church."

Some of the most significant experiences of seeing the Holy Spirit at work are when he empowers you in your service within the church. When we're operating in the flesh, we think like the world, asking, *What's in it for me?* On the other hand, when we're living lives surrendered to the Lord, we're looking for ways to serve others, which is what Jesus modeled for us in his earthly ministry.

When our children were young, the temptation for Juli and I was to attend church to be served. After a long week, it can be a challenge just to get everyone fed, dressed, and out the door. But as we relinquished our rights for a leisurely Sunday and began serving, we were blessed in ways we couldn't have predicted. There is no end to how God will bless you in your involvement in serving in small groups, in children's ministries, and other in areas within your church. A surrendered heart is a selfless, serving heart, and a prerequisite for experiencing the fullness of the abiding, Spirit-filled life.

Spirit-filled, Level III followers of Christ are fully engaged in their local church. Regardless of your age, the number of years you've been

following Jesus, or your biblical knowledge, God's plan is to utilize the gifts he has given you to bless others. How has God gifted you? Ask your local church leaders how you can identify and utilize your gifts to serve others in your church.

Now, having said all of that, it's worth noting it's entirely possible to serve others in the flesh. The real evidence of being filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit is when your life displays the fruit of the Spirit. It isn't so much that service to others is evidence you are experiencing the abiding, Spirit-filled life, but an *unwillingness* to serve may be a sign that you're not.

Surrender Your Worldliness—Finances

“Bring the **whole tithe** into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. **Test me** in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” (Malachi 3:10 NIV)

Over the years, I have heard many teachers say this verse is the *only time* in the Bible that God says we should test him. God challenges you to relinquish control of your finances to him, and then watch him keep his promises as he blesses you.

Is this a guarantee against job loss or that the investments in your retirement plan will soar in value? Not at all. It is a statement intended to encourage you to trust God and release your finances to him so you can experience him and the blessings he gives you with your finances.

A wonderful story I heard from a young couple at our church illustrates what surrendering our finances to God can look like. They wanted to begin giving to the church, but, when they sat down and created a budget, their expenses exceeded their income. Nevertheless, God laid it on their hearts to begin giving, so, by faith, they committed to begin regular, generous, monthly giving. Though they couldn't predict it, in the months that followed, unique things kept occurring with their finances that allowed them to balance their budget for the first time! They saw God's faithfulness firsthand!

Everything you have is God's: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1 NIV). But he has entrusted his resources to you to manage faithfully. And the point is clear—what you do with your finances reveals your priorities. How you use or invest your finances is an accurate picture of what you truly treasure.

The Bible gives this guidance as to the *attitude* of your heart concerning giving when it says:

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver**. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:7–8 NIV)

During my forty years as a financial advisor, I heard countless viewpoints on investments, but one of my favorites comes from a missionary. Jim Elliot was a young man when he and four other missionaries were killed while taking the gospel to a remote village in Ecuador.

After his death, an entry was found in his journal, written several years earlier. It presented a crystal-clear picture of what surrendering our worldliness for eternal purposes looks like. It read: He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose. Jim's life illustrated this principle and serves as a dependable reminder that we are wise to invest our temporary resources of time and money in what is eternal.

When it comes to wisely utilizing the resources God has entrusted to us for kingdom purposes, I prefer the term "investing" rather than "giving." The funds you invest in your church and in ministries are stored for eternity in heaven. As a follower of Jesus, I think it is healthy and appropriate to have an Eternal Kingdom Portfolio mindset. That is, just as you may have (or plan on having) personal investments such as a 401k or IRA for earthly purposes, you can set your mind on investing for eternal purposes. God invites you to join him in his kingdom work so you can experience the joy of participating in activities that will last for eternity.

When you support your church financially, you are part of everything

God is doing there. What you do with your finances matters. God wants you to both be blessed and be a blessing. “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

Let’s be clear, however, we can be generous givers while still in the flesh. It’s possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. The real evidence of the abiding, Spirit-filled life is, once again, when your life exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. It isn’t so much that generous giving is evidence you are experiencing the abiding, Spirit-filled life, but an *unwillingness* to fully release your finances to God is a pretty good sign that you’re not.

Surrender, Not Checklists

As we finish these three chapters on surrender, it’s possible you are beginning to think this sounds like a checklist of requirements to experience Level III living. There is a fine line between making sure our relationship with Jesus is where it should be and falling into the trap of turning our walk with him into trying to keep a list of dos and don’ts. Following a list of rules is just legalism and religion.

Abiding in Jesus is not about checklists; it’s about the condition of your heart. Your heart’s condition, as revealed by your attitudes and actions, is of utmost importance so you can experience the abiding, Spirit-filled life in all its fullness. When your heart is fully surrendered to Jesus, the actions we’ve mentioned flow naturally from it. Moreover, you experience joy and peace from being wholly yielded to God.



ABIDING TRUTH

To experience the fullest blessings of the Spirit-filled life,
surrender your worldliness.

SONG SUGGESTIONS

“I Surrender All” by Clay Crosse

“Have It All” by Brian Johnson

“The Motions” by Matthew West

