



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**Connection: Surrender**

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~ Scripture: Philippians 2:3-11 ~

### INTRODUCTION

Before moving on, let's recall the finish line (i.e.: where we're headed). We're aiming for:

- INTIMACY == closeness with God. [Show PPT of Phil.3:10] *"For my determined purpose is that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly. . ."* To accomplish that, we have been looking at some of the **spiritual disciplines** that will help us get there. . .
- SIMPLICITY == shuffling our priorities to help us reorder our lives, free our minds, and clear our lives from the clutter that gets in the way.
- SILENCE and SOLITUDE == finding time and ways of shutting out the noise, the clamor, the frenzy in order to allow the Spirit of God to reach, to teach our spirit.

Now we come to the toughest discipline so far: SURRENDER / LETTING GO / RELEASING OUR GRIP.

- The first disciplines involved getting rid of things (e.g.: complications, clutter, noise, distractions) == all unpleasant things.
- But surrender! Laying down our will. Releasing our grip on our rights (entitlements), plans, dreams. Now we're talking about getting rid of things we love.

I don't know about you, but I confess that *letting go* is a battle royal to this day in my life. I hang on to my thoughts, my ways, my expectations till the last dog is hung...till I've made myself and everyone around me miserable. ☺

You know what's at the core of such resistance? It's a 4-letter word called SELF! More often than not, the plans, the dreams, the things. . .my preferences (what I want), my ways of thinking I hang onto so stubbornly are rooted & grounded in SELF.

It's like an addiction! It is an addiction—more powerful and potentially more devastating than alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, spending, food, etc. Addiction to self is the ultimate addiction—endemic to the entire human race. It's our #1 spiritual problem. It's what drives all the other addictions. . .what leads us into sin. . .what blocks intimacy with God.

Even those who have put away the obvious *sins of the flesh* (e.g.: lust, greed, rage, slander, envy, strife,

deceit)<sup>1</sup> struggle with this “god” who sits on the throne of our lives. Here’s the thing: *we make pretty good human beings but pretty lousy gods*. Yet with self on the throne that’s what we’re attempting to be==God==maybe not of the whole universe, but of our own little universe (our own lives). We get into these power struggles with God: to see if it’s going to be my way or His. . .my timing or His?

We’ll bargain with God: “*I’ll give a little, You give a little*”

“*You deliver / answer / bless (et.al.) . . .I’ll serve You.*”

What God really wants is not our promises or the conditions we’ll meet, but simply you & me—all of you & me.

There’s a great little POEM that was written back in the 1800’s that captures the struggle for surrender I’m talking about today. It was written by **Theodore Monod**, a minister in the Evangelical & Reformed Church in France, and goes like this:

Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow That a time could ever be  
When I let the Savior's pity Plead in vain,  
and proudly answered, "*All of self and none of Thee.*"

Yet He found me; I beheld Him Bleeding on the accursed tree;  
Heard Him pray, "Forgive them, Father;" and my wistful heart said faintly, "*Some of self and some of Thee.*"

Day by day, His tender mercy, Healing, helping, full and free,  
Sweet and strong, and, oh, so patient,  
Brought me lower, while I whispered, "*Less of self and more of Thee.*"

Higher than the highest heavens, Deeper than the deepest sea,  
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered;  
Grant me now my soul's desire, "*None of self and all of Thee.*"

### SCRIPTURAL MANDATE

How can we live selfless lives when we’re so full of self (i.e.: it’s all we know, all we are)?  
JESUS is our model / pattern / guide / example.

This comes through loud & clear in the letter Paul wrote to his Christian friends in Philippi (while he was under house arrest in Rome). He urged them to imitate Christ’s selflessness. In the beginning part of **chapter 2**, he gives them 4 commands (2 do’s, 2 don’t’s). . .then holds up Christ as the ultimate example of surrender. Look at the commands first (vv. 3-4):

- 1) “**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit**” (v. 3);
- 2) “**With humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves**”;
- 3) “**Do not merely look out for your own personal interests**” (v. 4);
- 4) “[**Look out**] **for the interests of others**”.

Notice the word “*merely*” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> command. It doesn’t say “*never*” look out for your own interests. We must take care of business. But there needs to be a balance. “Not *merely* your own personal interests, but *also* the interests of others”. I like the way Eugene Peterson renders it in *The Message*: “**Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.**”

Following the four commands, Paul points to Jesus as the perfect illustration of surrender and selflessness. Let’s read, beginning with v.5:

<sup>5</sup>**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**

<sup>6</sup>**Who, being in very nature God,**

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<sup>1</sup> See Colossians 3:5,8 and Romans 1:29.

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!  
  
<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name.....

Note a couple things (cf. the underlined phrases):

- Jesus “*did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.*” Though Jesus deserved all respect, worship and adoration, He let it all go. By allowing Himself to be misunderstood, misrepresented, mistreated, crucified → He released His grip on all of it.
- Further, “*He emptied himself.*” That does not mean He gave up His deity. What it means is that He relinquished the independent use of His divine attributes during His sojourn on earth.

[Here’s a bit of THEOLOGY: Jesus has always existed. He has always been coequal, coeternal, coexistent with the God the Father. The Son and the Father have always been peers—except for the period of time when Jesus became a flesh-and-blood man. During that time (when Jesus was on earth), He submitted to the Father. His ‘meat (food)’ was to do the will of the Father—as to where He would *go*, what He would *do*, what He would *say*, and *when* He would say & do those things. He gave up all the glory & preeminence that were rightfully His—for the sake of others (including you & me). THAT’S SURRENDER!!!]

#### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

When we talk about SURRENDER as a spiritual discipline, exactly what are we talking about? What exactly do we surrender?

##### A. POSSESSIONS

It’s hard to think about releasing the things that are near & dear to our heart. Surrender here begins with declaring Him the *owner* of each thing. All good gifts come from Him anyway. He’s given us many things to enjoy, not to idolize. I’m not suggesting that poverty is more spiritual than wealth. I am suggesting that we hold our possessions loosely so they do not own us.

##### B. POSITION

Career and social standing are important—especially in this community. We’ve got a lot of “high rollers”. What a blessing! Does that mean we should become “sluggards”? Absolutely not! We are to use the gifts & talents God has given us to the max. But position, benefits, perks, power, a sense of importance—can become all too important to us. Don’t wrap your ego around your role or your job—that’s your assignment (not your calling). Find your security, identity, and contentment in Him + the things He has put in your life (most of which are probably not measurable in dollars & cents).

##### C. PLANS

James has a good word for us here: “*Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. . . Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.” [James 4:13-16]* As with material possessions, our plans must always be held loosely. We make our plans, yes. But God

may choose to rearrange things and take us along paths we hadn't intended. Can we trust that He knows what He is doing?

D. PEOPLE

This one's the hardest! We build our lives around our children, parents and friends. Parents spend a lot of time teaching their kids to "embrace" life, learning (etc.). . .then have to turn around and release them. It seems the whole first part of our lives is spent trying to learn how to grab hold, to hold on (e.g.: to a career, family, lifestyle). . .then the latter part letting go (releasing). Sometimes that process starts earlier than we'd like (e.g.: with the death of people close to us OR a divorce). And we're faced with not only letting go of the person. . .but surrendering a way of life, then there's the anger, the sense of unfairness, and feelings of guilt (e.g.: "I didn't do enough" / "I couldn't prevent the unpreventable").

What we need to keep in mind (and accept) is: Nothing this side of heaven is permanent. Some relationships will change; all will one day end. In this life we are always getting ready for eternity. So enjoy the time you have with those closest to you. . .avoid the temptation to cling. . .and get ready for eternity to unfold.

E. OTHER THINGS

Talents & Strengths (not just weaknesses & deficits) → so God can use us.

GOOD NEWS

Surrender brings great blessings, great surprises you wouldn't otherwise encounter.

- It led to Jesus exaltation (cf. Phil. 3:9-11);
- It will lead to ours. **I Peter 5:6** says: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will in due time lift you up." That's the promise of God!

SING. . .INVITE CONGREGATION TO SING

Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord (echo)  
Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord (echo)  
And He shall lift you up  
Higher and higher and He  
Shall lift you up

So I will humble myself in the sight of You, Lord (echo)  
Humble myself in the sight of You, Lord (echo)  
And You will lift me up  
Higher and higher  
And You will lift me up

CONCLUSION

You know, it takes a lot of energy to keep a tight grip on something. **Hebrews 12:3** says: "Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that **you** will not grow weary and lose heart."

If you follow Jesus' example, you're less likely to wear out. Most of the things we hang onto are too big for us to manage and handle anyway. And if it's making you uptight. . .you have no serenity or inner peace. . .and your emotions are in turmoil—then it's time to let go, time to release your grip. If you clutch it for too long, sooner or later your grip will fail and it'll be lost anyway. If it's a problem too great for you to solve. . .a responsibility too heavy for you to shoulder. . .or even a blessing that has come to dominate your every waking thought—rather than have it ripped from your cramped fingers, **choose** to release it into God's care. That is a **choice** you can make!

**ILLUSTRATION:** A monkey was walking by a tree one day and saw something that intrigued him. Whatever it was, it was lodged inside a hole in the side of the tree. He reached in to grab it, but the fist he made was too big. His hand was caught in the tree. He had to let go of the object in order to get his hand out. Giving up what you don't want to give up will bring change.

“But I can't let go”, you argue: *Who will take care of---? What will happen if---?*

When you surrender, you are not dropping the ball. . .you are not dropping out. You are not giving into defeat. . .you are not giving up. You are releasing it to One greater than yourself—trusting and believing He is both able & willing to care for it better than you.

So, release your grip. Stop striving, stop struggling, and simply surrender. You'll be amazed by how much more energy you have. . .how much more at ease / unruffled / unflustered you are. . . how much more positive your attitude and outlook are.

Your old self will whine and fight for dominance. But you're simply putting *self* in its rightful place: NOT out of the picture; JUST off the throne (where Jesus belongs).

It comes down to the SERENITY PRAYER, doesn't it? **[everybody recite]** That's how we deal with this universal addiction that we all have to “self”!

*God, grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change  
To change the things I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

### Study Guide

**Monday:** Reread your sermon notes. Read Philippians 2:3—11. How does it make you feel that Jesus Christ would give up everything in heaven and on earth to be the lowliest of all people? How would things change in vss. 3-8 marked your family life? Church life? Work life? How does surrender to Christ and serving others differ from being a doormat?

**Tuesday:** Read Luke 22:39-46. This is Jesus and His closest disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Note especially verses 42-44. Jesus surrendered His life to His Father, God's angels ministered to Him, but still He was in anguish as He prayed. In times of crisis, do you stay cool, get hot, panic, or dig in? Where do you go to get away, think, and pray? What is the “cup” that you are being asked to live (or die) with? What do you mean when you pray “Your will be done?” Put your Bible down and turn to God with everything you are facing. Breathe Him in, and let those things go to Him.

**Wednesday:** Read Hebrews 12:1. This verse talks about laying aside every sin and encumbrance that so easily entangles us in order to run the race of life with perseverance. If life is a marathon race, what is entangling you and keeping you from running well? What sin has a hold on you? Surrender. Surrender your will to God's. Lift your hands, from your shoulders, your heart, your mind, to God's, that He may take these away as you surrender to Him again.

**Thursday:** Read Proverbs 3:5-8. We take this wisdom for granted. It's become such a part of our culture that we forget how incredible it is that someone once wrote it down for the first time! Why is it so hard to put our trust more in God than in ourselves? Read the verses again slowly. What part of your heart are you still hanging on to, rather than trusting to God? Today, look to acknowledge God in every setting of your day in every way, and see if God doesn't straighten a few things out...

**Friday:** Are you surrendering in love? Read 1 Corinthians 13. Usually we concentrate on vs. 4-8. This time, concentrate on vss. 1-3. We are often interested in spiritual gifts and power. But Paul says “If I surrender my body to the flames without love, I gain nothing.” What should surrendering out of your love look like? Will it draw you closer to those around you? Pray that every step of surrender would draw you closer and closer into Christ, that you may love like Christ loves, and see what happens...