

Lesson #5

Sunday October 16:

I Surrender

Have you ever received a gift that was so unexpected or extravagant you didn't know how to respond? A gift that was so perfect or significant you were left speechless when it unexpectedly appeared?

Perhaps it was an engagement ring and a proposal that you were not expecting. Perhaps it was a financial gift that was exactly what was needed but completely unexpected. Perhaps it was some act of kindness or gift that came completely out of the blue, but addressed a very real need. Maybe it wasn't you personally who experienced such an incredible gift but it was someone you know who was amazed by an unexpected but perfect gift. What did/would you do? How did/would you respond?

In many ways that is the situation in Romans 12. Paul has described the incredible mercies of God for eleven chapters. He has focused on God's grace and repeatedly emphasized that we have done nothing to deserve or earn this gift. It has come to us so unexpectedly and so extravagantly that it has left us speechless. We may not know how to respond when we receive an extravagant and unexpected gift, but Paul has given us clarity as to how to respond to the unexpected and extravagant mercies of God: we need to surrender.

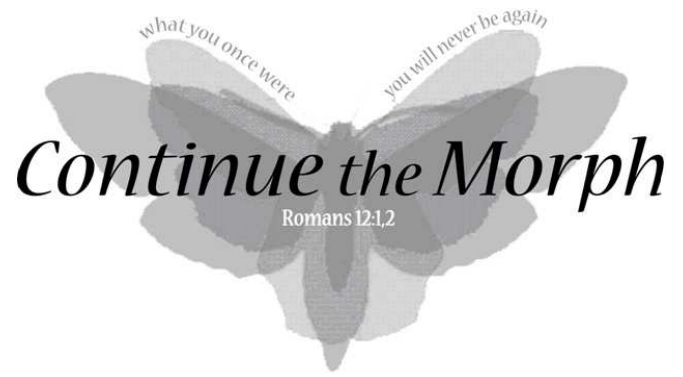
Let me be very clear about this: I hate to surrender.

It doesn't matter if it is a game or an argument, a test of wills or a personal goal that will not be achieved, I hate to surrender because I hate the feeling that I have lost. Surrender always leaves me feeling like I have lost badly in something I should have won or been in control of. I should have dominated, won, controlled, finished or achieved and if I have to capitulate, yield, lose or surrender....I hate it.

I know that hate is a strong word, but it is absolutely the right word. This is more than the feelings of dislike or objection or reluctance -- I really intensely dislike the whole idea of surrendering for any reason.

I know I am not alone in this. I have talked to many other people who also struggle with this reality. Like the man who knocked over the chess board when it became obvious he was going to lose the game. Or the wife who walked out on her husband when he proved that she really was at fault in an accident. Both of them recognized that they had a problem that was going to adversely affect them if they didn't learn how to surrender. They knew it was important but they would only do it reluctantly, if at all.

How about you? How do you feel about surrender? Even more fundamentally how do you feel about surrendering your life to God?



That is after all what we are talking about here, isn't it?

If we have recognized God's unexpected and extravagant mercy and have responded to it by becoming a follower of Christ then we have received the perfect gift. A gift like that calls for a very specific response: Surrender.

Going Deeper:

Let's review again our key text, Romans 12:1 ***"Therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."***

Paul knew that he was writing to people who understand that responding to any "god", involved a sacrifice. Jews, Greeks and Romans all understood a very simple concept: to thank any "god" you gave a sacrifice. The Old Testament is filled with teachings that either call for or describe sacrifices that are made as an act of worship or thanks and Paul picks up on that pattern. But there is a significant difference here: the sacrifice that we are called to make in response to God's mercies is *a living sacrifice*. No animal dies, no blood is spilt, and no loss of future offspring occurs in this sacrifice.

But what exactly is a living sacrifice?

The passage itself has a very simple pattern to it. There is a command, a motivation and a reason. The command is to offer your body as a living sacrifice. The motivation is to respond to the mercies of God. The reason is that it is the spiritual act of worship that God desires. The point of Paul's command is simple: God desires that we recognize and respond to his incredible mercies by offering our entire lives, holding absolutely nothing back.

Eugene Peterson captured this thought in his Message: *Take your everyday ordinary life -- your sleeping, eating going to work and walking around life and place it before God as an offering.*

In other words: surrender. Hold nothing back. Capitulate control of your life and live for God in absolutely every area. That is how we need to respond to the mercies of God: with our entire lives as a living sacrifice.

- How does the idea of surrendering control of your life feel to you?
- Do you struggle with surrender or do you find it easy to yield control to God?
- Are there areas of your life where you really struggle to surrender control to God? Can you share those areas with the group?
- Do you find yourself motivated to respond to the mercies of God?
- Would you consider living your entire life as a sacrifice for the purposes of God?
- Have you been taught somewhere along the line that such a life is really only for professionals like priests, nuns and pastors?

Read 1 Samuel 15: 17-23

The idea of surrendering to God is not just a N.T. concept. Saul was the King of Israel but was struggling to follow the clear instructions of the LORD. He was driven by his fears and a sense of obligation that led him to make many disobedient choices. In the passage you just read Samuel the prophet arrived to confront Saul about his actions.

- In essence, what was Samuel's real question for Saul? (v19)
- How did Saul respond to Samuel's question?
- Was that an honest response?
- Please take very careful note of verses 22-23: what does God delight in?
- How serious is rebellion and arrogance as far as God was/is concerned?
- In your opinion, if Saul had surrendered control of his life to the LORD, would any of this have happened?
- Would you agree that a surrendered life would be characterized by obedience and heeding God's clear voice?

Read Romans 6: 11-18

In this section of Romans Paul is making a very serious point and is doing so by using a very common illustration from his culture: slavery. In essence, he was suggesting that we are going to either be slaves to sin, or slaves to righteousness. As difficult as it is for us to wrap our heads around the image of slavery, the principle he was advancing is crucial to grasp: we are either surrendered to the power of sin or we are surrendered to the control of God.

- What do you think it means to count ourselves alive to Christ?
- What would it look like to offer parts of our bodies to sin?
- Does it encourage you to hear the words of verse 14: *For sin shall not be your master?*
- Do you think/feel that Paul was right when he said that we are slaves to whatever we choose to obey?
- How does verse 18 make you feel? Are you able to recognize that the mercies of God are such that you have been set free and therefore are a slave of righteousness?
- If you give control of your life to God, would that make you a slave of righteousness?

This is only a Test:

Let's do a quick test regarding surrendering control of your life to God. Have you surrendered control of your:

- Money?
- Sexuality?
- Power?

For thousands of years now followers of Christ have understood these three to be the ultimate litmus test of our willingness to surrender control to God. Whether it was monastic vows of poverty, celibacy and a service or simply recognizing that these were the areas we needed to most surrender and trust God, Christ followers knew that these three areas could hinder their transformation. Do you recognize the challenges and have you surrendered? Are you willing to trust God completely and offer your money, sexuality and desire to control as a living sacrifice?

Responding to the Truth

The mercies of God and the freedom that are ours in Christ are an extravagant gift of grace. Are we willing to respond to them by surrendering to God and willingly grow in obedience? Are we willing to respond to this truth and really surrender all? Surrender involves both an initial decision to surrender control and a daily (sometimes hourly) decision to keep on surrendering in specific situations. There are many hymns and prayers of surrender – is it time to use one of them as a prayer for your next step of surrender?

Prayer Time

As a group praise the Lord for his mercies, grace and the freedom that is ours in Christ! Pray that we would grow in the ability to surrender until our lives are a living sacrifice. Perhaps sing the old hymn / *Surrender All* together as a closing prayer.

Foundational Truth:

Jesus said that we cannot serve two masters. (Matt. 6:24) There can only be one person in control of your life and that person is the one who extended great grace and mercies to you. Surrendering to his will is the pathway to genuine transformation.