

Chapter 16

The Issue of Control

Surrender is not a panacea to all of life's problems. It is not a quick spiritual fix. **It is a way of life.** You will never "arrive" at the place of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity does not come from any accomplishments but rather from the recognition of what we are and feel and our willingness to surrender it all. You may have a point of beginning but never a point of ending. You simply become more in tune to the Holy Spirit as He works in your heart. As you start surrendering your honest motives and feelings, it's like an onion being peeled. You think you're at a level of truth and then the Holy Spirit reveals more areas of deceit. If you walk in surrender long enough, you will face head-on the issue of control.

Control comes in many forms. Some women are so obviously controlling that people flee to escape their clutches. But just because a woman is not obvious about it, doesn't mean she isn't controlling. The silent martyr, the meek manipulator, the headstrong bully, all have one goal: to control others. And control is about power. This power is ultimately self-serving as it protects the heart and meets the needs of the ego.

I am controlling. It is in my nature. God has shown me through the years just how important control is to me. Since I don't fit the normal description of a controlling person, I was unaware it was there for a long time. I don't try to control my physical environment. My area of control was with situations and relationships. I was constantly determining the outcome of a relationship and then trying to force the situation to bring about that outcome. I call it "writing the end of the story." All of us do it to some degree. And in some areas of life, such as the business world, this is not necessarily bad. We have to have a plan of action, goals, and direction. But what works in the secular world can be destructive in the spiritual realm.

When we write the end of the story in spiritual matters, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. God first taught me this lesson in a very dramatic manner. We had been taking unwed mothers into our home for about a year. All of the young women who came to us loved me! I was their

surrogate mother, and they basked in my love and attention. Until Susan came. She hated me. I could do



nothing right. My cooking was terrible, my mothering a failure, and she wanted nothing to do with me. Once when I tried to comfort her by putting my arm around her, she threw it off and hissed, "Don't you EVER do that to me again!" I wished I could say that Susan changed. But she left our home as hateful as she came. It was I who did the changing. God showed me through this experience that I had a "Savior complex." I had written the end to Susan's story before she ever crossed our threshold. I would show her love and compassion and she would change because of my actions. I expected her to perform to my specifications, and when she didn't, I was angry and defensive.

At that point God asked me, "Who are you doing this for?" Ouch! I had to take an honest look at my motives. I came to the inescapable conclusion that I was secure in my spirituality when I was receiving "warm fuzzies." But I was hurt and angry when Susan had the nerve to not see me in the noble role in which I had cast myself. I thought I was full of unconditional love. What I had was a counterfeit version of unconditional love—my own. When I came against a very unlovable young lady, my love was exposed for what it was — self-serving. And so, I surrendered that part of my heart and asked God to fill it with His unconditional love. I was incapable of loving unconditionally. Over the years, that prayer was repeated often!

In order to grow spiritually, we must quit writing the end of the story. It takes real honesty to recognize when we are doing it. But it happens in friendships, romances, Christian relationships, spiritual pursuits, etc. We don't mean to do it. We think our intentions are pure. But in reality, we set

ourselves up for disappointments when we write a script for God or others to follow. It is so much less stressful and disappointing when we admit we don't know the end of the story and that God is a much better author anyway. As we yield our will to His, we will be amazed at how the story unfolds. He won't disappoint us because we didn't write a script for Him to follow—He wrote it for us. It's like walking along a path God has prepared, not knowing the destination but simply reveling in the beauty along the way!

The next time you meet someone whom you would like to have as a friend or whom you would like to help, notice how often you start writing the end of the story. It happens often especially when we, as Christians, reach out to non-Christians. As much as we hate to admit it, we see the whole scenario in our mind's eye from the very beginning. First, we help this poor, needy sinful person. They respond with gratitude. They then inquire about our faith, which they see in our example. We share Christ with them, and they accept. They change their lifestyle, join the church (where everyone knows it was our good deed that got them there) and live happily ever after. We have just written the entire script for their life—and they just meet us!

But if they respond in a very human reaction of taking our offerings and spitting in our face, they have really let us down! Only then does the question rear its ugly head: "Who did you do this for?" How much better it is to "simply walk in a path prepared by God and let Him change hearts. It means we must give up control. But we also give up frustration, anxiety, and disappointment when people fail our expectations. The recipient of our attention also comes out ahead. They don't have to perform to an unwritten script; they are simply accepted for who they are. Our gift is given without strings, and they are free to accept or reject it without incurring our anger and disappointment. This runs totally contrary to worldly wisdom, but it is the essence of a surrendered and God-centered heart.

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Control. Sometimes it is annoying. Yet in its extreme, it can suck the life and joy out of another. All control is based on the lie that we can change another person's attitudes and actions. The controller knows best what the other person needs, how the other person should think, act, feel, etc.

When you think of control you often think of an angry bully. But there are so many ways people control others.

Silence, exploitation, guilt, moodiness, minimizing feelings and much more. It is often used out of fear, pain or superiority - none of which are from God. When someone tries to control another, it destroys the potential for a real, honest relationship. All women, at a deep level, want to be heard, accepted and loved unconditionally. The very nature of control puts conditions on a person that require dishonesty in order to have a relationship.

Surrender is the opposite of control. Surrender is saying we give up control to a sovereign God. When we accept Jesus, we are saying we can't control our lives and we ask Him in to take over. We are saying that He knows us, loves us and has a purpose for us. He accepts us completely. This view of God cannot coexist with control. And this is why Surrender is so hard.

And the truth is, we really have no control, period. Take a few minutes to meditate on the following Bible passages. Then write after each one how this speaks to you about control and God's sovereignty in your life.

Jeremiah 29:11 - *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* Example: God loves me and wants the best for me. It may not look like what I want but when I trust him, I know He's in it!

Joshua 1:9 - *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*

Psalms 64:4-5 *Sing praises to God and to his name! Sing loud praises to him who rides the clouds. His name is the Lord -rejoice in his presence! Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy.*

Isaiah 41:10 - *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Matthew 11:28 - *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Psalms 9:10 - *And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.*

Philippians 4:6 - *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

What are some areas in which you struggle with control?

MEMORY VERSE

*And those who know your name put their
trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not
forsaken those who seek you.*

Psalms 9:10

Chapter 17

God's Upside-Down Kingdom

God's ways are the opposite of man's. In a sense, God's kingdom is "upside down." Think about what is important to man: power, control, money, physical beauty, material possessions, social status, personal comfort, etc. If these things had been important to God, it surely would have reflected in Jesus' position and lifestyle while on earth. God could have sent Jesus into any situation He wanted. But when we measure Jesus by those things that man deems important, He comes out a total failure. Consider the following:

The Jews were looking for a Savior to come in power and might, who would deliver them from their oppressors. Instead, Jesus came as a meek man preaching such "cowardly" messages as found in Matthew 5:39: *"But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."*

Men use the force of armies and navies to maintain their power on land and sea. Jesus had only a ragtag band of reject followers who were told that they would be persecuted, reviled, and even put to death for their faithfulness.

Throughout history, beauty has been one of the most important assets women revere. Christ could have come down as the most magnificent human being ever to have been created. Yet from the writings of historians of that time, we know that Christ was in fact, a homely man.

Material possessions were and are an indicator of one's success in life. We even have television shows that do nothing but glorify the magnificent homes and opulent possessions of the rich and famous. Contrast this to Christ's own description of His lifestyle as found in Matthew 8:20: *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*

In Jewish culture, even if a person had few possessions, little power, or were not physically attractive; if they had the proper lineage, they were still ensured a position of respect in society. The Jewish society was organized

by family, clan, and tribe. One's genealogy was an important part of one's identity. Descent from a respected forefather could bring social, political, and religious prestige. The genealogy of Jesus is traced for us, back to Abraham in the Gospel of Matthew and to Adam in the Gospel of Luke to show that He was a son of David as



prophesied. But the circumstances surrounding his conception cast Him into the worst social status possible—as the illegitimate son of a peasant girl.

It appears that God has a different set of standards from ours. He could have brought His Son into this world as anything He wanted. Men, wanting heroes so badly, would have followed Him for all the wrong reasons. Reasons like beauty, wealth, power, prestige, status, family name, and social position. Instead, Christ came into this world as the opposite of *everything* that man deems important. There was nothing to distract from His message. *If men followed Him, it was because His word struck their hearts.*

Chapter 17

God's Upside-Down Kingdom

Many of the key teachings of Jesus on spirituality are expressed in paradox. A paradox is a statement that on first glance is wrong or contradictory but upon closer thought reveals a deeper spiritual truth. In one line can you write the lesson that is being taught in the below scriptures about what man values and what God values?

Matthew 19:30 *But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.*

For example: Being important, wealthy or powerful in this world means nothing to God in His world.

1 Corinthians 15:36-38 *What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed.*

Matthew 10:39 *If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.*

2 Corinthians 12:10 *That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Romans 6:18 *Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.*

Philippians 3:7-8 *I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ*

Matthew 20:26-28 *But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

MEMORY VERSE

*That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the
insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer
for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
2 Corinthians 12:10*

Chapter 18

The Heart of the Matter



If you read the four gospels, you will notice a common theme. All of Christ's teachings and words pointed to one thing: the condition of man's heart. In John 8:2–10, we find the story of the adulterous woman. The Pharisees caught her in the act and brought her to Jesus. The Jewish law commanded that she be stoned, and they wanted to know what He would say. *"But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'"*

You see, the woman, like the tax- gatherer, *knew* she was a sinner. Christ told her to *"Go and sin no more."* On the other hand, the Pharisees did not even recognize themselves as sinners. Yet Christ compared the Pharisees, who were the most respected religious group in His society, to corpses who were wrapped white on the outside but were rotting on the inside.

The words spoken by David thousands of years before Christ still held true in Christ's time, as they do now: *"A broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise"* (Psalm 51:17). Man has set up religious systems on earth that include hierarchy, power, prestige, popularity, possessions, and status. While these things are both the creation and natural result of man's institutions, their existence cannot change one person's heart. No position, religion, or institution can change a person's heart. Only God changes hearts and *our hearts are the only thing God wants.*

Man builds crystal cathedrals and ornate churches as an offering to God. Yet, if you think about it, it is the height of arrogance to think that we can impress God with our creations. God Himself states this very thing in Isaiah 66:1–2 when He says: *"Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool; where is the house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,' declares the LORD. 'But to this one I will look: to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'"* I believe that throughout history man has found it much easier to build magnificent cathedrals than to surrender his heart to God.

Chapter 18

The Heart of the Matter

Let's look at what happened after David stopped lying to God and trying to impress Him with outward appearance while hiding terrible sin in the back rooms of his heart. After this, David finally got real with himself and with God. **Psalm 51** records the changed David. Use the following verses to answer these questions.

1. What attributes of God were called upon to “blot out the stain of my sins”?

1 Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.
2 Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

2. How is this different than his attitude and behavior before?

3 For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.
4 Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight.
You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

3. What does God desire from David (and us)?

From the womb” means throughout one’s life, from the beginning.

5 For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.
6 But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.

4. Look at these verses. This isn’t about David doing FOR God, it is all about God changing David’s heart.

Write down some things David asks God to do?

7 Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
8 Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice.
9 Don’t keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.
11 Do not banish me from your presence, and don’t take your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and make me willing to obey you.

5. What sacrifice does God want from David? From us?

13 Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you.

14 Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.

15 Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.

16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

6. David resumes the sacrifices required by the law but what is the difference from before his repentance?

18 Look with favor on Zion and help her; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit— with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

MEMORY VERSE

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.
Psalm 19:14*

Chapter 19

Without Guile

“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47). Jesus said this of Nathanael upon meeting him. Obviously, Christ felt that being without guile was a commendable trait. But what exactly does it mean? *Guile* is another word for *deceit*. But it means a more personal, subtle form of deceit. It is what feeds such things as denial, repression, and manipulation.

There are some people, like Nathanael, who truly have no guile. They are very transparent and open. They accept people at face value, and, since they have no guile themselves, they are bewildered when they are faced with wickedness and deceit in others. But truly guileless people are rare. They are both refreshing and frustrating at the same time. They simply cannot “connect” with those of us who wallow in the muck and the mire of our wicked human nature.

I have shared the message of surrender and my “black little heart” with a few of these guileless people. They *try* to grasp what I am saying and often understand intellectually that man is basically evil, but they can’t imagine the kind of manipulative deceit and wickedness of which I speak. I am not suggesting they are sinless. But because they are transparent with themselves and with others, their motives are more often pure, and their reactions are more kind.

I used to observe people like this and want so bad to be like them. (Martha Jo was guileless, of course.) I would get up every day and try to have that pure heart and kind spirit. But it is impossible to take one’s “black little heart” and transform it through this type of effort. An absence of guile, like humility, is a by-product of surrender.

When we start being honest with ourselves and our motives and surrender all that we find in our hearts to God, guile is unmasked and exposed. Our prayer should be as the Psalmist’s: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way.”* As a person walks in surrender and

recognizes guile in their heart as soon as God reveals it, they do become “without guile.” The natural outcome is a lack of guile that it is not founded in a *lack* of deceit but rather in a *recognition* of deceit! God sums it up in Jeremiah 17:9: *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart...”* God knows the condition of our “black little heart.” All He wants from us is to know it, too, and surrender it to Him.



Chapter 19

Without Guile

Surrender is not a one-time act. It is something that we do for a lifetime. Things change. As they do there are new hurts, offenses and emotional upheaval. But your first acts of surrender should start with what is in your heart right now. Go back to your lists you made in chapter five, ten, thirteen and sixteen. Find a place of quiet privacy.

First, face the truth. Don't shrink from this. It is what it is with or without your honesty. And God knows. Ask God to show those things to you in all of their destructive ugliness.

Second, cup your hands in front of you. Then close your eyes and see Jesus on the cross. He is looking at YOU. In His eyes you see only oceans of love and complete acceptance.

Third, in your mind's eye, place the ugly heart issue into your cupped hands. Look at it for all of its destructiveness. Be bold. Be honest.

Fourth: Say, "Dear Jesus, I give you my _____.
I can't fix it. I can't change it. I can't control it. I can only surrender it to you. I leave it with you Jesus."

Fifth: Open your hands and physically leave it at the foot of the cross.

Do this with each thing on your list. Do this when the "theater of your mind" wants to play revenge. Do this when you feel the ugly feelings stirring in your heart. Do this daily, sometimes moment by moment.

If you do, the chains of hurt, betrayal, abuse, terrible choices and all else that keeps you in bondage will drop away one by one. As you surrender, the links open and drop away. Isn't this the greatest paradox of all? When you surrender you have VICTORY.