



*Beautiful*  
**SURRENDER**

LENT WITH CARMEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Beautiful SURRENDER

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. -Ecclesiastes 3:1*

On Ash Wednesday we enter the season of Lent. What is this time for? Lent comes from the old English word, lencten, meaning “lengthen” or “springtime.” Spring is a time when the days are lengthening. Lent marks the six-week period before Easter, a time of spiritual growth, a time to stretch our spiritual lives and to lengthen our connection to God. As a church we enter Lent as a season of Beautiful Surrender. Our text is Matthew 5:17-47 and together we explore the beautiful surrender of Jesus, who gave his life for us that we might live for him. In our times together in Lent Groups, we invite the Holy Spirit to lead us in surrendering our ways that we might receive the way of Christ and find our fulfillment in Him.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Small Group Weekly Rhythm	5
Surrender Perfection Discover Life	4
Surrender Anger Discover Agreement	6
Surrender Appetite Discover Abundance	8
Surrender Control Discover Sincerity	10
Surrender Vengeance Discover Prayer	12
NOTES	14

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# small group rhythm

**STORY OF SURRENDER:** *Read the story together or on your own. Take a few moments to re-read and take notes on how their story might relate to your own. What is God trying to teach you here?*

**REFLECT:** *Spend some time thinking about and answering the supplied questions or asking yourself other questions that came to mind while you read.*

**REFRAME:** *Read the passage for the week together. How does Jesus reframe the topic he is teaching on, and how does that impact our understanding and touch our lives in a new way?*

**RELINQUISH:** *Pray this short prayer of repentance after taking a few moments to ponder what God has for you through this story and scripture today.*

**REPEAT:** *A few practices that can help move us toward a fulfilling life in Jesus. Consider incorporating one or two into your weekly rhythm.*



**...take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you."**

**Ephesians 4:24 (The MSG)**

## GROWTH OVER ARRIVAL:

I have never worried much about where I ended up professionally. I have always felt as though my next steps were Providentially guided. I always stayed open to options and possibilities and to God's intent. Jeremiah 29:11 and Colossians 3:23 were my guideposts. The perfect job was not as important to me as striving in the journey to be as perfect in intent and practice as I could be—tethered deeply to honor, obligation, and Christian ethics.

What bothered me was this: the personal side of the journey and how often I failed in achieving the perfect personal journey. My sins were manifold and failings were sometimes a surprise and always disappointing. Matthew 5:48 was a chasm for me... "Be perfect. Therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Really? What does that mean?

In that inquiry I realized that in the entirety and context of the Beatitudes and throughout scripture, Love itself becomes a perfect wholeness—that our striving should be toward our intent to love and that "perfect love" is not in our power. Working to reflect God's perfect love is wholly within our obligation as images of God. We are not perfected by actions or performance. We are perfected by God's grace and through Christ's sacrifice of love.

I think about Abraham and his perfection of trust, of Job and his perfection of patience and resilience, of David and his perfection through repentance and Peter through restoration...there are so many examples that God has given us in Scripture that exemplify "perfect Perfection." We best achieve Christian perfection by discerning and understanding human failure. We learn by the journey more than by the destination.

We are made perfect by God's Grace made manifest in our efforts toward an intentional journey. To surrender perfection is to discover life through the process of loving faithfully, prizing growth over arrival, experiencing joy in giving, repenting over pridefulness and working intentionally toward wholeness of our hearts. Christian perfection is not about being a success or failure. Christian perfection is manifest in our unwillingness to walk away from love, truth, responsibility and gratitude for God's grace.

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## REFLECT

1. When in your life have you tried to "go your own way" and not rely on God?
  2. Where have you withdrawn because of a fear of failure?
  3. Where might faithfulness energize the courage to discover and grow?
  4. How has your image of "perfection" narrowed your discovery of life?
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**REFRAME** MATTHEW 5:17-20 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

#### OTHER SCRIPTURES:

EXODUS 20:1-17

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

## RELINQUISH

*Heavenly Father, I come before You today acknowledging that I have tried to be the god of my own existence by chasing a standard I was never meant to reach.*

*Lord, I relinquish my need to have it all together. I surrender my rigid standards, my ruthless inner critic, and the belief that my worth is tied to my productivity. Empty me of my self-reliance so that I may be filled with Your grace. Teach me that true 'holy perfection' is found not in doing things perfectly, but in surrendering to Your will and trusting that Your strength is made perfect in my weakness.*

*I place my life, my work, and my mistakes into Your hands, knowing You are the one who completes the good work within me. Amen.*



**Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans...**

**-Colossians 3:23 (NRSV)**

## REPEAT

- Try something new this week, perhaps something you know you won't be good at. Prayerfully and intentionally approach whatever it is with a heart willing and ready to hear what God has to teach you through that experience.
- Write about your own experience with failure and how it shaped you. Consider sharing your story with someone in a younger generation.
- Instead of making a “to do” list this week, try making a “to be” list. Who do I want to be today? A listener, a grace-giver, one who finds joy in others? Make your list.

# Surrender Anger DISCOVER AGREEMENT

by Greg Ogden

## THE SLOW THAW OF RECONCILIATION

From the start, the relationship with my new boss faltered. Lily and I had moved to Pittsburgh, for a position on a church staff ministering to university students. I arrived as a 26-year-old assistant pastor with all the answers. Our ministry styles clashed. Doug was a do-it-all minister while I had been trained to entrust the ministry to a team. He kept an emotional distance while I believed pastors should be closely connected. I wanted weekly meetings with heartfelt interchange and strategy sessions and Doug didn't seem to mind if weeks went by without a singular meeting. Finally, after two years, my frustration and my anger boiled over.

Facing each other in Doug's office, I finally said, "For two years I wanted a relationship with you. Your 'open door' policy says I must always make the first move." Doug replied, "Is there anything else?" I hesitated. "You seem to have built an ego-satisfying ministry—you at the center of everything." I wanted to stuff those words back into my mouth. The damage had been done. His response is forever seared into my brain. "If you are at the point of questioning my motives, I don't see a basis for our relationship." He stood. Pointed to the door. The meeting was over. But thank God it was not over. Both of us felt the shame of the breakdown. We knew that this was not right. Reconciliation came as a slow thaw—true appreciation conquered the bitterness. My last day in the office, as I was packing books, readying for a move back to CA, Doug's six-foot-four-inch frame filled the doorway, his face wearing his Cheshire-cat grin. He threw his arms around me. That hug contained the joy of triumphal reconciliation. I came to see that the Lord settles for nothing less.

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### REFLECT

1. How is God reframing Anger and Reconciliation in your life?
  2. What role do unmet expectations often have in declining relationships?
  3. What role does confession have in reconciliation?
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**REFRAME** MATTHEW 5:21-25 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister,

'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

**GENESIS 4:5-8** "...but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

**PROVERBS 14:29** Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.

## RELINQUISH

*O Lord, our life is full of slights, misunderstandings, and even broken promises that provoke anger within us. We acknowledge that behind every angry emotion is some word or deed that triggers hurt. Please give us discernment for how to deal with these daily occurrences. For most of these, Lord, help us to let them go, knowing we have received bountifully from the reservoir of Your grace that has covered a multitude of sins. For other offenses, give us fortitude to approach someone who has hurt us with a desire to name the offense, but in a spirit of reconciliation. Search us Oh God we pray.  
In the bountiful name of Jesus, Amen.*



**Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

**-Psalm 139:23-24**

## REPEAT

- When you are angry at the person that cut you off on the road, try taking a deep breath and asking God's peace to cover your anger and soften your heart.
- Next time you are ready to fire off an angry email, try writing it, reading it and then deleting it. Consider reading it as if it was addressed to you from someone else. How does this shift your perspective?
- Pray Psalm 139:23-24 everyday. Write it down somewhere where you know you'll lay eyes on it every morning and practice praying it slowly aloud to God.

## SURRENDERING FULFILLMENT ON THE WORLD'S TERMS

What biblical character do you most identify with? For me, it's the Prodigal Son. Surrounded by his father's provision, yet he spurned that love, determined to make his way on his own terms. We typically think of prodigals as those who reject God brashly, pursuing illicit worldly lusts with devil-may-care swagger. But I wonder if some of us still secretly harbor prodigal hearts, desperately grasping after the things of the world to fill what French theologian Blaise Pascal famously named "the God-shaped vacuum" in our hearts.

In my life, I've found myself quietly strolling out to that far prodigal country over and over again. My own dalliances with the world (apart from a stereotypically wild prodigal season as a teen) may not seem overtly idolatrous, phases in my life that have included photography, mountain biking, motorcycling, disastrous Audi ownership, guitar playing and various collecting forays. The draw for me? I love the idea of "the perfect thing," finding the best-known example anywhere in the world. In that longing for perfection, there is a longing for God that gets bent away from Him.

And so I relate to John Calvin, who wrote, "The human heart is a perpetual idol factory." Likewise, in his song "If I Stand," Christian singer Rich Mullins described the battle for our hearts' affections thus: "The stuff of Earth competes for the allegiance I owe only to the giver of all good things." Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom added, "Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open."

Indeed.

Each of those quotes, like facets in a kaleidoscope, gets at the temptation of pursuing something in the created order in search of fulfillment instead of trusting God to make good on His promises to fill us, promises we find in both the Old and New Testaments.

Learning to relax our grip on the world's promises has been a lifelong journey for me. It involves learning to place our trust in One whom we cannot see. It's an ongoing path of remembering God's goodness and relinquishing my own willfulness. And so, I keep coming back to the patient Father who stands waiting for His prodigal's return.

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### REFLECT

1. How is God reframing appetite and abundance in your life?
  2. What is something that's been filling the God-shaped void in your life?
  3. What do you think God is asking of you?
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**REFRAME** **MATTHEW 5:27-32**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

**PSALM 16:11** “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

## RELINQUISH

*Dear God, we believe, but help us with our unbelief. Help us to rest in Your goodness, to trust You to fill us, to relinquish our white-knuckled grip on the desires that will never fulfill us the way that only You can. May we receive with open arms and hands the abundant life You promise us. Amen.*



**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**

**-John 10:10**

## REPEAT

- Try living with less this week to serve as a reminder of the source of all things. Pause before your next purchase and ask yourself if you really need it before buying.
- Surrender to God this week by writing about it. Is there something that has taken the place of fulfillment in your life recently?
- Pray Psalm 16:11 as a prayer of thanksgiving everyday. Write it down somewhere where you know you'll see it every morning.
- Search "Prodigal Me" by Shane and Shane on your music streaming app and listen to the words.

# Surrender Control

## DISCOVER SINCERITY

by Ali Ashmead

## I MEAN, YES.

Being a parent to young boys (8, 10, 12) you can imagine how I'm constantly on the lookout for new parenting strategies. To be honest, a lot of the days—my only strategy is prayer (I'm way over my skis!) On a Wednesday, you'll hear me, *“Dear God, help! Take these boys and grow them into men—rooted in You, holding tight to the promise of your unconditional love, honoring You in their living, faithful to Your word. May they know You and be known by You so that regardless of circumstance—they move confidently, assured always of your steadfastness in their lives, loving others with sincerity, trusting You more each day.”*

But other days, a Thursday perhaps—without a mother or father of my own—I'm hunting down more practical wisdom (note to self: read up on raising emotionally intelligent boys) or I'm subject to unsolicited advice from parents who are at a stage beyond me. And it's not that I don't appreciate any and all advice—I want it, but the implementation feels a lot easier when things are calm and controlled and conflict isn't banging on my door. But today, I read this scripture in Matthew 5 that lands on my heart—a soft and sure conviction: *“Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.”*

Left to my own devices, I can be that parent with empty threats or promises—filling the air with more words than often necessary. “Do that again and I promise I'll take away screens for the week”—doing my very best to control the chaos and manipulate for obedience. But then these words!! Is it really as simple as this simple command? Relinquish control, speak plainly and sincerely. I think it's pretty profound advice for us all (parent or not). Especially in a world filled with so many words, lots of them empty promises and threats. The deep wisdom in the simple command of Jesus here: Relinquish selfishness and control and in so doing discover simplicity and sincerity. For me (and perhaps for you) it looks like surrendering the need for control and manipulation for selfish gain. The prayer is the place to start and a desire to Love like Jesus, which means living with sincerity and simplicity. Yes? Yes.

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## REFLECT

1. How is God reframing control and sincerity in your life?
  2. What is something tangible you need to relinquish control of this week?
  3. What does a promise mean to you?
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**REFRAME** **MATTHEW 5:33-37** “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

**2 CHRONICLES 2:17-18** “I know, dear God, that you care nothing for the surface—you want us, our true selves—and so I have given from the heart, honestly and happily. And now see all these people doing the same, giving freely, willingly—what a joy! O God, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep this generous spirit alive forever in these people always, keep their hearts set firmly in you.” (The Message)

## RELINQUISH

*Father God, thank you for making a way in our hearts and our lives. May our response always be Yes and Amen to You and to the work You’re doing. Help us to trust you more and release the desire to control or manipulate the circumstances of our lives. We know in our heads that You know what’s best, but we don’t always know in our hearts or live it out in our lives—forgive us Lord and help us to move openly and freely to the beat of Your drum. Amen.*



**But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.**

**-James 3:17**

## REPEAT

- Reflect on your conversations this week. Confess to God the ones where you were out for selfish gain or control of a circumstance.
- Try taking the words “I promise” out of your vocabulary this week, and reflect or write about what it felt like to do so. Share it with someone.
- Pray 2 Chronicles: “O God, God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Isreal, *give* us a generous spirit that is alive forever and keep our hearts set firmly on You.”
- Search “Yet Not I, but Through Christ in Me” by CityALight on your music streaming app and worship God.

# Surrender Vengeance

## DISCOVER PRAYER

by Jennifer Holz

### FROM VENGEANCE TO LOVE:

There were eleven of us who sat together around the living room that fall evening in 2006. Four couples and three babies who were sleeping in their car seats on the coffee table. We came together to listen and pray. One couple was going through the agony of the husband being wrongly accused of an awful crime, and they were desperate for a few others to walk with them through the terrible mess.

That night we formed a small community of support and care. We didn't know it then, but we would continue to gather twice a month over the next 18 years. By the time we moved to California, those three babies were 18 years old and our flock of kids had grown to 13. It would be years before our friend was fully exonerated, but the ongoing feeling of vengeance (a deep desire on many of hearts that the accusers fully experience the costly pain they had caused our friends) ebbed and flowed in continuous waves as weeks turned to months turned to years.

As I reflect on the years of battling this ugly desire for revenge, I am keenly aware that it was vulnerability and steadfast trust in God that transformed my heart to a heart of compassion and love. But that didn't come from me, it came from the couple who lost almost everything in the legal process and daily submitted themselves to the mercy of God. Because they had to and because they wanted to. They led our prayer times and showed us how not to become hard-hearted. They reminded us who the real enemy was and that praying God's Word was our most valuable tool to keep our hearts soft and hopeful.

It dawned on me at some point in those years that I needed this community of love as much as our friends did. Maybe more. The journey out of vengeance didn't happen immediately, it was a continuous surrender over time with others in prayer. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, said Jesus. A difficult ask. So we learned to ask. Because only Jesus can accomplish this in us.

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### REFLECT

- 1. How can you demonstrate grace to someone who does not deserve it?**
  - 2. How does loving our enemies set us apart from the world?**
  - 3. Reflect (and share) about a time that you received mercy from someone when you know you didn't deserve it—how did it make you feel?**
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**REFRAME** **MATTHEW 5:38-48** “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well, and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

#### OTHER SCRIPTURES:

EXODUS 21:23-24

LEVITICUS 19:18

## RELINQUISH

*Lord, Your Word tells me to pray for those who mistreat me and to love my enemies. Honestly, I don't feel that love right now, so I'm asking You to provide what I lack. I ask that You would bless them—not because they deserve it, but because You are good. Heal any wounds in their life that cause them to act out in ways that are difficult for others.*

*While You work on them, please work on me. Protect my heart from bitterness, anger, and resentment. I release my need to be “right” or to see them fail. I leave them in Your hands, trusting that Your justice and Your mercy are far better than mine. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



**Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.**

**I am the Lord.**

**-Leviticus 19:18**

## REPEAT

- Before you go to bed this week, light a candle and open your bible to Numbers 6:24-26. Pray this blessing over each person you encountered throughout the day.
- Decide a few days this week that you will “fast” from screens, information and news cycles. Instead, use that time to catch up with a neighbor, bake something for someone or play a game with your family or housemates. Notice how your heart and mind respond to these choices.
- Practice Matthew 4:42 this week: “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

**THOUGHTS**

**NOTES**

**PRAYERS**

**MUSINGS**

**WORDS**

**IDEAS**

**HOPES**

**REMINDERS**

**MEMOS**

**ITEMS**



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