

**“Thrive”**: Forging a Vital Faith  
**Pivot---** The Movement(s) of Surrender  
**Text:** Romans 8:31-39  
**1.27.19**



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“Has your family done any of the ancestry testing? Did you find out anything surprising about your heritage?”*

*“Have you ever had anyone suggest to you during a challenging season that you should ‘Let go and let God?’ What does that mean to you? How do you read it with Philippians 2:12-13? Is it God or is it me?”*

*“Where is the place where you would say that your will is running head-on into God’s will? How is that showing up in your life/relationships?”*

*“Is your determination to maintain control of your life resulting in greater levels of peace/confidence or fear?”*

*“What is it that you believe to be true of God that prevents you from trusting him?”*

*“In what area(s) of your life are you finding it difficult to surrender? Are you able to trust without a ‘contingency plan’?”*

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### **Teaching Notes...**

**Because ‘blessing’ is the framework for all of creation (“It is good”), it gives us some place to which we might return. It provides the context for any talk of restoration.**

It’s in our DNA. “**23andme**” traced my family’s origins back to Ireland. It connected me, genealogically, to Sir Walter Raleigh. It outlined our movement from the ‘mother-land’ to Virginia; from Virginia to Kentucky; from Kentucky to Ohio. All novel discoveries, but it left some glaring gaps in my development.

What it didn't provide was the answer to such questions as:

**“If we were created in the image of God, why aren't our strongest inclinations toward him?”**

**“If we were created for dependence, why is control our default response?”**

**“If I really believed that God was good, I would be less hesitant to trust him with \_\_\_\_\_.”**

*“What happened in Eden may be hard to understand, but it makes everything else understandable.”*

Peter Kreeft

**The most primal tension we face seems to have been initiated when the talking snake said, “You will be like God” (Genesis 3).**

Strangely, we were already 'God-like', in that we were image-bearers. We were called to assume our rightful place as his representatives. To live under an *“authoritative, singular voice”*. To reflect his will and desires in his world. We heard another voice--- a competing voice--- and we determined that we would live as 'self-sufficient'; 'self-explanatory'.

Once humanity is outside of the boundaries of dependence, we see this entire pattern of suspicion, and fear, and control, set in motion.

**Until you come to terms with a benevolent God, you will never feel safe in his world.**

According to Jesus (Matthew 5-7), if you are “pre-occupied”, “anxious”, and “obsessed with security”, your operative image of God is either indifferent or hostile.

In Exodus 33, we are let in on some 'body-cam recordings' of a conversation between Moses and God. *“Show me your glory”*. God's 'glory' was always associated with his presence; his significance; what makes God, God.

**Exodus 34:4-7 [read]**

First thing we learn (baseline) is that God is **compassionate** and **gracious**. In Hebrew, it's a word pairing in which one helps reinforce the other.

**'compassionate'**- merciful; from root of female womb (God feels like a mother does toward her infant child). Isaiah 49:15 *“Can a mother...”* It's a 'feeling' word.

**'gracious'**- 'to show favor'; 'to help someone in time of need'. It's an action word.

With incredible patience and passion, God tries in various ways to communicate to our hearts that ***we are special*** and that ***he is good and can be trusted***; but another urge in us keeps reminding us that ***we are broken*** and we ***can't risk losing control***. Control is one of the primary mechanisms we have for fending off heartache and pain.

**I hear:** *“I’m on my own in this world. I must learn how to provide for myself because no one else really cares”.* **Jesus says:** Father is good and Father is aware. He sees when birds fall and the hairs that fill up your sink trap. Your obsessive pursuits are counter-productive and a poor use of your time and resources.

**I hear:** *“I must maintain control; otherwise, I will lose the ability to ensure the life that I desire”.* **Jesus says:** Father can be trusted and has never given humanity any reason to doubt his good intentions toward us.

### **Control is managing our lives as to eliminate our need for trust. It’s too risky.**

Control attempts to manage risks for favorable outcomes. Faith engages in risky obedience and relinquishes outcomes to God.

Anytime that our sense of identity and worth are not settled in love, we must take life into our own hands. If we are not the *‘beloved’* (Ephesians 1), we must perform. If we are not the *‘cared-for-ones’* (Philippians 4), we must strive. If the resources for life are not naturally made available to us, we turn to *subsistence living*.

### **The challenge with of our self-imposed strategies is that they all “work”... to some degree.**

[Hebrews 11:25]

Enough pleasure to keep us coming back, but not enough to risk surrender. We are never satisfied, but at least we feel ‘full’. All of us have mastered the art of ***re-purposing fig leaves!***

We can shape them into any number of “knock-off versions of wholeness”: control, shopping, food, noise, productivity, sex, victimization.

### **Good faith must always result in “surrender”.**

#### **Surrender often comes after a long bout with God.**

**Surrender:** We are a people who are learning to trust in God’s goodness and his good intentions for us and who are courageously and voluntarily living into his will for us.

Surrender is rarely appealing because life has chipped away at our capacity to trust. We’ve been violated. Trust has been abused. The guarded-life seems our only other option.

You can’t honestly pray, *“Nevertheless, your will be done and not mine”* (Luke 22:42), until you have realized places in your life where your will and God’s come into direct conflict and you are confident enough in his will that you are willing to defer.

### **Life always requires a response from us, and surrender is the “yes” that initiates the life-long journey of transformation--- growing into who you are in God.**

Surrender is the “pivot”. It’s the “re-direct”. It’s the moment(s) when we have an encounter (crisis) which awakens us to our need for a renewed response.

It is not the “yes” of absolute clarity, or the “yes” of unwavering confidence, but the “yes” of humility that signals our willingness to cooperate despite our lingering questions. It’s not passivity. It’s not about succumbing to life or resignation, but it is about taking responsibility for who you are becoming.

**Know that there can be no other legitimate motivation for surrender than ‘trust’. Trust is invoked by love.**

While it is certainly true that if God is the Creator and we are the created, he has absolute right over us, but, given that he IS love (and has created us for love), he refuses to use his God-ness to overwhelm or coerce us. His love is always a “*compelling love*” (2 Cor.5).

***“Sin is unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness.”***

St. Ignatius of Loyola

**You will never know a God that you won’t seek.  
You’ll never seek a God that you don’t think is good.  
You will never love a God that you don’t know.  
You’ll never trust a God that you don’t know and love.**

**Here’s the counter-intuitive nature of the gospel:**

**We assume that control is the antidote to anxiety when, in reality, it is “surrender”.**

Surrender is the one decision which makes available a strength that we can never experience in any other way: the tireless movement of God toward and in us: in a word... “*grace*” [James 4:6].

**We assume that the likely outcome of surrender will be “fear” (for having lost control), when in reality it is “peace”: the settled-confidence (inner-quietness) which comes as a result of not having to attempt to micro-manage your life and ensure that things work out the way that you had planned.**

The beauty of surrender is that it doesn’t require a great deal of clarity, only trust.