

BARRY L. ROWAN

THE
SPIRITUAL
ART
OF
BUSINESS

CONNECTING THE DAILY
WITH THE DIVINE



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PART 1



SURRENDERED

DISCOVERING FREEDOM IN SUBMISSION TO JESUS



As we surrender ourselves to God, we come into our most complete selves as the Spirit of Jesus occupies us and is expressed through us. We grow into better employees, better bosses, and better coworkers.



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1



COME, FOLLOW ME

*Those of you who do not give up everything
you have cannot be my disciples.*

LUKE 14:33

*Our natural inclination is to take control to
achieve independence, but surrender is the
first step on the path to true freedom.*

Jesus' first words to his disciple Peter were "Come, follow me" (Mark 1:17). They were also his last: "You must follow me" (John 21:22).

Our adventure with God begins with the decision to follow Jesus rather than our own desires. Surrender can be terrifying as we are asked to put everything on the table—our possessions, our careers, our pride, our freedom, indeed our very lives. Our natural instinct is to determine the course and lead the way. This challenge is compounded for us when we have leadership gifts we are used to exercising at work or in other aspects of our lives. In the matter of ultimate authority for our lives, however, we have to learn to follow. The best leaders are practiced followers.

In my experience, the station called Surrender is the only valid departure point for the journey toward a life of true meaning found in God. As we exchange our own plans for the plans of our Lord, it opens our eyes to see and pursue his call for our lives.



Relinquishment has become the mantra of the spiritual life for me. Surrender has revealed itself not only as the only way to step onto the Way, but also the only way to *stay* on the Way. It is the starting point . . . and the ending point.

Jesus, of course, is our greatest example of surrender. When he invites us to “Come, follow me,” he is not asking us to do anything he didn’t do. He did nothing apart from the Father. He came to earth with no agenda of his own—not to do his own will but to do the will of the one who sent him. His words were not his own, but rather they were the words the Father gave him. And in the end, he was obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Jesus knew what was coming for him when he chose to obey the Father’s will, and he tells us to count the cost of following him. And what is that cost? Only everything we have.

- “Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples” (Luke 14:33).
- “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25).
- “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24).

As we surrender to him, God transforms us from living a managed life to living a released life. Through our surrender, we give our gracious God permission to do his transforming work in us. He exposes the lies about our identity that we have lived by, replacing them with the truth that we are adopted sons and daughters of the Most High God. He sets us free to live into his design: life by the Spirit.

The process of reshaping, even as we wince under the pressure of the strong thumbs of the Potter, can become a source of great joy. As we live in joy, others will see the authenticity that comes from living

a life where we seek, and fail, and seek again to live into the fullness of the life he has promised.

In the preface I tell the story of how a sudden outburst of tears, while I was sitting on a rock in Colorado, forced me to face questions of the meaning of my life and work. In the days that followed, I had to submit to the confusion, embrace the pain, and follow the questions. As someone who had gone to church since childhood, now at nearly thirty I had to decide whether I really believed Jesus is who he said he is. If I believed, I couldn't escape his words "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." Give up *everything*? Everything hung on the answer!

I wrestled with this admonition for weeks. The resolution came one day while I was on a run around the lake near our home. I surrendered to Jesus. I simply said to him, "I give up." (But there were certainly heel marks in the sand.)

That was thirty-five years ago. Now, as I approach the conclusion of an executive career, I sense God leading me into an "encore calling" of prayer, writing, teaching, and holistic accompaniment. I believe this season includes investing in Christ-following leaders who are called to live fully for God in the world. But . . . I can't really see how any of this is going to turn out. I have no idea whether it will be helpful to others or fulfilling to me. I have to simply put one foot in front of the other.

So the call to surrender is still very much alive within me. It's at a deeper level now, but it's also grounded in a deeper trust.

Surrender is a lifelong process that continues its work until it has worked its way into every moment, every decision, and every action we undertake. For those who wish to practice the spiritual art of business, surrender is the ground of everything.

FOR REFLECTION

- Have you declared your unconditional surrender to Jesus?
Which parts of yourself, your life, or your career might you be

holding back? Do you know him well enough, and trust him enough, to give up everything you have?

- Are there parts of the idea of surrender that you still find scary? What do you worry about being called to give up as part of surrender?



2



GATEWAY TO FREEDOM

Not my will, but yours be done.

LUKE 22:42

*Abundance of life begins
with abandonment to God.*

When I was in business school, a class called Control was a part of the required curriculum. I can assure you that the school didn't offer one called Surrender. The idea of surrender runs directly counter to our human instincts. What military manual would suggest surrendering to win the hill? Name a business guru who gives a keynote speech on capitulation. However, arriving at the emptiness of other alternatives through painful experience, and guided by Scripture and the Spirit, I'm learning that we must pass through the gateway of surrender to experience true freedom.

A friend of mine used to say, "If it doesn't work for you, don't export it." This wisdom has contributed to my reluctance to share truths I've read but haven't yet lived. Now, though, after decades of following Jesus, I can say that my cup is overflowing with gratitude for the fullness of life Jesus provides as we surrender to him. It flows from surrender to God wholly and in every moment of our lives. Jean Pierre de Caussade, a French Jesuit priest born in the late 1600s, called it "abandonment to divine providence."



The vantage point of surrender provides the best opportunity to see God's will and his Word embedded in every moment of our lives. And as we submit to the lessons and presence of God in each moment, we give him permission to shape us into vessels that are carriers of God himself.

To be clear, surrender is not passivity. Christ's anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane is profound evidence that it often takes more strength to let go than to hang on. It's not easy for any of us to say, "Not my will, but yours be done," over and over. We need to learn to "endure hardship as discipline" (Hebrews 12:7), because learning this lesson is the only way our lives will be nudged into alignment with God's loving design for his kingdom.

My personal transformation has included God setting me free from a perfectionism that filled a reservoir with slow-burning resentment from living in a world that is not as it should be. He is redeeming this distortion into a healthier focus on continuous improvement of myself and the world. The true God has also had to remove the false god of achievement from the gilded throne I had built for it from my earliest years as a child.

This transformation has taken years, and God and I are still working on it—and probably will be for as long as I live on this earth. We'll be touching on this process more in the chapters to come. But here in the early part of our conversation, I can state that it has all been worth it—much more than worth it.

My experience has taught me that if we submit ourselves to God's will hidden in our daily circumstances, he will also set us free from tendencies that are not necessarily selfish but that limit our humanity and our leadership.

Early in my career we hired an employee who was highly competent technically but difficult to work with personally. This manager's demeanor was combative and inflexible, introducing tension into every meeting they attended. From our individual discussions,

I knew this outward rigidity was an expression of an interior wound-
edness, so I wanted to extend an extra measure of grace to this
person I was responsible for hiring. We worked together over an ex-
tended period of time to improve the employee's relational skills on
the job. Ultimately, though, I concluded that the disruption to the
team was just too much, and we had the difficult conversation that
ushered this manager out the door.

After the firing, virtually every person who had worked with this
employee approached me individually to say what a relief it was to
have this ill-fitting manager gone. Only then did I fully appreciate
the contortions the members of our team had been going through
in an effort to work with this one individual. I should have acted
more quickly.

This experience dramatically and permanently expanded my
understanding of compassion within the workplace. By narrowly
focusing my compassion on the individual, I was being uncom-
passionate to the organization as a whole. The cumulative stress and
stifled productivity of the team far outweighed any help I might
have been to their difficult coworker. Only through surrendering my
own limited notions of compassion would I gain the greater under-
standing I believe God was trying to teach me.

It was humbling. And freeing.

Those around us, and the voices from within, may call out,
"Control! Take charge of your life. Don't lose your grip on your destiny.
Protect yourself. Maintain your image." May we close our ears to
these lies.

Abundance of life begins with abandonment to God.

FOR REFLECTION

- Are there times in your life when you have abandoned yourself to God's providence and experienced his abundance? What lessons did you learn from those experiences?

- As you look at your life from your current vantage point, are there areas of your life where you sense God calling you to surrender to him so that you might receive more of his abundance?
- What parts of God's abundance do you particularly long for?

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