

# INDEPENDENCE IS OVERRATED

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LIVING IN VICTORIOUS SURRENDER



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# Contents

Introduction .....	11
1. Surrender Is Victorious? .....	13
2. Surrender's Sidekicks .....	21
Illustration: A Surrender Diagram.....	32
3. Surrender to the Lord's Power: Is He Almighty? .....	35
4. Surrender to the Lord's Promises: Will I Let Him Bless Me? .....	43
5. Surrender to the Lord's Purpose: Do I Believe He Has a Plan? ...	53
6. Surrender to the Lord's Precepts: Is He Truly My Lord? .....	61
7. Surrender to the Lord's Principles: Will I Please Him? .....	71
8. Surrender to the Lord's People Accountability: Will I Let Others Help Me? .....	83
9. Surrender to the Lord's People Responsibility: Will I Help Others? .....	91
Conclusion.....	101
Acknowledgments .....	103

## Chapter 1

# Surrender Is Victorious?

“In other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. . . . This process of surrender—this movement full speed astern—is what Christians call repentance.” C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

“Christians are not saved by summoning up their strength and accomplishing great deeds but by admitting their weakness and need for a Savior.” Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*

“I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” Jesus Christ, Matthew 18:3–4 (NLT)

## *Surrender Is Victorious?*

*I quit!*

There's an original thought. I wish it was the only time it crossed my mind. But alas, I remain far more human than I prefer. Nevertheless, *I quit* was my exact thought as I walked out of the Boys & Girls Club on an overcast winter day in my late teens.

My brothers had been spending time at the club boxing. I decided to join their pursuit, jumping rope and training on the heavy bag as well as the speed bag. The speed bag was my favorite. I thoroughly enjoyed the timing and accuracy needed to keep that bag pounding. My mind can still hear the "bapatta, bapatta, bapatta, bapatta" of a well-throttled speed bag.

For some reason, while relishing boxing's various training elements, I had not given much thought to actually boxing: getting in the ring, facing an opponent, dishing out "bapattas" while dodging the same. It just didn't cross my mind. Until a Boys Club staff trainer suggested I step through the ropes and spar with another would-be boxer. Hmmm. Why not? Unfortunately, the trainer gave me no advice as to who I might spar against. So, without guidance, I entered the ring facing a boxer who was 8–10 inches taller and 30–35 pounds heavier. For three, merciless, seemingly thirty-minute rounds, my opponent "bapatta'd" me into total submission.

*I quit!*

While some can completely appreciate my resignation, others might be saying, "Toughen up, Buttercup!" This is the conundrum we face with surrender. When, if ever, is it acceptable to quit? Is surrender ever wise or honorable? Or is the maxim "Winners never quit, and quitters never win" always true? It seems that our tendency is to side with the great Winston Churchill, "Never give up! Never surrender!" Except those words are not the ones he used. Over the years, he has been edited and misquoted. Even before Twitter. Churchill's actual words in his short speech were, "Never

give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy” (Harrow School, October 29, 1941). Surely his overarching message in these words is *never*. Yet even within such powerfully inspiring words, the great man allowed “except to convictions of honour and good sense.” Except. Even in the mind of the eminent political bulldog, the concept *never give in* has an exception. But over the years, Western humanity has found it easier to propagate *never* and ignore *except*. Why is that?

The United States of America exists due to its forefathers’ pursuit of independence. As Americans do each July, independence has been celebrated annually since the declaration in 1776. On July 4, 1777, in Bristol, Rhode Island, a thirteen-gun salute rang out in the morning and again in the evening. On that same day, Philadelphia celebrated with its own thirteen-gun salute and added prayers, parades, and fireworks. Since these first remembrances, America has celebrated its independence.

Further, Americans celebrate personal freedom: self-rule, self-determination, and self-sufficiency. We embrace freedom from outside control and relish support that validates and propagates self. American ideas of self-validation and protection find their origins in the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. These first amendments create specific guarantees of personal freedoms and rights, while at the same time limiting the government’s power.

It is within the Bill of Rights that Americans are guaranteed freedom of religion, speech, the press, and assembly. Citizens are provided the right to keep and bear arms. There is protection against unreasonable search and seizure, against self-incrimination, and

## *Surrender Is Victorious?*

against double jeopardy. Individuals are guaranteed legal process, and defendants are given specific rights in a criminal trial. As many have summarized, the foundational documents of the United States of America broadly facilitated “power to the people.” United States citizens were provided rights that specifically protect their individual independence. Democracies around the world hold similar convictions.

Consequently, citizens reared in “individual rights” republics naturally gravitate toward those elements of Christianity that fit with our penchant for independence. Self-rule people love Jesus’ proclamation, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Free people enjoy Jesus’ liberty message. We are thrilled that Jesus told believing Jews, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) and “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). We flash broad smiles and slap high fives when we read Paul’s words, “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Corinthians 3:17). If free citizens love their freedom, free Christians *really* love their spiritual freedom. When the subject of independence is presented and promoted in Christianity, democratic disciples are quick to embrace it. Freedom is a concept we celebrate, and this notion is certainly a good thing.

However, when we follow the Lord Jesus according to the fullness of His teachings, we discover that liberty and freedom are part of the message, but they are not the entire message. For biblical disciples, there’s another side to the independence coin. And, as strange as it may sound, the other side of the independence coin is surrender. Resignation. Abandon. Ceasing to resist. Submit-

ting to authority. Yielding to another's power. Giving up completely. High five, anyone?

Oftentimes in Christian circles, we hear people speak of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. While I believe that there are more commitments and experiences expected of believers, I also recognize this acceptance as the beginning that it is. In order to follow Jesus, one must first accept her need of a savior and also that Jesus is that Savior. Having a Savior carries many wonderful benefits and promises. Everyone who comes to Jesus loves His cleansing, His forgiveness, and His deliverance—all for free!

Yet sometimes I wonder if accepting Jesus as Lord gets lost in our excitement of seeing Him as Savior. I wonder if we blend “Lord” with “Savior” and consider them one and the same. In reality, choosing Jesus as Lord is different than merely acknowledging His saving power. Calling Jesus “Lord” speaks of surrender. Knowing Him as Lord is to yield my will to His. I allow Him, as my Lord, to direct my life, to instruct me, to correct me, to provoke me. When Jesus is truly my Lord, I willingly serve Him. I wholeheartedly follow Him. He is the captain of my soul. Fundamentally, the victory that Christians enjoy in Jesus Christ is not just the one-time experience of His promised salvation, but it is the lifelong victory we have as continually surrendered disciples who follow His every direction.

And there's the conundrum. Surrender promotes victory. To our humanity, this notion doesn't make much sense. Our experiences from the earliest memories onward teach us that fighting for and defending our space are the ways to know victory. The kingdom of God is different. Success in His dominion calls for surrender. He increases as we decrease (John 3:30). Jesus' influence and instruction bring spiritual victory. Followers increasingly know His spiritual victory as we surrender our merely human ideas, attitudes, and actions to His.

## *Surrender Is Victorious?*

Ideally, if things were simple, when new believers in Jesus make their decision to follow Him, they surrender to Him all things, all at once. One massive flag-waving. One laying down of arms. Once and for all, self-will completely crucified with Christ. Or in sporting vernacular, “one-and-done.” If only it could be that way. Most often it’s not. New followers of Jesus discover what seasoned servants have long known: it’s not that easy. The plan is clear on paper but muddier in everyday life. Surrendering to the Lord Jesus typically occurs in layers. And the process of discipleship demands a lifetime of revisiting surrender (Romans 7:13–25).

At the core of following Jesus is surrender to His power, His authority. Having decided that the God of the Bible is the Almighty and worthy of our surrender, there are other levels of surrender that follow. We surrender to the Lord’s promises (His blessings and benefits), to the Lord’s purpose (His universal and personal plans), to the Lord’s precepts (His instructions), to the Lord’s principles (His values), and ultimately, to the Lord’s people (His body). When presented with these discipleship elements, we are challenged by the opposing value, independence. Although independence and surrender may clash, they are both necessary for the Christian’s life. Yet finding the balance between the two is not always straightforward. The line between self-direction and disobedience can be a blurry one. In fact, independence provides fertile ground for authority issues to blossom. Thankfully, as with all elements of this Christian walk, this challenge is readily addressed in the Bible.



## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*Think about a time when you were forced to surrender. What was difficult about giving up?*

*Consider a time when you chose to surrender. Why did you do so? Was surrendering the best solution?*

*Remember a time you expressed independence. What caused you to feel good about your action?*

*What consequences have you experienced when you chose surrender but independence would have been best? Vice versa?*

*What is your experience with surrender to Jesus? Can you identify times of new surrender or resisted surrender?*

*Read Romans 7:13–25. What element in this passage particularly challenges you? Why?*