Better - Part 2

# Surrendering

# (Genesis 16:1-4)

Today, we’re continuing in our series called “Better” and we’ve been talking about choices and learning to choose what’s better, because it’s our choices that determine who we are today, who we’ll become, and what we’re able to do tomorrow. And so, if you missed last week, we talked about choosing to live our lives in the presence of God. This morning, we’re going to talk about surrendering our lives, identifying those different areas in our lives where we feel like we need to control everything, and we’re going to choose better, surrendering completely to the Lord.

I believe this is very important, because whenever we’re trying to control something that’s not ours to control it’s really a reflection of our spiritual condition. In other words, what we’re trying to do in this particular area of our life is that we’re trying to be like God. It’s saying that I need to be in control because I know what’s better, I know what’s good for me, I know what’s best, and therefore I can do this better than God. This morning, I’m going to show you an example of when someone said, “God, I’ve got this, I’m going to control this, I’m taking over” and of course as you could imagine, things didn’t work out very well, because honestly, we don’t do a very good job when it comes to trying to be God.

As we begin, we’re going to look in the book of Genesis at the example of Abraham and Sarah, because if there was anybody who battled with control issues in their life it was Abraham and Sarah. However, I think that most of us, if we’re truly honest with ourselves, we’d have to admit that there are some areas of our lives where we feel like we have to control everything. Some of you are sitting next to a person like that, others of you work for that person, and some of you are that person. You know, it’s you, you’re the massive control freak; in your home, your workplace, everything has a place and everything’s got to be done your way. Or maybe you want to control everybody, you want to control schedules, you want to control the money, you want to control how everybody acts; but the problem is, and we’re going to see this in Genesis chapter 12, that when we try to take control and we’re not completely surrendered to God, we rarely get it right, and things can get really bad really quick. For example, when God calls Abram he says,

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.” "I will make you into a great nation…" (Genesis 12:1-3).

And so, Abram believed the promise and left as the Lord had told him; but there was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt. And verse 11 tells us,

“As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say that you’re my sister so that I’ll be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you” (Genesis 12:11-13).

Notice how Abram, instead of trusting God, instead of telling the truth, lied because he was playing God, he was attempting to control the circumstances while ignoring the promise of God. You see, God had promised Abram that he would be the father of many nations, that he and Sarai would be parents, but now watch this, things get even worse.

Many years go by and they’re still childless, so Sarai does what so many of us do when God’s timing just isn’t working; she took things in her own hands, she took control and tried to fulfill the promise of God her own way. Genesis chapter 16 tells us that she said to Abram,

"The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant…”

And so, Sarai is taking control, she’s attempting to take the place of God and she says,

“Perhaps I can build a family through her" (Genesis 16:2).

You see, she’d grown impatient because God wasn’t doing what he said he would do. It had been years, and so she took control telling Abram, “Go, sleep with my maidservant”. The last part of verse two and following says,

“Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So, after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife” (Genesis 16:2-3).

You see, God had made them a promise, but his timing wasn’t meeting their expectations, so they took things in their own hands, they took control, and unfortunately, as is often the case when we try to play God, things didn’t work out quite like Sarai had planned.

Verse four says, “Abram slept with Hagar and she conceived,” she got pregnant and gave birth to a son named Ishmael. However, later Genesis chapter 21 tells us, Sarah got pregnant too,

“The Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him” (Genesis 21:1-3).

And so, now because of Abraham and Sarah’s impatience, because they’d determined to take control of things, everything went south, and things actually got really bad. As a matter of fact, there’s been tension ever since. If you’ve watched the news anytime since the invention of television you’re well aware of this conflict. You see, from the descendants of Ishmael came Mohammed and the Palestinians; but out of Isaac, the promised child, you have the Jewish nation, Israel, through whom came the Messiah, our Savior Jesus Christ. And so, because of Abraham and Sarah taking control of the situation and not surrendering to the will of God, we’ve had centuries of tension between the Palestinians and the Jews.

This is an important spiritual lesson for us when it comes to trusting God and so I want you to consider for a moment how to choose better. What areas of your life are you trying to control? Maybe it’s a person, a thing, or a certain circumstance; a relationship or financial issue, but what is it that you’re trying to control? Some of you may be still trying to control your kids, but know they’re grown-up kids, or maybe your coworkers, or your spouse? What are you tempted to take control of when things aren’t right, they’re taking too long, or when something just doesn’t seem to be going your way? Today I want to encourage you that when life hands you choices, choose better, because when you try to control something that you’re supposed to trust the Lord with, the results can be really, really bad.

And so, this morning, we need to learn to surrender; to trust the Lord, to trust his timing, and to give to him whatever it is; that person, thing, or circumstance. And instead of trying to control that situation, we need to choose better and surrender. You see, there’s no greater place to be than in that place of total surrender because that’s where you’re waiting on God, you’re believing God, and you’re trusting God. That’s a place of worship, contentment, and perfect peace; and so, I’m going to share with you three steps to help you reach that goal and accomplish that in your life. Number one is to simply determine what matters most. The first step to surrendering all of your life to God is determining what matters most.

## 1. Determine What Matters Most

We need to determine what matters most, because it’s better to have more of what matters and less of what doesn’t, because that’s where we find rest for our souls; that’s where we find tranquility and the peace of God. And so, we need to define what really does matter. King Solomon spoke about this, the Old Testament tells us that he had greater wisdom than all the kings of the earth, and he wrote in Ecclesiastes chapter 4 saying,

“Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:6).

He recognized the wisdom of living a balanced life, determining what matters most, and of being a man or woman who is productive, but also careful to take time to relax and enjoy life. And so, Solomon says it’s better to have gain in one hand and tranquility in the other. It’s better to have a balance of work and rest because you can take what you want from life, but you’re going to have to pay for it, and so you just may discover that it’s chasing after the wind.

I want to encourage you to seriously consider what matters most to you? Don’t let our culture lie to you, don’t settle for the good life, don’t waste your life on things that don’t matter, because you have purpose and your calling is great. And so, don’t settle for second-best, when life hands you choices, choose better, because God created you to make a difference. Here’s what the Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 2,

“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

And so, you have purpose, you were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, and your calling is too great and your God is too good to waste your life on things that don’t matter. Therefore, don’t sell out chasing after the wind, but consider that your life is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. And so, what would you do if you knew that you only had a month to live? What would you do in the next 30 days?

Most likely, if you were to make a list, micromanaging everyone’s life, their schedules, or their whatever, wouldn’t rank very high on your list. As a matter fact, many of the things that people pursue in the world today probably won’t even show up on your list. They’re just not things that really matter, but you may find that your relationship with God is most important, and your family, your marriage, or your children rank right up there near the top. You see, the reality is that the things that matter most are often meaningful things, things that last, and not the tangible things of this world.

And so, why waste your time on all this stuff that doesn’t matter when it’s better to have one handful with tranquility. You see, when we begin to consider those things that matter most, it puts all this other stuff over on the side. Now, some of those things are responsibilities, but honestly there are so many things that we just don’t need to be worrying about, it’s not something that we need to do, something that we need to think about, certainly nothing that we need to control. And so, we can choose better, having determined what matters most and ,number two, throwing off what doesn’t matter.

## 2. Throw Off What Doesn’t Matter

We choose better when we let go of anything that doesn’t matter; but I want to emphasize that there’s a really big difference between surrendering control and abandoning our responsibilities. You see, there are some things that God wants us to do for ourselves. For example, if your finances are a mess, you don’t just sit around waiting for God to mail you a check. If you’ve got a family to feed, you go to work, you spend less than you’re making, and if you can’t rise above your circumstances then you get a second job. You do something about it. You do what you can in those situations, but if it’s something that doesn’t matter, something that’s holding you back from doing what God has called you to do, then you do what the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 12,

“Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1).

You don’t allow yourself to be slowed down, you throw off what doesn’t matter, and you throw off everything that hinders you from competing in the race before you. Now if you’re anything like me you can find this to be very difficult, because deep inside you want to serve, you want to give, and you have this desire to please everybody. And so, when it comes to life there’s the temptation to say yes to every invitation, but all that does is create a perpetual state of busyness which results in exhaustion. Therefore, you’re going to have to say no to some good things, in order to say yes to what’s better. You see, when you say no to what everybody else says yes to, then you’re choosing better because you can say yes to what nobody else has the time for. And God has a better plan, a plan to give you a hope and a future, and busy and tired wasn’t part of his plan, it wasn’t even on his mind when he said,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Today, you and I need to recognize that God has a better plan, our culture has lied to us and more is not better. For some of you, it’s time to start saying no to some things that everybody else says yes to. Sometimes that means disappointing some people, but just because you could do something doesn’t mean that you should. Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles recognizing that there is a race before you, a will, a purpose, and a plan. You see, God put you here to do something significant and yet the devil, our spiritual enemy, is going to try to distract you, to tempt you, and often with good things. And so, if you’re not careful, before long you’ll find yourself detoured and chasing after the wind doing something, and investing all of your time and energy into something that doesn’t even matter. So, we need to develop the discipline to throw it down, to throw off what doesn’t matter, and choose what’s better.

And yet, some of us subconsciously are still trying to control our environment, even creating a form of security by the things that we’ve collected. We’ve got walk-in closets, we’ve got basements, we’ve got garages that are full to the ceiling. Some of us have so much stuff that we’ve got to rent additional space to put our stuff in. And so, sometimes we’ve just got to have a spring cleaning, to throw out what doesn’t matter, and just get it out of the closet! You know, if you haven’t used it or worn it in a year, give it to somebody who can use it, because honestly the Bible tells us that it’s all just stuff that’s going to burn up one day anyway.

And so, we need to determine what matters, throwing off what doesn’t matter because there are just so many areas of our lives that we’re clinging to, pulling and tugging, desperately trying to control. And yet, many of us are literally wasting our minds, wasting our time, because we’ve created this environment where we isolate ourselves in technology and we need to learn to surrender that area to God too. You see, there are some of us that spend more time on our phones and tablets each day messaging, texting, and playing video games than we do in prayer, in God’s word, serving others or playing with our kids.

Today, I’d like to ask you to honestly consider why you’re wasting hours of your life doing something, holding on to something, or just being so busy doing something that really doesn’t matter in light of eternity. For some of us, it’s time to surrender that to God, to throw it off, to cast it away, to stop isolating yourself, and stop trying to control your environment. We need to consider what matters most, throw off what doesn’t matter, and number three, trusting God with the rest because it’s just better.

## 3. Trust God with The Rest

You see, much of our lives are spent desperately trying to control things that we really have no right trying to control. The stress and anxiety in our lives for the most part is because of things that we’ve refused to surrender and trust God with. For example, I wonder how many of you are anxious about something, maybe something that somebody else did, and yet as much as you tried it was actually something you couldn’t change?

Well, there’s a familiar passage written by the apostle Paul that I often find encouraging because even though he was imprisoned and chained to a Roman guard, he writes these amazing words. Here’s what he said in Philippians chapter 4, he said,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

We can go boldly before the throne of grace with everything by prayer and petition, because we have access to God, he hears our prayers, and with him all things are possible. And so, Paul encourages us to surrender it all with thanksgiving, because we know that he hears us, we know that he cares, and we know that he’s working in all things to bring about good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. And the Bible tells us when we do, verse seven says,

“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

And so, when there’s something that you can’t control, you just surrender and give it to God, realizing that if your spouse is making poor choices, if you’re struggling with sickness and you’re hurting, or if your kids are out of control and set on a path of destruction; you just choose better. You surrender, recognizing that you can’t change their behavior, you can’t heal, you can’t control the future, but you have a God that can and with him all things are possible. And so, it’s at that point that God does something supernatural, he gives you a peace that goes beyond your ability to understand and its really summarized best in Proverbs chapter 3, verse five,

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

You just choose better! Trusting the Lord. Surrendering so that your life is completely in his hands. In other words, not leaning on your own understanding, not thinking you’ve got it all figured out, not thinking you’ve got everything under control, but surrendering. Trusting in the Lord with all of your heart, surrendering what matters most, throwing off what doesn’t matter, and trusting him with the rest. When we do that, when we’re trusting him, surrendering, acknowledging him, he will make our paths straight. Choose better, surrender, because it’s so much better to have less of what doesn’t matter and more of what does. Let’s go to God in prayer.

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