

Series: TRANSFORMERS. Changing Direction One Choice at a Time

SUNDAY MARCH 10. 2019
WE ALL SURRENDER TO SOMEONE OR SOMETHING
Mark 14:32-38, Romans 12:1-2
SPEAKER: KEN DAVIS

1. Recently Lori and I binge-watched Ken Burns entire series on The Civil War. Now, I know that wouldn't be of interest to most of you—but it is to me because the name of one of my ancestors fought in the defining battle at Gettysburg. What gives me at least **some** peace about that is that he was fighting **against** the institution of slavery. There were two horrible things about this war.

*The first is that one side was fighting to preserve slavery—if you can imagine that.

*The other is that this war split families and friendships and an entire government right down the middle. Imagine shooting—or watching someone else shoot your Dad, your brother, or someone who had once been your best friend.

-The Battle of Gettysburg ended with something called **Pickett's Charge**.

General Robert E. Lee ordered the charge—even though several of his best generals and advisors warned that it would fail. Pickett led his men for an mile over an open field into almost total annihilation. And that was the turning point of the war.

a. Now, here's my point:

*There are times when to surrender is **unthinkable**—and can destroy our lives.

*There are times when what we're **really** fighting for—or fighting about—is our ego; our need to be right

*There are times when we need to listen to our friends - the people around us - the people who will be affected **deeply** by the war we're in - and the ego we're trying to preserve.

*There are times when you and I are fighting for the wrong cause—and even if we win—we **lose!**

b. Some of you are facing something right now where you have two options: Should I surrender—or fight on? For example, you're in an argument with your teen - it's going nowhere and it's getting ugly and personal. You think, "Should I **surrender** or **win?**"

You've been sober for 3 months. You're at a party, feeling a little down, and someone offers you a drink or a joint or a pill. You think—should I fight this... or just **feel better?**

c. We're **all** different—but **everyone** surrenders to someone—or something! So here's my question; **Where** are you most likely to surrender—and **should you**. My experience is that sometimes we need to stop fighting and lay down our weapons—and we just **won't do it!** And sometimes when we **need** to fight on—we go limp and passive.

-God asks us to surrender to **Him—do you know why?** How many of you think it's because He **loves** power and it makes him feel good when we send up the white flag? That would be **wrong!** He's **trustworthy**—and **He's** the one who helps us know **when** to say **YES** and **when** to say **NO!**—and the power and grace to do both.

-My question is this: Will you surrender to someone who loves you more and knows you better than **anyone** ever has?

2. The passage that speaks **so** clearly to this issue is the one we've been studying:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NLT)

-Just a couple of notes on this: Notice, first, that this ask is **clearly** about surrender. **Give your bodies to God! Let them be a living and holy sacrifice, the kind he will find acceptable.** That's about as surrendered as you can get. And it's a **living** sacrifice. Eugene Peterson puts it like this in his paraphrase, The Message:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. (Romans 12:1 MSG)

a. That's the **right** kind of surrender—to God and **His** plans. But there **is** another kind of surrender: **Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world.** Let me distinguish between the two; surrender to God will **never** be the easy option that everyone thinks is normal. Surrender to God is **upstream**; conforming to the world system is **downstream**. Think about **downstream** for a minute—where all the garbage, sewage and dead animals end up. How many of you would say, **That's where I want to be!**

-The Message says it in a memorable way:

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. (Romans 12:2 MSG)

b. There's another part to this; if you want to find and do God's will for your life—if you want to become the person He originally designed you to be—**this is what you need to do!** If you don't care about that, then surrender to...**whatever!** Listen to this:

...Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12: 2 NLT)

-The **first** step toward knowing and doing **God's** will for your life is **surrender**.

3. So...let me tell you two stories, okay...the **STORY OF TWO SAULS**. You've likely heard of them both; one was a regular guy—who became King of Israel; the other was a prominent religious dude who tossed religion for Jesus. One Saul totally blew his mission because he surrendered to his ego instead of God; the other **surrendered** his ego—and changed the world.

-The **first** Saul walks onto the stage at a critical juncture of Israel's history. The era of the Judges—leaders like Samson, Deborah and Samuel—is over, and Israel asks for a king. God uses Samuel to find and anoint Saul, a Benjamite, as king.

-Saul is out trying to find some of his Dad's donkeys that had wandered off. Well, they're not finding them and decide to ask a **seer—Samuel**—for help. And it's in this context that Saul—a tall, good-looking guy—with a poor self-image is anointed as king. But the Spirit changes him.

a. His first issues with surrender came when he was leading the army of Israel against a vastly superior force. As he was waiting for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice to God before the battle, some of the men started to desert him. Impatient and afraid he offered the sacrifice himself—something he wasn't qualified to do. And Samuel **called** him on his fear and rebellion.

b. Well, that was the first warning; the second came when Saul, again, presumed to disregard the clear instructions God had given about how to handle a group that had been troubling Israel for centuries. Saul just did what **he** thought was right—and let the entire nation in an act of rebellion. To be clear—he did what make **him** a hero to his troops.

-Samuel's words gutted him; "God has ripped the Kingdom away from you—and has given it to someone who is **better** than you—a **man after his own heart**." And **that** day, instead of surrendering to God's leadership, Saul began to sulk—which turned to anger—and then to hatred and jealousy. And all that poison was focused on the person God chose—someone who **would** surrender—**David**.

c. What we **now** know is that **what** you surrender to **instead** of God—whether it's hatred, lust, pride, greed—**becomes** your god. **It** calls the shots, runs your life—and causes you to do things you **never** thought you'd do. I'm wondering if the other Saul may have been thinking of King Saul when he wrote these words.

And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry ...For anger gives a foothold to the devil.
(Ephesians 4:26-27 NLT)

-This "other Saul"—**Paul**—writes a few verses later that when anger decomposes into hatred, it **grieves** the Spirit of God. And **that's** what King Saul experienced. The Spirit who had initially changed his heart—left Him—and evil spirits took His place.

d. The word Samuel uses to describe Saul's refusal to surrender is **rebellion**.

Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. (1 Samuel 15:22-23 NLT)

-BTW—know where Saul turned for advice the night before he died?
To **witchcraft**—trying to conjure up one last conversation with Samuel for advice.

4. Now, did you see the arc in that story? It started **really** good—very positive. God takes an awkward young guy with low self-esteem—puts his **Spirit** in him—and makes him king. Saul #2 is a very different story.

The Saul of the New Testament actually starts out as a religious expert—and becomes a **somebody**—trained at the feet of the most famous Rabbi of that day; Gamaliel.

-That was quite a feat; I mean these guys had to memorize the Jewish Scriptures—along with all the Rabbi's commentaries—the Talmud. He **too** was from the tribe of Benjamin and was mostly likely the namesake of King Saul. Unlike most Jews—he was a Roman citizen—and **free!** He was a rising star with impeccable moral accomplishments?

-But when **Jesus, Son of David** showed up—he stole Saul's identity as a rising star. And Saul, just like the person he was named for, started a war of hatred against Jesus—**son** of David--and his followers. He had convinced himself that Jesus was a fake—**not** the rightful king—and the only way to stop the movement was to kill Jesus' followers. When you **refuse** to surrender, pretty much the only alternative left is war.

a. And **war** best describes what Saul waged on Jesus and his followers. When he ran out of victims in Jerusalem, he headed to Damascus. Jesus stops him dead in his tracks. Saul says, in his own words:

...As I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.' 'Who are you, lord?' I asked. And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.' (Acts 26:14-15 NLT)

-This encounter shook him to the core and left him blind and helpless. Guess who came to heal him in Jesus' name? One of the Christians he had come to arrest!

b. To Saul's credit, when Jesus told him He wanted him to be a witness to the Gentiles—he got on it right away. The **problem** is that he seemingly didn't check his ego at the door—and all his arguing created chaos! After several attempts on Saul's life, the disciples sent him back to Tarsus where stayed for **8 years**—and there was **peace!**

c. Saul's **surrender** to Jesus changed his life. He laid **everything** on the line for Jesus. He was so different from his namesake, King Saul, that they changed his name—to Paul. Listen to the definition of love written by this one angry, hateful man:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being Wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT)

-And Paul was the one God used to spread the message of Jesus—a message of grace and love—from Israel to Italy. The irony between the stories of the two Saul's is **way** too profound to be coincidental. King Saul hates and tries to kills the Anointed King, David, and his followers.

-His namesake hates the Anointed King—Jesus, Son of David—helps get him nailed to a cross—and then tries to kill his followers. But then he surrenders to Him and ultimately dies with Jesus' name on his lips.

-And that's why he would say:

I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. (Romans 12:1 NLT)

-It's called **surrender!** And **surrender**—hear me—is the **key** to you becoming who you were **meant** to be.

5. As we close today, I want to spend a few minutes talking about surrender. There is such a thing as **voluntary surrender**—and we do it pretty much every day.

How many of you have a job? If you do, you have surrendered chunk of your life and your freedom **voluntarily**. Is it fun and exhilarating? Sometimes—but it **is** called WORK for a reason! Is this voluntary surrender a **good** thing? If you want to have some money to work with it's a surrender you need to make.

-As a child you have to surrender to your parents—where they live, the kind of food they eat, the kind of vacations they take, and the kind of values they have. At first—it's **involuntary**—and then you grow accustomed to it.

-And as a **parent—SURPRISE!**—you have to surrender your kids to a school system. In Ontario, there is **no choice** on educating your child; it will either be in a school system or in your home. And if your children want to continue their education—or play a sport—they have to voluntarily **surrender** to another system.

-Marriage—or **any** relationship for that matter—can't work without two people **surrendering** their independence. And if you can't—or **won't** surrender yourself, and the relationship is all about **you**—it won't work; you'll become enemies.

-And that raises the question; who ARE your **real** enemies? See, sometimes we don't think about that enough.

- a. For example, **fear** can be an enemy. King Saul defied God and ultimately hated David; he was **afraid** of losing his army—and afraid of losing his Kingdom. It ultimately wrecked his life.

-For Paul, his ego—his fear of loss drove his hatred. See, if what Jesus said was true, he'd lose his job, his status and his credentials. After he met Jesus he wrote:

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless...yes, everything is worthless compared with the infinite value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. (Philippians 3:7-8 NLT)

- b. See, that's where we need to go. We all **want** things—and sometimes find ourselves in a fight to the death to get them. I see this happen in businesses—and in divorces. The thought of **surrendering** just makes you angry! Question: is the enemy you're surrendering to your **ex** or your business competition—or is **greed** the real enemy? If so, you've **already surrendered** to the real enemy **without a fight!**

c. Sometimes when other people get ahead—and get the stuff **we** wished for, the position **we** wanted—or get noticed when we didn't, something in us **hates** them when they go by.

-To be kind to them, to wish the best for them—or acknowledge their success is a kind of surrender. We think, "**I'd rather die!**" But actually, we've already **surrendered** to the **real** enemy—self-pity, hatred and jealousy—and we **gave up without a fight!**

d. How many of you think it **might** be good to fight the **real** enemies in life? Lori and I were watching a recent documentary on the life of Mr. Roger's the other night. He was kind, principled--an **amazing** man. Wouldn't you know it, at his funeral—parked across the street from the church—'**God Hate's'**...people.

-See, like us sometimes, **they** think the people who disagree with them are the enemy. The enemy **they've** surrendered to is **the** most spiritually dangerous enemy there is: **Hatred.**

e. Do you understand what I'm getting at? We fight with people—sometimes spouses, kids, co-workers—and fly our flag high; **I will NEVER surrender!** Actually? We've **already** surrendered—without a fight to an enemy like lust, or addiction, or pride, the need to be right, or some false antidote to the needs we feel. **You and I had better know who our REAL enemies are!**

-Paul, see, understood this. He said, in Ephesians 6, **Our battle—our real war is not against flesh and blood! It's against the principalities and powers of darkness in high places.** Let me tell you what that means; if you're in a war with your spouse or your in-laws or your employer or your neighbor—or someone else in the church—**you've already lost the plot! The enemy is closer to home—it's in your heart—and you've already surrendered to it!**

6. Honestly? It's possible to be doing the 21st century version of Pickett's charge; that is—on some dumb headlong charge into a meat-grinder. All for a cause that **cannot succeed!** Ego—arrogance—says, "I need to fight on! I need to win! I will never, never, **never** give up!" Actually? This isn't the battle for Britain—and you're not **Winston Churchill!** In fact, it's probably a stupid war for a pointless cause...where even if you win, you don't win!

-We fight God in places where we need to surrender; it's because the core of sin has **always** been rebellion.

Our rebel heart says to God, "If **You** won't give me what I want and support my ego, I'll find a source of power that **will.**" And that's why Samuel said to King Saul, "Rebellion is like the sin of **witchcraft**—because witchcraft is doing an end run on God. Hey, I'll serve the **Devil** if he gives me what I want!"

a. Can I just lay out a couple of scenarios where you and I **need** to surrender? The first place is this stubborn refusal to offer ourselves fully to God. "**I will control my own life!**"

-Question; **how much do you and I know right now for sure our futures? How much do you and I know, right now, about the future of everyone and everything we love?**

-I'd say, for most of us, the average would be around 0%. So why won't we give control—surrender to the One who made us, loves us, and knows the future—and has **all** the power?

- b. Another big area of control for us is our **time**. To be honest, this frustrates almost any opportunity to serve and show kindness to others. ***I will control my time!*** See, the deal is—***who gives you ever single moment you'll ever have—and every breath you'll ever breathe?*** We can and **should** control the minutes and the scheduling—but the **time?**

-Would it be safe to say that we **all** waste time on dumb things? You know, like binge-watching a Netflix series on the Civil War? Wouldn't it make sense to surrender to the One who made time and who knows **what time it is** on the clock of eternity?

- c. One of the biggest fights we have with God is about controlling our sexuality. ***"No one—not even God—is gonna tell me who I can sleep with or how to run the sexual arena of my life! That's MY business!"***

-I have a comment—and a question. First, the comment; I've noticed that, in our world, people these days are giving people access to their bodies—that they would **never** give access to their cell phones or bank account.

-If that's you—how's it going? What I've noticed is sex outside of marriage **really** complicates relationships, creates shame and guilt—and a past that you won't want the person you settle down with to know about. See, when you live like that you've already surrendered to something—usually your desires and instincts—and you've kept your soul out of it—and you **can't**. We're not animals. Sex **involves** the soul. Do you **really** want to shove God out of this arena of life? See, you **will** in fact surrender to something—and whatever it is—it won't be gentle.

- d. One more area of control. There are some people who say, ***I WILL control my relational world—my friends, my kids, my spouse!*** I'd like to say, "Really? You think you can actually do that?" You **can't**—and to attempt it is **not** love—it's manipulation. You **can't** control people—because love doesn't **try** to control! When you try that—you've surrendered to **fear**. And when you find out that you **can't** control people—you surrender to anger and resentment. See, that's where King Saul found himself and he alienated almost everyone in his life.

7. The irony is that while we fight on for our ego, our money, our sexuality, our need to be right, and this strange need to control others, we then **refuse** to control the areas where God calls us to use **self-control**. In describing what it's like to **surrender** to the Holy Spirit—and let **Him** fill and control our lives, Paul writes that the **fruit** of that—the **results** of us doing that are beautiful and amazing.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
(Galatians 5:22-23 NLT)

-Notice what the final quality is on this list. **Self-control**. How many of you think it's okay to just surrender yourself to whatever impulse comes your way--**to buy, to hit, or to give someone the universal gesture of displeasure and contempt or to?**

-How many of you think that **self-control** of the tongue is a good thing—instead of letting it

be like a wick dipped in your temper or your hatred or your need to judge and criticize?

-How many of you think that **self-control** would be a good thing when it comes to your sex drive. See, we **all** have this impulse to use others sexually and mate at will. The truth is—it may be the way of the 21st century—but God has some things to say about it. Sex, like fire, is amazing when it's kept within the limits God has set—but if you turn it loose, the damage and shame is horrendous.

-How many of you think that **self-control** might be a good idea in the area of spending. See, the **Spirit** leads us to toward generosity and kindness and love. The ultimate reward is using what we've been given to change the world. A lack of self-control in spending **sabotages** our future on this planet—**and** our ability to invest in eternity.

-You see it, right? We **all** face the temptation to **control** what we need to surrender—and **surrender** when we need **self-control**. You will face the temptation to surrender—wave the white flag—give up without a fight—when you actually need to resist!

a. You'll be tempted to surrender your dignity. We are made to serve the Most High God—and ultimately become like Jesus. **That's what God has in mind**. And **that's** where the enemy goes after us; to surrender our dignity as people who have the capacity to make wise and courageous choices in the face of difficulty.

-When we give into the temptation to **preserve** our pride by fighting God and others—we totally surrender the name of Jesus—and **our dignity** as His followers.

b. We have been made to honor Jesus with how we love others as ourselves. We make a **difference** in the world with the patience, goodness and kindness we show. To give in to the temptation is to just blow up, use others, get sneaky with our money or with the truth—is to surrender our reputations as people who love God and have a center line down our highway.

c. Some of you have taken **huge** steps in your life toward sobriety—that is to not let alcohol, drugs—prescription or other wise—control your life. There are **other** forms of sobriety we need too; see gambling or sex or money or social media can be every bit as addictive as cocaine.

-And every day, you and I face—and will **continue** to face the temptation to **surrender**. This little voice comes up in your mind, "Like how much damage can **one** drink, **one** joint, **one** pill, **one** visit to the poker table, **one** visit to the porn site do? And that **really** is the question, isn't it? Is that one decision an **on ramp** to something better—or the **exit ramp** from sanity? Unless you want to go **back** to the desperation and shame and mess of the past—you need to put up the flag of freedom—**not the white flag of floating downstream**.

If you go with the current you end up downstream - is that where you really want to be?

d. Now, I could describe other things—but here's the real question for you and me; when you say **yes**—do you know **what it is** that you're surrendering to? Is that where you want to be?

8. That's why Paul says in these verses: If you're going to surrender to something or someone—and you **are**—then **why not fully surrender to God?**

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. (Romans 12:1 NLT)

-The irony in this verse is found in the words, **living and holy sacrifice**. If you know anything about the word sacrifice, you know it means death. Jesus knew that too. The planned irony of Jesus' death is that it took place on Passover. We're going to be talking about this in the next series—but Passover commemorates the evening of the last judgment on the Egyptians.

-The night before this happened, the Israelites were to sacrifice a lamb and smear it's blood on the door frame. That night, the angel of death passed through the country—and the only thing that spared the firstborn of each home was the blood. And the next day? **Freedom from slavery.**

- a. Jesus, is called the **Lamb of God**. And the night before his death, as he prayed in the Garden, He **knew** he would give his life—and that he would be, in some horrible way, separated from God. And it was a battle.

Judas surrendered to money. The high priests surrendered to hatred. The disciples surrendered to sleep—to their exhaustion. As they surrendered to all this other stuff, Jesus surrendered to the Father:

...He became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. “Abba, Father,” he cried out, “everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” (Mark 14:33-36 NLT)

- b. That struggle—and those words, “**Yet I want YOUR will to be done, not mine**” is what split history, redeemed us—and made it possible for God's will to be done here on this planet. Christ's willingness to **surrender** changed everything. And **so does ours!** See, the truth about every person here is there is **one final** surrender we can't refuse. We call it death. And we can hang onto our pride and sing along with Frank, **I Did It My Way**; We can hang on to our stubbornness and use our mouths, our time, our sexuality and our lives any way we want. But, see, death has this way of releasing our grip on everything. Not initially; rigor mortis sets in as this kind of final act of defiance. And then we let go.
- c. What God asks of us—what allows Him to renew our minds and transform us—is our answer to the question, “**Will you surrender—FULLY—to me? Or are you going to just fight on? Will you allow me to change you—or are you going to drop into eternity—unyielding, unwilling to follow—and un-transformed.**”

-You have to decide **what** you're going to do. And today I want to call you to that choice. This is your chance to be changed. Will you take it...or are you going to just fight on, waiting for more options?