

FOREWORD BY RICK WARREN
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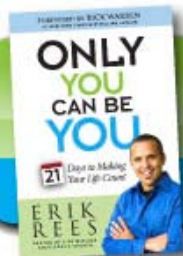
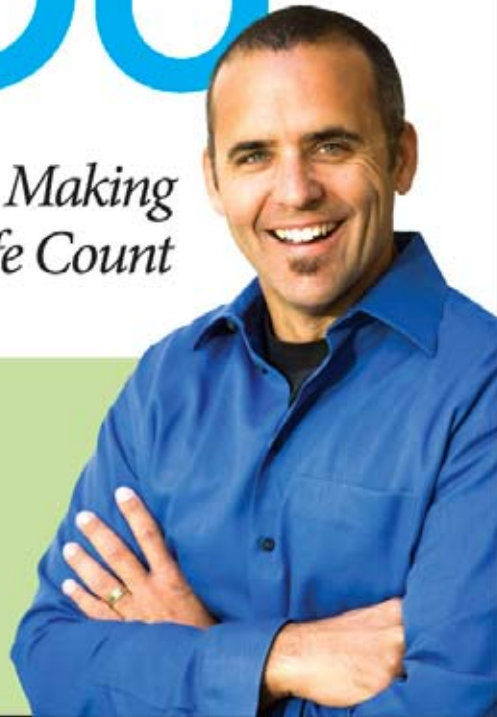
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DAY
1
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RESTORATION

Discovering the True You

The more we get what we now call “ourselves” out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become.

-- C.S. Lewis

The absolute surrender of everything into His hands is necessary. If our hearts are willing for that, there is no limit to what God will do for us or to the blessing He will bestow.

-- Andrew Murray

We loved our home, but after living there awhile, it seemed that something was wrong. That fireplace: it just didn't quite say, "Sit by me and get cozy." After a few years of watching the paint flake off, my wife, Stacey, said, "What would happen if we restored the bricks to their original color?" *Ugh*, I thought, picturing all the work it would take. *What would happen? Major headaches, that's what!*

"Sure, honey," I said. "Let's do it." And so the restoration process began. After the first few "guaranteed" products failed, we sought and followed a professional's advice (always a good idea). We took off the old paint, wire brushed the bricks, applied stain, and lost our tempers a few more times than I'm pleased to admit.

Then one day it was done. We stood back and admired the earthy red beauty of those bricks, looking just as their maker had intended. "It's beautiful!" our daughter Jessica exclaimed. "It was hard work, but it was worth it!" My aching muscles agreed. There's nothing quite like natural beauty.

We serve a God of restoration who wants to bring us back to his original design. While the fireplace had no choice about submitting to our renovation, you and I are free to choose whether

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we'll surrender to his control. On the surface, that sounds like an easy choice to make, like trusting the hairstylist to know what will look best on you. But in practice...well, let's just say that if it were easy, a lot of pastors would have nothing to do.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses impressed upon the children of Israel the importance of always choosing God's way over their own when he told them: "When you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you" (Deuteronomy 30:2-3). God is ready and waiting to bring out his best in each one of us -- but first we must surrender to him.

What Surrender Means

Many people have the wrong idea about what it means to surrender to God. In her book *Dangerous Surrender*, Kay Warren explains:

Surrender is a dirty word to many of us. It has mostly negative connotations. Some synonyms are give in, give up, admit defeat, lay down your arms, submit, yield, capitulate... One of the most deeply held illusions of Westerners such as me is that we are tough and independent and quite sure that we don't need anyone else. We carry these illusions over into our spiritual lives as well, and doing so keeps many from following Christ. "Surrender to God? No thanks. I can do life by myself." Even those of us who have acknowledged our need for Jesus Christ to be our Savior have a difficult time surrendering our will to him on a daily basis; we're just too full of ourselves, too much in control, too proud."

What Kay describes is exactly where I was when I first asked Christ into my life. I'd heard that I had a heavenly Father who loved me and wanted to help me. Believe me, I was ready for that message. After years of trying to please a dad who didn't really care and then trying to live up to a false image of myself, I was lonely and tired. But it was much later when I finally invited Jesus to be in the center of my life, where he belongs. When I finally switched places with God and fully surrendered to him, everything in my life changed. It was as if God had pushed the Reset button and restored the original settings that had been lost for all those years.

Today I'm living the life God intended for me from the beginning. He's taken all the junk I went through as a kid -- the abusive, alcoholic father, my overeating to compensate for not feeling loved, the pressure I felt to live up to someone else's idea of perfection -- and given me back the real Erik Rees. He has convinced me that only I can be me. And by the same token, only you can be you.

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Anything You Want to Be -- Or Who God Made You to Be?

I recently finished reading a great book, *Pinocchio Parenting: 21 Lies We Tell Our Kids*, by Chuck Borsellino. Guess what one of the top lies is that parents tell their kids? "You can be anything you want to be." Have you heard that phrase before? I have. Did you hear it growing up? I did. If you have kids now, have you ever told them that? I sure have. The phrase *you can be anything you want to be* sounds so good, doesn't it? But this idea has a big problem: it's a lie!

The truth is, you can't be anything you want to be. When you were born, you were given a specific set of gifts, talents, and passions, and a unique personality. Then, as you grew, you went through a series of experiences -- some good and some not so good. Perhaps you even had a few devastating moments. All those things are tools God uses to make you into the unique you he's had in mind from the start. But you've got to let go and let the master makeover artist do his work.

Over the next few days, we'll look at various areas of our lives that we need to inventory to make sure we're living truly surrendered lives. We must give every aspect of our lives -- our past, our present, and our future -- to God so that he can guide us. In the weeks ahead, I'll ask you a few tough questions because I care about you and want to see you living the life that God intends for you -- a life that many want but few take the time to strive toward. Although I truly desire to see you find freedom in who you are and what you do, what matters most is that God wants this for you. He designed you to be you and wants you to trust him with your life.

As you think about making this fresh start and renewed relationship, I must ask you a critical question -- one of the most important you'll ever have to answer: where is God in your life right now? There are only three real possibilities. He is either:

- 1. Outside your life**
- 2. Inside your life, or**
- 3. At the center of your life**

When God is outside our lives, he has no chance to finish his good work. When God is inside our lives, he'll control only what we give to him. However, when God is at the center, given full access, he can begin his work of restoring our broken lives.

So I ask you again, where is God in your life?

The Bible says, "God made my life complete when I placed all the pieces before him. When I got my act together, he gave me a fresh start. Now I'm alert to God's ways; I don't take God for granted. Every day I review the ways he works; I try not to miss a trick. I feel put back together, and I'm watching my step. God rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes" (Psalm 18:20 MSG).

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Could you use a fresh start with God? Do you feel like your life is an unfinished puzzle? God wants to put it back together -- and only he knows where all the pieces go. He wants to rewrite the story of your life, but you've got to recognize that he has always been its author. The psalmist David knew what that felt like when he wrote, "Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be - - you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean" (Psalm 32:1 MSG). If you want your slate wiped clean, you've got to give God the eraser. Are you catching the drift here? Give it all to God...that's what you do when you surrender.

The Surrendered Life = The Significant Life

We hear a lot of talk about living a significant life, as if it's something on the other side of the fence that we must work toward, the ultimate goal. But I would argue that we can live a significant life every day -- once we understand God's equation: the surrendered life = the significant life.

Let's take a look at what God promises to those who choose the surrendered life, as opposed to continuing in a self-centered life. Following are the wonderful benefits of allowing God to live at the center of our lives.

Purpose for Living

As God prepared Moses to confront Pharaoh and demand that he release the Israelites from their Egyptian captivity, he said, "I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:16). You and I may not be called to lead a nation, but we all have the purpose of showing God's power through our lives so that his name will be glorified through us.

Paul tells us, "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). Beyond showing God's power to the world through our lives, discovering our purpose allows us to see what God created us to do.

But discovering God's purpose for our lives is impossible unless we first surrender to him our dreams, our hopes, our plans, and our ambitions. The Bible says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21).

God desires to show you the specific purpose he put you on earth to fulfill. That's great news!

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Peace of Mind

Almost since time began, mankind has been on a quest for peace. Our world is continually in conflict, yet, somewhere in our hearts, we know this is not how it should be. We talk about peace, we put visualize WORLD PEACE bumper stickers on our cars, and at Christmastime we sing songs about peace on earth. So why is peace so elusive?

Jesus promised his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). This world may never have peace, but you can know the peace of God in your life. Surrender to him your troubled heart, your confusion, and your conflicts, and watch his peace take over.

Is peace of mind something you long for? If so, keep reading!

Perspective for Living

Have you ever noticed that people tend to line up on one side of an issue or the other? Jesus sees all sides -- better yet, he knows what is true and what is false. In Christ we can finally know genuine right thinking. He helps us to see life as it really is.

We must be willing to see life through Jesus' eyes. In order to do that, we must be willing to surrender our old ideas and consider his radical call to righteous living. The Bible says, "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).

One of the coolest benefits of giving God the center place in our lives is his daily guidance. When God is truly the pilot of our lives, he grants us guidance for living. This guidance comes in the form of perspective. Situations in life that never made sense, we now begin to understand.

Power to Persevere

In my profession, I work with many people who want a quick fix. They want to meet with me once and be done. They want the confusion and chaos in their lives to be replaced with clarity and confidence, but they don't want to take the time this requires. This is another reason why we are spending twenty-one days together. I don't want you to give up. More important, I have discovered in my walk with God that he does not want me to ever give up. Tap into his power and persevere through the times of stress, pain, and difficulty. God does not promise us a pain-free life, but he does promise us the power to finish life faithful and fulfilled.

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Plan to Live Out

None of us has a crystal ball, but if we did, we might be sorry to see some of the trouble coming our way. But no matter what tomorrow holds, we can be confident in God. “ ‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ “ (Jeremiah 29:11). This does not absolve us from responsibility for making our own plans, but it does allow us to surrender the outcome of those plans to God, trusting that whatever happens, we are safe in his hands.

Symptoms of a Self-Centered Life

In contrast to the surrendered life, the self-centered life is a diseased one marked by several symptoms. I discovered three common symptoms during a ten-year study I did, looking at what caused people to seek change in their lives. More to the point, these were the factors that caused people who had kept God outside their lives to place him at the center.

As we look at these three symptoms, you may find that a few or all of them resonate with you. That's great! It means you truly desire to become all that God made you to be so that you can do all that God has planned for you.

Frustration of Mind

The first symptom of a self-centered life is a high level of frustration: frustration with careers, relationships, finances, marriage, kids...the list goes on. Frustration is really a symptom of an issue that goes deeper than the things that seem to frustrate us. It all goes back to the basic issue of control, to the self-centered wanting to be in charge of certain aspects of our lives instead of letting God be in control.

The truth is, without Christ we will remain frustrated and try to control every area of our lives. But when we surrender everything to God, our minds will be renewed and we'll get to see God's will for our lives. This is exactly what Paul taught in Romans 12:1-2, when he wrote, “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” (NLT).

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We won't be frustrated with our lives when God gives us the opportunity to know our purpose and to know his desires for our lives. Surrendering our entire lives to God allows his peace and purpose to calm our frustrations.

Fatigue of Heart

When a person keeps God outside his or her life or away from the center of life over long periods of time, frustration of mind turns into fatigue of heart. I've coached some of the most tired, sad, depressed people. These are great people whom Jesus died for but who still insist on remaining CEO of their own lives. When we hold on to control rather than surrender it to the One who made and sustains our lives, we become weary of trying so hard to get it right only to fail time after time.

Is your heart weary from the frustration of trying to steer your own life? Do you ever feel like you just can't take any more? Everyone has those "end of the rope" moments occasionally, but when you have given God ultimate control, you can rest in him until the storm blows over.

Fear of Life

When we continue to push God out of his rightful place at the center of our lives, fear sets in. We fear that we've messed up beyond remedy...that we're broken, inferior, unlovable, rejected. People in the grip of such fears have said to me, "Erik, I don't think I have a purpose in life." The saddest phrase I heard was from a young woman: "Erik, I don't think God loves me." Although that was just a lie from Satan, she believed it 100 percent. It was not until some months later that she replaced her fear with faith in God.

The self-centered life is afraid of death, afraid of losing everything, and thus focuses on survival. In so doing, such people fail to really live. While the drive to survive is universal and God given, we're in trouble when we have such fear of losing it that we hold on to life with a fierce grip, denying and fighting against the day that death will come. The person with a surrendered life realizes that we are here for only a moment -- but that something better is coming. Pastor Rick Warren often quotes the old saying, "Only one life too soon is passed; only what's done for Christ will last." The fearful, self-centered person clings to this life, which he or she cannot keep. The surrendered person rests in God's promise of eternal life.

Malise provides an example of the change that can take place when a person living a self-centered life exchanges her frustration of mind, fatigue of heart, and fear of life for the purposes of living, peace of mind, perspective on life, power to persevere, and plans for life that come when we surrender our lives to God. After a lifetime of mental illness, Malise had finally reached bottom.

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"I was as low as I could possibly get," she told me. "I hadn't worked in months; I was repeatedly in the hospital due to harming myself. I was broken in every sense of the word. Frustration was at an all-time high.

"That's when God came to me. I can't explain just how, but it's like I heard a voice saying, 'You're going to be okay.' And immediately, my life began to change." Malise put God in the center of her life, and since then her life has steadily improved.

"By surrendering all I could possibly be -- all my fears, loves, hopes, and dreams -- to God and asking him to take care of me, I am now freer than I ever imagined I could be," she said. "I've learned that in everything I do, the point is to help others see that they can be free -- free from whatever is holding them back."

Making It Count

How about you? Has our conversation today motivated you to surrender all to Christ? Does the word *surrender* still make you think of fear, weakness, or giving up? How has considering God's promises changed the way you think of surrender? Write your thoughts in the space below and share them with God, who loves you and wants you to feel safe in his presence. But first, let's pray.

Father, I confess that I've been living a self-centered life for way too long, and I'm so tired! As I work through this book, help me to understand the life you created me to live. For now, give me the strength to see that the first thing I have to do is give up -- surrender my life completely to you. Thank you for loving me and for giving my life meaning because of what Jesus did for me. In his name, amen.

Over the next six days, we will look at every area of our lives to see if God is truly at the center. By week's end we'll be able to decide whether we will choose to fulfill Life Choice 1 and surrender our lives completely to God.

Now that our restoration project is under way, it's time to determine if anything is interfering with our ability to hear God's voice. In our next meeting we'll spend some time retuning our ears. See you back here tomorrow!



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