

TAKE A STEP

Signs of Surrender

Every day we're faced with choices, will we go God's way or our own? Set aside an hour this week to sit quietly before God, and ask Him if there are any areas of your life that are not fully surrendered.

Is there a need for confession? Repentance and faith? Putting Jesus first? Write down any changes that come to mind.

Prayerfully examine the following areas:

- Relationships (e.g., friendships, work, marriage, kids, parents, siblings, neighbors, dating, etc.)
- Work
- Money/Finances
- Devotional life
- Church involvement
- Hobbies
- Time Expenditure

Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you and rely on His power every day to change you from the inside out. Share your insights with a trusted friend this week and spend some time praying for each other!

DAY ONE - FEB 26

Responding to God's Gift

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

Matthew 3:2

Have you ever had the horrible experience of accidentally turning on to a one-way street? You wonder why people are pointing at you and looking so irritated, and then you suddenly realize you're heading in the wrong direction. The quicker you get off that road the better, both for you and everybody else! Or, perhaps you're driving along and GPS lets you know you'd better turn around!

In the passage above, these are words of John the Baptist, as He prepared the way for Jesus to emerge in public ministry. The word "repent" or "repentance" conjures up images of hell, fire and brimstone preaching. However, the word repentance in the Bible literally means to change your mind or change your direction. Repentance is more than "feeling sorry" or being ashamed. It's a recognition that you're going in the wrong direction and you need to get back on the right path.

Being a Christ follower involves submitting to the Lordship of Christ and joining ourselves to some other believers who are learning to live a new life in a new way.

Unfortunately, many people have been affected by a false gospel. It's a gospel which says: Come to Jesus and get wealth and prosperity and everything you've ever wanted! But the Bible says something different than that: It's come to Jesus and give your whole life to Him.

Becoming a Christian is more than making an intellectual assent to the principles of Christianity – it's a change of ownership. It's a change of management where Christ is exalted to the highest place. And two things happen: We give up our wrongs, by turning away from everything that's sinful and displeasing to the Lord. But we have to take a step further than that – we have to give up our rights.

In becoming a Christian, we have to give up the right of self-determination. We have to give up the right to live life on our own terms and create our own morality. Through repentance we turn away from our sin and through faith we turn toward God, trusting Him with each aspect of our lives.

Repentance and faith go hand in hand. In repentance, we agree with God that we are sinners. In faith, we agree with God that He loves us, and through Jesus Christ our salvation is complete. True repentance always leads to the joy of being rightly related to God. There is no greater satisfaction than that!

REFLECTION:

When it comes to being fully surrendered, what's holding you back?

What would it take for God to be number 1 in your life?

DAY TWO - FEB 27

Embracing Jesus as King

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.
Matthew 4:23

It was common in Judaism to think of God's kingdom in terms of the restoration and exaltation of the nation of Israel, but in the New Testament there is a bigger picture laid out of God's supremacy over all the earth. His kingdom involves all people and all nations, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

The Kingdom of God was also the central message of Jesus and the early church (Mark 1:14-15, Acts 3:19). In fact, Jesus initiated a divine rescue mission. His goal was to seek and save the lost (Matthew 10:6; 15:24; Luke 19:10; Mark 2:17; Luke 15:7). Jesus saw His ministry as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. For in Jesus Christ, God invaded human history, bringing salvation and triumphing over evil. Our Lord also revealed that one day His kingdom would come in fullness, in the Age to come, and there will be a redeemed community of people who love God supremely, free from the grip of Satan and evil (Matthew 25:41; Matthew 13:36- 43).

Jesus taught His followers to pray for God's kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). How we need to seek the Lord and allow Him to rule over our lives on a daily basis! For He is raising up a community of believers who are uncompromising in their faith and wholly dedicated to Him. From the very beginning of time, the Lord has always wanted to have a people on the earth who submit to His leadership, who love each other, and who are a true reflection of what He is like. His goal is to raise up an alternative society, a holy people, who demonstrate the beauty and benefit of living under His rule.

You could say that we're living between the times. The old Age goes on, but there is a new Age coming where heaven will descend to earth and all will be made new (Revelation 21:2-3). Today, God is reaching out to us in love and we must make a choice: Will we submit to Jesus now, and live under His kingdom rule, or will we go our own way?

As Christ followers, our highest allegiance must always be to God and to His Kingdom. Let us pray for the government and be good citizens, but in the end, we must put our hope in the Lord and arrange our lives around His priorities. There is no higher purpose for us to fulfill!!

REFLECTION:

Have you surrendered yourself to Jesus the King?

What changes would be necessary for you to align yourself with the lifestyle and priorities of God's Kingdom?

DAY THREE - FEB 28

Confessing Known Sin

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16

How can someone become free from besetting sins and become more like Christ? In the above passage, Paul the apostle doesn't tell them to occasionally pray and access the Spirit's help. He doesn't say that all you need is weekly church attendance to maintain your spiritual vitality. He tells them to live by the Spirit – it's a moment-by-moment relationship.

The scripture makes it clear that we've all inherited a nature that's bent toward sin. And sin is basically an attitude of rebellion toward God, where we choose to live on our terms, even when it comes into conflict with what He wants for our lives. The sin nature is also called "the flesh" in some Bible translations and it can be defined as "all the evil that people are capable of doing, when left to their own devices, or apart from the intervention of God's grace in their lives."

Although it is still quite possible to react out of our sin nature, from the moment Christ comes into our hearts, we're not obligated to sin anymore – we've got the power to change. So, as Christians, we have the ability to sin, but we don't have the obligation to sin any longer, because we've received a new nature that's fashioned after the image of Christ and we now have the Holy Spirit to empower us.

Second Corinthians 5:17 states, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! In union with Jesus, we become new creations, sons and daughters of God Himself, adopted into His family! When Christ lives inside, we begin to show the "family traits" that one would expect from a child of God: righteousness, holiness, peace, love, etc.

What should we do if we mess up? First John 1:9 states: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. God is absolutely trustworthy, so when He says we have forgiveness and eternal life by believing in Him, we can count on it! But we're also told to confess our sins, whenever they occur. The word "confess" means to agree with God or to say the same thing that He says about our spiritual condition.

The good news is: When we give our lives to Christ, God gives us His Spirit to dwell in us as a pledge of His love. And He doesn't expect us to live the Christian life all alone. The Holy Spirit is our "Helper" (John 14:26), and the Scripture teaches us that when the Spirit enters our lives, He strengthens us spiritually, purifies our hearts, and enables us to make right choices (Galatians 5:16-18).

REFLECTION:

What would help you recognize sin in your life, whenever it occurs?

Do you have the assurance of your forgiveness and eternal salvation?

DAY FOUR - MAR 1

Be Filled with the Spirit

*Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life.
Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.*
Ephesians 5:18, NLT

In this passage, Paul the apostle is writing to some believers in the city of Ephesus. Drunkenness was very common in that locality and it was a serious temptation for Christians in that day. Paul said it will ruin your life! Paul is contrasting the state of being drunk/or under the influence of alcohol, with the kind of all-consuming influence the Spirit of God wants to have in our lives.

When people are drunk it affects their moods and emotions. It alters their thinking and their decision-making ability and it affects their behavior. If they're filled with anger, then anger controls their lives. If individuals are filled with love, then love influences all they do. If we're filled with the Holy Spirit, then the Lord will be the dominant influence in our thoughts and behaviors.

To explain it another way, when we pray to receive Christ as Lord and Savior, the Spirit of God immediately comes to live within us (Romans 8:9). However, it's one thing to have the Holy Spirit and quite another for the Spirit to have us! He wants to have us – all of us!

Paul is not saying to "fill yourself" with the Spirit. He says, "be filled," which reminds us that the filling of the Spirit is the work of God, not people. The Holy Spirit is ready to fill us right now, but we must be willing to make ourselves available to Him. Literally, Paul is saying, "Keep on being filled with the Spirit," or more technically, "Allow yourselves to continuously be filled with the Spirit. Being Spirit-filled means you're living under the influence of the Spirit, not just for one moment, but day by day.

The central issue here is one of cooperation and the question is: Am I going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and let Him lead me or am I going to keep on doing things my own way? So many of us struggle at precisely this point; we persist in our rebellion and self-centeredness because we're afraid to surrender everything to the Lord and entrust it all to Him. The Bible makes it clear that every person who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior needs to pray for the fullness of the Spirit.

We can't always control the outward events that occur but we can choose to cling to God and respond in a Christ-like way when the Spirit is in control. Don't be afraid to allow the Spirit of God to consume you, to saturate your entire being. What's holding you back? The filling of the Spirit is not primarily an emotional experience and it's certainly not reserved for a few super-Christians. It's a vital part of the normal Christian life!

REFLECTION:

How can you yield yourself to the empowering of God's Spirit each day?

Is your life exemplifying the fruit and gifts of God's Spirit?
(Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12-14)

DAY FIVE - MAR 2

Taking Up Your Cross

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.
Luke 9:23

The call to follow Christ is one of the main things that separates Christianity from all the other religions. In other world religions, you're called to embrace a set of beliefs or standards that were set down by the founder. In Christianity, the main focus is committing yourself to an ongoing relationship with a person.

When you become a Christian, there are a set of teachings to believe, but the heart and soul of Christianity is getting to know a person who loves you and who wants to become intimately involved with your life. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ!

Jesus is saying that if you want to follow me, you've got to do it on my terms and not your terms! He's reminding us that there are times when our desires will come into conflict with what God desires. And when that happens, we need to say "no" to ourselves and "yes" to what God wants for our lives.

In the first century, whenever you saw a man carrying a cross, he was on his way to die. In fact, crucifixion was the most painful and degrading form of capital punishment in the ancient world. The cross was a person's appointed place of death.

So, what is the cross you have to carry? It's not your job, our spouse, a mean teacher at school, or your mother in law. And it's not a financial shortage or a health problem. The cross is the point at which your will and God's will cross. Every day, we're faced with all kinds of choices, whether we're going to do things our way or God's way. In fact, when Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, just before he died, he prayed to God and said, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me (Matthew 26:39).

The cup was a picture of His suffering on the cross, but then our Lord went on to say, Yet not as I will, but as you will (Matthew 26:39). When Jesus said those words, He was choosing the way of the cross, fully knowing that the way of the cross would cost Him everything!

Every day we're faced with choices of whether we're going to go God's way or our way. And, like Jesus, we need to say, "Lord, it's not my will, but yours be done!"

REFLECTION:

Are there sin patterns in your life that need to be addressed?

Are you able to pause and pray and access God's power to enable you to overcome temptation?

DAY SIX - MAR 3

Demonstrating Faith Publicly

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

Baptism can be defined as an outward expression of an inward faith and it's supposed to occur after you make a decision to follow Christ. Jesus was baptized and he expects His followers to do the same.

When two people get married, they get up in front of others to publicly state their devotion and loyalty to each other. In that sense, baptism is like a wedding ceremony, except in this case, we're expressing our love for the Lord. Baptism says to the world, "I'm not ashamed to go public with my faith." Paul the apostle said, I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

Christ died, was buried, and was then resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Baptism by immersion (where someone's entire body is lowered under the water) is an important visual demonstration of our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. When we go under the water, we're saying goodbye to our old life. It's like conducting a funeral service for our sinful self. We're declaring that our sin nature is now buried and when we arise from the water it's a picture of a brand-new life, where we're cleansed and forgiven.

Some people think that they're not good enough to be baptized. They think they have to wait until they've achieved a certain level of morality before they take that step. However, baptism is not a merit badge for successful living. In the early church, it was expected that people would be baptized as soon as they professed their faith in Jesus. In other words, there's no reason to wait!

Some will ask, isn't the reality that I was baptized as a baby good enough? The fact that you were baptized as a baby is a wonderful thing to celebrate — it was a declaration of your parent's faith. You should honor your parents for wanting to raise you in the Christian faith! But you are not a baby anymore; it's time for you to give expression to your own faith. A public declaration of faith, followed by baptism is what Jesus asks us to do to declare our allegiance to Him. What's holding you back?

REFLECTION:

Have you ever been afraid to go public with your faith?

Do you regularly pray for boldness to stand up for Jesus?