

“One Quarter at a Time”

Luke 9:18-27

Series: BELIEVE Chapter 15: Total Surrender

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“Did you get any good ones?” That’s the question my wife Lisa always asks me when I get change. I know exactly what this means. Did I receive any special quarters? My wife and I were both coin collectors as kids. I gave up long ago but she still loves it. For the last decade she’s been on the lookout for State Quarters. All fifty states are commemorated with a special design on the backside of George Washington’s head. She has the State Quarters Collectors Book, the Ultimate State Quarters Collectors Kit, The State Quarters Collectors Lunch Box, and the State Quarters Collector’s Map. On the map she has all the states filled in except one: Alaska. Actually she used to have Alaska but I put it in a parking meter. When the last state was issued I thought, “Glad that’s done.” She said, “Yes! Now we can collect the National Parks Quarters.”

We are all collectors. For some it might be coins, stamps, dolls, or spoons. You may collect books, toys, video games, family pictures, songs on I Tunes, apps on your phone, friends on Facebook, followers on Twitter. I have a collection of guitars. We collect possessions in our basements, attics and storage facilities. We collect money in savings accounts, college funds, and retirement plans. We collect degrees and achievements and put these on our resumes. If you want to find out how much you collect watch what happens when you move, or better yet, downsize. It’s amazing how much we squirrel away.

Often we are defined by what we collect. I consider my Dad one of the pioneers of the computer age. He started with punch cards. He was working online through the telephone long before the internet. We actually had a computer in our basement in 1970. When he passed away I found in his man cave five computer monitors, four desktops running, three laptops glowing, two ipads playing and a cartridge in a 3D-printer. What do your collections say about you?

And how would you feel if you suddenly lost all your collections – all you had in the world? There was a time in our nation’s history when millions of people lost everything through stock market crashes, factory closures and dust bowls. We know how they felt. It was called The Great Depression.

So when we come to the chapter in BELIEVE entitled Total Surrender you might feel a little depressed. After all, surrender means you lose. In the Super Bowl, the Atlanta Falcons went home feeling discouraged. In a war a losing nation is ravaged and ruined. Nobody wants to wave the white flag of surrender. We’re not excited about surrendering – even to Jesus. A four-year-old found a quarter in the driveway as the family left for church. Mom encouraged him to give it to Jesus in the offering plate. After church, however, he still had the quarter in his possession. When his Mom asked, “Why?” he replied “I was going to give it. But the man on the stage said God loves a cheerful giver, so I felt like I would be much more cheerful if I kept it.”

Surrender is never easy. Yet that’s what Jesus tells us to do if we want to follow Him.

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? (Luke 9:23-25)

Jesus reveals one of the unexpected twists of life. The world tells you “More collections = more life.” More luxuries, more achievements, more possessions, more fame will give you a better, fuller, richer life.

If that formula is true for anyone it should be true for Tom Brady. “The Comeback Kid,” as he was known when he played for the University of Michigan, just pulled off the biggest come from behind win in Super Bowl history. During Brady’s career with the New England Patriots he’s earned an astounding five Super Bowl wins, four Super Bowl MVPs and two League MVPs. Brady is rated among the greatest quarterbacks of all time. Yet in 2005, Tom Brady was interviewed by 60 Minutes journalist Steve Kroft. Despite the fame and career accomplishments he achieved already, Brady told Kroft something was still lacking in his life:

Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what [it's all about].' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think, 'It's got to be more than this.' I mean this isn't—this can't be—all it's cracked up to be."

Kroft pressed Brady as to what the right answer was, and Brady added:

What's the answer? I wish I knew... I love playing football, and I love being quarterback for this team. But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find.¹

So more collections, possessions and achievements do not equal more life. Now Jesus doesn’t say the opposite is true – no possessions or achievements is a better life. Just ask any of our Code Blue homeless guests how harsh life is for them. What does He say?

Surrender your life to me and for me. That’s the only way to save your life. That’s the way to find a fuller, richer, deeper life. If you try to gather all the stuff the world says, your life will be crushed under all the collections. If you try to live selfishly, if you live to please yourself, you’ll lose. Jesus says the way to win is to lose. The way to win at life is to surrender your life to Him and His way of life. The key idea in BELIEVE this week is “I dedicate my life to God’s purposes.” And the key question is, “How do I cultivate a life of sacrificial service?”

The thought of Total Surrender may scare you. This week you’ll read stories about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Queen Esther, and Stephen the first Christian martyr. Each one made the ultimate surrender. Each one chose God rather than life. Four out of five of them lived. Stephen didn’t. Down through the ages there have been countless followers of Jesus who’ve made the ultimate surrender and didn’t live. My guess is you’re not that excited about joining them. Of all the spiritual gifts, for some reason nobody seems to want the gift of

¹ www.cbsnews.com and 60 Minutes (CBS, 2007)

martyrdom. I honestly don't know what God has in store for you and me. I don't know if He will ever ask you to make such a dramatic sacrifice. What I do know is Jesus wants you to live a life of daily sacrifice and surrender. According to Jesus there are three steps to being His disciple.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

What does it mean to **Deny Yourself**? He doesn't mean deny yourself chocolate, ice cream or television for Lent. In this case, you deny only one thing: yourself. You give up yourself. You give up the right to yourself. You give your life over into God's hands. He becomes the owner of your life.

After my Dad passed away, I helped my Mom get everything in her name. Thankfully he set up their finances so they can be easily transferred to her. The most challenging transition was the ownership of their cars. The lawyer had to petition the court, we needed to obtain a letter from the court, present this to the Division of Motor Vehicles, with the two titles, the mileage of each car, my Mother's driver's license and \$57 per title. This is required even though both titles are in both their names.

Right now, the title of your life may be in just your name, in someone else's name or maybe it's even in your name and Jesus' name. When Jesus says, "Deny yourself" He asks you to transfer the title of your life into just His name. He becomes the sole owner of your life. In a quote from Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis describes Jesus as saying:

"Give me all of you!!! I don't want so much of your time, so much of your talents and money, and so much of your work. I want YOU!!! ALL OF YOU!! No half measures will do. I don't want to only prune a branch here and a branch there; rather I want the whole tree out! Hand it over to me, the whole outfit, all of your desires, all of your wants and wishes and dreams. Turn them ALL over to me, give yourself to me and I will make of you a new self---in my image. Give me yourself and in exchange I will give you Myself. My will, shall become your will. My heart, shall become your heart."

How do you do that practically? That's Jesus' next point: **Death to Your Way**. Jesus says, "Take up your cross." When someone carries a cross it means one thing: death. Now Jesus doesn't want you to die. He wants you to put to death your way of doing things. We put to death whatever comes between us and Him, whatever gets in the way of our relationship with Him. Some things in our lives need to die before there is a resurrection, before new life rises up.

It's impressive to see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego dance in a disco inferno and come out unsinged. They were willing to make the total surrender, to worship God instead of a golden idol even if it meant death in the fiery furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18)

How could they make such a sacrifice? They prepared for it daily. That's how you do anything well – you work up to it with practice. You run shorter distances to train for the marathon. You take classes before you graduate. You practice piano scales before you give the concert.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego prepared for their big surrender with lots of daily surrenders. They fasted with Daniel, eating only vegetables and drinking only water, instead of feasting on the king's rich food. Fasting is one of the ways we learn how to surrender to God. Fasting is not dieting. Fasting is giving up something – food and drink, TV, social media, video games, alcohol, gossip, judgments, prejudices – anything your heart hungers for so you can develop a greater hunger for God.

Dave Pettigrew has offered numerous concerts here at Woodside. Recently he posted on his blog that he is in the middle of a 22 day Daniel Fast in which he cuts out all sugar, meat, fish & breads. Only drink water for the whole time. He is not doing it to lose weight. The physical hunger is teaching him to spiritually hunger more for God. Quoting a friend, Dave writes,

"Developing a hungry heart after God is tough. The competition for our heart is fierce; phone, Internet, television, classes, projects, friends, money, things, work and fun. When we crave everything, we end up with nothing. The noise and the confusion of a crowded heart can block our access to Him".

What do you need to take out of your life to develop a more intimate and passionate relationship with our Father? To be completely honest, I need to get rid of some things in my life to find the time to spend with God more every day. Going through this fast I've been able to find more time to be with God because I need it. I've been hungering for Him more because I haven't had the food that usually comforts me.

Bottom line. If I can do it, so can you. Start small. Isolate one thing in your life, or your day, you can give up to spend more time with our Father. I guarantee the more you give up, the more you get. As it tells us in James 4:8 "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you". I encourage you today. Draw near to Him. See what changes in your life. How hungry are you for the changes that God wants to make in your life.

In order to gain the Lord, you must make room for Him by losing a few things. I challenge you to fast this week. Give up something for two, three or seven days. It can't be something easy. It must cause you some hunger pains. It might be video games, facebook or twitter, binge watching a show. I challenge this whole congregation to do a food fast along with our Senior Highs during the 30 Hour Famine next week. You don't have to fast for 30 Hours. Just miss two meals – breakfast and lunch. Fast two meals and donate with them to World Vision. And when you fast and give up something, make sure to add something – more time in worship and prayer, more time in God's Word, more time serving others, more giving to others.

Practice surrendering small things, prepares you to surrender some larger things:

- Release your control on the people in your life.
- Surrender your right to feel sorry for yourself.
- Let go of the expectations you impose on everyone around you.
- Try tithing – giving 10% to God's work – for a month.

- Put down the addiction that holds you in its clutches.
- Clear out the guilt, the shame and the resentment stashed up in your soul.
- Admit that you were wrong and ask forgiveness.
- Quit listening to the criticisms in your head that tell you God will never forgive you.

When we begin to put to death our way we start to **Daily Follow His Way**. Jesus says the last step is “daily follow me” (Luke 9:23). Simply mimic and copy what you see Jesus doing. Does Jesus forgive? Then you forgive. Does Jesus serve and help others? Then you serve and help others. Does Jesus pray to the Father? Then you pray to the Father. Does Jesus invite everyone to come to Him? Then you invite everyone to come to Him. Jesus isn’t asking for one huge attention-getting, glorious act of total surrender. He’s looking for daily acts of surrender that copy what He did.

Fred Craddock was a great preacher. As a child he used to go to a Christian camp in the summer where he heard missionaries give amazing testimonies of the sacrifices they made out in the mission field. At night, he would lie awake in his bunk bed and dream about being a missionary in some far off jungle. He imagined giving his life for Christ in one great and glorious act of surrender. He dreamed they would build a monument to him on that spot and one day tourists would come and see the monument. “Stand by Fred’s monument Mabel and let me take your picture.” It was awesome.

Then he grew older and realized that’s not what Jesus wanted. He writes, Most of us think that this call to follow Jesus will come in a startling moment...that causes us to shed our old life in order to totally and completely embrace another life for the sake of the Gospel. And the truth is, for most of us, most of the time, it doesn’t happen that way. It’s as if we have been given a million dollars and we think we have to spend it all at once on something big. The reality is that we give away the million dollars a quarter at a time, all day long, every day of our lives. We give it away in little acts of sacrifice and kindness to others and devotion to God. We listen to the neighbor kid’s problems, we spend a night at the homeless shelter, we give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home, treat the teenager at the drive through with respect whether they deserve it or not, the list goes on. Usually, giving our lives to Christ is neither glorious nor spectacular. It’s done in little acts of love, twenty-five cents at a time; living the Christian life little by little, day after day, over the long haul.²

Got a quarter?

² Fred Craddock – Cherry Log Sermons