

Surrender 104

Andrew Murray's Fifth Chapter in "Absolute Surrender" (adapted by Chris)

Monday' Reading:

"He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.'" (Luke 18:27).

Jesus challenged the rich young man who came to him asking about salvation, *"Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* We are told that the young man went away sorrowful. Then Jesus says to his disciples, *"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* Astonished by what Jesus said, the disciples replied, *"Then who can be saved?"* Then Jesus gave the most blessed answer:

"What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

This story gives us two lessons. First, that it is impossible to do anything for salvation by our own efforts no matter how closely we may follow. But second, what is impossible for us to accomplish, God can do.

These are two great lessons we all must learn in life. It often takes us a long time to learn the first lesson, that self-willed efforts cannot restore us to communion with God. But, when we do learn this lesson, the second lesson seems even more elusive, that what we cannot accomplish God can and is willing to do in us. Blessed is the one who learns both these lessons! You can mark your spiritual formation by stages in learning these two lessons.

Monday's Reflection:

I have often mentored folks in recovery from alcoholism. Bill W's experience of radical transformation and freedom from addiction came from personal encounters with Christ. His story is fascinating and worth looking up. Those I have mentored in the Sacred Art of Surrender who have learned the steps find this art very familiar. Examine the first three steps of Alcoholics Anonymous' 12 Steps and meditate on their alignment with Jesus' teaching in Luke 18:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (you could replace this with "sin")— that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

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Tuesday's Reading

Man Cannot

The first stage of spiritual formation is marked by human effort and failure. How often do Christians get stuck in this stage. We try to rid ourselves of sin only to fail and go back to the drawing board. The solution we come up with? More effort! It only results in more failure. Peter spent three years closely following Jesus and yet he only learned this lesson when he denied Christ three times. It was here he came to the end of himself and wept bitterly. He had finally learned, no human effort can accomplish it.

The one stage is when a man is trying to do his utmost and fails, when a man tries to do better and fails again, when a man tries much more and always fails. And yet very often he does not even then learn the lesson: With man it is impossible to serve God and Christ. Peter spent three years in Christ's school, and he never learned that, It is impossible, until he had denied his Lord and went out and wept bitterly. Then he learned it.

When we first come to the foot of the cross, we are so full of hopeful optimism and Christ's joy. We set out earnestly and honestly expecting radical changes. Indeed we feel them. But somehow we experience disappointment after disappointment. The life we expected to lead seems so far away. After each failure our temptation is constantly to think, "I was not watchful enough, I did not make my resolutions strong enough." And so we set out on the path of sea-effort again. Failure soon follows once more. But we know Jesus' has given us freedom from sin.

This marks the second stage. We see that such a life is impossible but we cannot accept it. We think, "It is just beyond my reach." And we give up believing God must have never meant for us to reach it in this life. We try our best but settle into a low level despair of knowing we'll never quite reach the rest promised to us in this life.

Tuesday's Reflection:

Do these two stages ring true to you? Sit and think about your life story. If you were to create a timeline, can you see moments of trying and failure in your pursuit of God's salvation and rest? Can you identify times of resignation into an imperfect life? Mark them on your timeline.

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Wednesday's Reading

God is willing to lead us to a third stage. When we accept that our efforts cannot get the job done, and yet still feel the longing for transformation, we cry out to God, "Lord, what is the meaning of this? How can I be freed from the power of sin?"

This is a good sign. Only a regenerate heart can see the truth of the first lesson but still desire after the result. This is what Paul demonstrates in Romans chapter seven. A man who loves God's law and desires after it but continues to fail in self effort time after time. We need something more than self-effort. Paul shows us that what is impossible with self-effort, is possible with God. In Philippians 2:13 he says, "for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

See the contrast from the man in Romans chapter seven and Paul's assertion in Philippians chapter two? In Romans seven, the man has come to the conclusion that he cannot accomplish God's will but desires it so badly, he continues to try with only failure as his result. In Philippians two, the self-effort is ended and a full reliance on God's power to do what is impossible for us soaks in. This is a necessary step in true spiritual formation. Coming to the end of our self and seeking something greater than self. Let us say to God, "It is impossible for me, my God! Let there be an end of the flesh and all its powers, an end of self, and let it be my glory to be helpless before you."

Praise God for the divine teaching of his Spirit within us that makes us helpless before God!

We are all made capable of receiving this. Let the Lord bring you to the end of self. It is here that you will find the life of absolute surrender necessary for transformation into who God has made you to be. You are meant for it! You can live it in all aspects of your life. I pray God teaches you this lesson now. If you are thinking, "I can't do that!" You are on the right path. Accept that position before God and pray out, "My heart's desire and delight is absolute surrender to your will O God. But I cannot make it happen. It is impossible for me to live fully surrendered by self-effort." Fall down before God and learn you are utterly helpless. At that place God will come to work in you not only to will but to accomplish.

Wednesday's Practice:

As you examine that timeline of your life, was there a moment (or moments) where you recognized your helplessness before God? Mark them on the timeline. If there are not any, are you ready to mark one down for today?

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Thursday's Reading

God Can

When we get to this stage, we are ready to learn the second lesson, *“What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.”*

We noticed earlier that many Christians stop before getting to this lesson. They learn the first and go on to live a miserable Christian life, without joy, or strength, or victory. Why? Because they do not humble themselves to learn the second lesson.

Our daily lives should witness to this second lesson. We should live making the impossible realities of self-effort lived experiences in absolute surrender to God's almighty power. It is that power that the Christian life needs. We don't need just a little bit of God's power. We need all of it. Think of the examples of the gospel. Christ's birth, as told to Mary, is brought about by God's power to do the impossible. And Christ's resurrection? We are taught that it was God's almighty power that raised him from the dead.

Every tree grows out of the root from which it springs. A mighty oak tree hundreds of years old grew all that time out of one root which was established at the beginning. Christianity's root is the almighty power of God and in everyone who clings to God's promises, they must grow upon that root. Consider what Paul says to the Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 2:4-5), *“I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”* And yet his words, though not eloquent or full of human wisdom but were *“a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”* Humanly all that Paul did was weak and helpless, but God brought power through his absolute surrender.

What keeps us from lesson two is that we want to work it out and let God help us do it. That cannot be! You must become utterly helpless and let God do the full work required. And God will do it! Has God not proved he can do the impossible time and time again? To Abraham, to Jacob, Joseph, David, the remnant in Babylon, to all of us in Jesus! But it requires on condition, absolute surrender. We must stop seeking to make it happen on our own with God's help and realize we need all of God's power to make it happen in us.

Think back to the transformation of Peter. All his self-confidence and self will led to a complete denial of his Lord. But how God then raised him up to be the man needed to lead the Church and accomplish impossible things. Do you believe God can do the same in you?

Thursday's Practice

In your own words pray to God, *“What is impossible for me to do, I believe you can do. Bring about absolute surrender in me by your power, that I might be your witness to the world.”*

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Friday's Reading

God Works in Man

The Church seems to have very little influence in our world today. This is because it lacks the art of absolute surrender. The flesh rules in our congregations and the Spirit does not fill us with power as the separated people of God. This is so because we are still struggling to make transformation happen in our own power, with maybe a little of God's help. If we want this to change, the change must first happen in us. Only absolute surrender to God's power in us will make that change. When we think, "Ok, I accept the message of absolute surrender and its necessity. But, will that ever be mine?" Think back on the second lesson, "*What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.*" And God is able to maintain it. He is able to wake you daily with the blessed through, "I am in God's charge. My God is working out my life for me."

If you are feeling that the holiness and humility of Jesus are far off from your current experience, let it awaken you to absolute surrender. As you desire after that transformation and remember the first lesson, that it is impossible in your self-effort, surrender to the second, "what is impossible for me is possible for God." Invite God's light to shine fully over all your life. Surrender to it and allow God to draw you near and know him better.

And what an unimaginable life it must be! Living like Christ, letting Christ be our savior from sin and death, and being for us our life and strength. Paul's prayer for the Church in Ephesus can also be ours, "*according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit.*" (Eph. 3:16) What you have once sought in your own power, turn over now and invite the full power of God to do the impossible in you.

Friday's Practice:

Break your candle back out. Light that candle as you surrender yourself to God's power over your transformation into the very image of God. Sit in the light and warmth of it. Clear your mind and let God reveal to you what life lived by his power can look like.

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Saturday's Reading

Let the love of Christ be a sign to you of the transformation God desires to bring about in you. We must have a new inflowing of love. Our heart must be filled with life from above. From the every fountain of everlasting love, so that we might overflow in that love all day long. That Christ's love might become as natural to us as gentleness is to the lamb and cruelty to the wolf. Do you see this sign in you? When we are faced with an unlovable sinner who does all they can do to hate and speak evil, but our heart only grows in Christ's love of them, we will know that God's work is being done. Desire after this kind of love. And then repeat the second lesson, "What is impossible for me is possible for God."

There are many today who are crying out for a great revival. I know it is my prayer constantly. God, come and revive your people once again. It must begin in us. It must begin with absolute dependence for the fullness of God's power to accomplish what we cannot. It must come after we have come to the end of ourselves and surrendered as helpless before God so that God may do his mighty work in us.

All around you there is a world of sin and sorrow and the great enemy is there. But remember that Christ is on the throne. Christ is stronger than the powers of sin and death. Christ has conquered those powers already. And Christ will conquer them in the life of all who surrender absolutely to him. Get linked to God. Adore and trust God as the one with almighty power. Not only for your life but for those which Christ's love will touch overflowing from your surrendered life.

May Paul's blessing to the Church in Ephesus be reclaimed as ours, "*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*" (Eph. 3:20-21).

Saturday's Practice:

Take a walk with God today. If you have not practiced sabbath this week, surrender today to God. Ask God what he would have you do. Then surrender to God's power to make it happen in you.