

## WHEN CONTROL IS NO LONGER YOURS

8 March 2026

### SUMMARY

This Lenten message explores the profound difference between being in partnership with God and fully surrendering to His lordship. Bruce Downes guides listeners through a spiritual journey that moves beyond initial faith commitments to the deeper challenge of complete surrender. Using Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane as the central focus, the message reveals that true spiritual maturity requires releasing control and allowing God to direct every aspect of life. The message emphasizes that surrender is not passive resignation but an active, often agonizing choice to trust God completely, even when His path contradicts our plans and desires. This message represents the culmination of a Lenten series addressing awareness, interruption, decision, dependence, and ultimately surrender as the heart of Christian discipleship.

### KEY POINTS

- Spiritual growth follows a progression: awareness of settling for less, willingness to be interrupted, decision to turn toward God, learning daily dependence, and finally complete surrender
- Many Christians remain in "partnership" with God rather than making Him truly Lord, maintaining control while seeking God's blessing on their plans
- Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane ("Not my will, but yours be done") represents the center of Christianity and the model for true surrender
- Surrender does not mean denying fear or suppressing emotion; Jesus brought His full anguish and fear into prayer while still choosing obedience
- The moment that appears weakest (surrender) becomes the doorway through which salvation and resurrection enter
- Surrender doesn't destroy what God has called you to do; it purifies it by removing the illusion that the future depends entirely on your strength
- Spiritual maturity often means recognizing increasing inability and dependence on God, contrary to worldly measures of success
- The spiritual life happens in the privacy of one's prayer room, not in public displays
- Surrender unfolds through small, daily decisions rather than dramatic overnight transformations
- Practical surrender may involve admitting addiction, seeking help, forgiving without apology, accepting limitations, releasing control, or trusting God with uncertain futures

**SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:**

- Luke 22:39-46 (Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane)
- Matthew 6:5-6 (Teaching on prayer in secret)
- References to the wilderness temptation of Jesus (40 days)
- References to manna in the wilderness and daily provision

## WHEN CONTROL IS NO LONGER YOURS

### **SMALL GROUP GUIDE**

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

### **OPENING PRAYER**

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work during this Lenten season. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

### **ICEBREAKER**

Choose one:

- What's one area of your life where you find it hardest to let go of control?
- When did you first realize that following Jesus would cost you something?

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

#### **1. The Journey So Far**

The message reviewed the Lent series progression:

- **Week 1:** Awareness (Do you want to be made well?)
- **Week 2:** Interruption (Are you willing to be disturbed?)
- **Week 3:** Decision (Turning is harder than wanting)
- **Week 4:** Dependence (Trusting one day at a time)
- **Week 5:** Surrender (Not my will, but yours)

**Discussion:** Which of these stages has been most challenging for you personally? Why?

#### **2. Partnership vs. Lordship**

Bruce Downes said: *"Many people say, Lord, I make you the Lord of my life, but what they're really doing is saying to God, let's be in partnership about my life."*

#### **Questions:**

- What's the difference between having God as a partner versus having Him as Lord?
- In what areas of your life are you still in "partnership mode" with God rather than full surrender?
- Why is it so difficult to move from partnership to lordship?

#### **3. Jesus in the Garden**

Read Luke 22:39-46 together.

The message emphasized: *"Surrender doesn't mean pretending that the path ahead is easy. It doesn't mean denying fear. It doesn't mean suppressing the reality of suffering."*

#### **Questions:**

- What does Jesus's honest prayer teach us about how to approach God with our fears?
- How does Jesus model both honesty and obedience in this passage?
- Why is it significant that Jesus prayed "as was his custom" in this place?

#### **4. The Spiritual Life Deepens**

Bruce Downes shared: "*There comes a moment in the spiritual life when relationship moves deeper than partnership.*"

##### **Questions:**

- Have you experienced this shift in your own walk with God? What did it look like?
- How does our understanding of surrender change as we mature spiritually?
- Bruce Downes mentioned that as he's gotten older, he's become more aware he "can't do it." How does age and experience affect our ability to surrender?

#### **5. What Surrender Looks Like**

The message listed dozens of practical examples of what surrender might mean (rehabilitation, forgiveness, career changes, financial trust, etc.).

##### **Questions:**

- Which of the examples mentioned resonated most with you? Why?
- What is God currently asking you to surrender that you've been holding onto?
- What fears come up when you think about surrendering this area to God?

#### **6. The Paradox of Surrender**

*"What appears from the outside to be the weakest moment of Jesus's life becomes the doorway through which salvation enters the world."*

##### **Questions:**

- How does surrender actually lead to freedom rather than restriction?
- Can you share a time when surrendering control led to something better than you planned?
- How does the cross redefine what "success" and "failure" look like?

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Take 5 minutes of silence for each person to prayerfully consider:

1. What am I holding onto that God is asking me to release?
2. Where am I trying to control outcomes instead of trusting God?
3. What would it look like for me to pray "Not my will, but yours" in this specific situation?

This Week's Challenge: Choose ONE:

**Option 1: The Garden Prayer**

Set aside 15 minutes each day this week to pray honestly like Jesus did. Bring your fears, your desires, and your struggles to God, then end with "Not my will, but yours be done."

**Option 2: Identify Your Partnership**

Write down one area where you've been in "partnership mode" with God. Each day, consciously surrender that area to His lordship with a specific prayer.

**Option 3: The Surrender List**

Make a list of things you're trying to control. Each day, intentionally release one item on the list to God's care.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

*Father, your will be done. Even though I don't feel I can do this, I know with you I can. Jesus, I make you the Lord of my life, not the co-partner with me of my life. If you ask me to go left, I will go left. If you ask me to go right, I will go right. Come, Lord God, and meet us exactly where we are right now. In Jesus' name, Amen.*