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“NO LONGER MY OWN”

- Week 1 -

SCRIPTURE

PROVERBS 3:5-6NLT

**5Trust in the Lord with all your heart;  
    do not depend on your own understanding.  
6Seek his will in all you do,  
    and he will show you which path to take.**

MESSAGE

*This series was written to be used around Lent. If you choose to use it at a different time, adjust the opening to introduce your series.*

We are starting a new series today called, “Covenant”… I’ll get to why in a minute. But first I want to give you some background on why we’re doing this series. See, today is the first Sunday of the 6-week season leading up to Easter we call, “Lent.” And for centuries it’s been a time of self-reflection, self-sacrifice, and preparation for the celebration of Easter. That’s why people sometimes give something up for Lent. That’s why every other commercial now is for the filet-o-fish sandwich; because Catholics give up meat on Fridays. It’s supposed to remind us of the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us.

*[Ask your people, did anyone give anything up? I gave up giving things up. It’s a win win.]*

But the whole premise of Lent, and therefore this 6-week series we’re starting today, is to take a look at ourselves, do some self-reflection, and prepare our hearts to celebrate Easter.

And the primary area where we’re going to do that self-reflection is *control*, the endless time and money and stress we have, trying so hard to control our own lives, and ultimately how to give up that control to the One who can handle it.

I’ll tell you a little something about myself, confession time… I like being in control. I like knowing the outcome before I’ve started. I like having the ducks in a row... and a spreadsheet outlining which duck goes where. I like knowing steps B through Z, before I even do step A.

*Share a story in your life where you felt the need for control*.

And my need for control started early. My first sentence as a toddler was, “give it to him,” meaning me. I would hear my mom say to my older sisters, “give it to him.” So, naturally, I started saying it, too. Then, when I was a little older, my favorite book was called, “I Can Do It Myself,” about tying your own shoes and making your own bed. Loved it…so I did it! In school, I was the one who would take over group projects. “You all just hang out, I got this.” Cuz I knew it would get done and I knew it would get done right… or at least how I wanted it done. But maybe the most apparent place you see my need for control is this. I have 5 of them… and of course I’m talking about remote controls. Tv, 2 Roku, DVD player, and floor lamp… and yes, I can control my floor lamp with my Google Assistant. I love remotes… they are the modern-day royal scepter. The one with the remote has the power. Just try to steal one from me, I dare you. But I get it, 5 remotes can be confusing… so when people come over and get confused, I finally just say, “give it to him… I can do it myself.”

Point is, we like to be in control. What are some of the things, some of the areas in our lives, we like to have control of? We fight for financial security – 401K, Pension Plans, Medicare, Salaries. We fight for job security – contracts, tenure, employment agreements. We seek control in our relationships – prenups, engagement rings, wedding rings. We like to be in control. We like to know what’s going on around us and control what happens to us. We like to be responsible for our own futures. It’s comfortable. It’s secure.

And I figured out why… it’s about fear. When we feel like we have control of our own lives, we’re not afraid of the future. The unknown is scary, so when we feel like we have some security, some control over the outcome, that fear starts to go away. When we have a salary, we’re not afraid of where that next paycheck is coming from. When we have a commitment, we’re not afraid they might leave us. When we have a contract, we’re not afraid of losing the job. We don’t like feeling helpless… so we fear the unknown. And because of this we try to control every aspect of our lives.

But here’s the problem; control is an illusion. Ask anyone who has been fired on the spot for no apparent reason. Ask anyone who has been given a devastating health diagnosis out of the blue. Ask anyone who has had someone walk away. Control is an illusion… because so much happens to us in this life that is OUT of our control.

And yet, because the alternative is just too terrifying, because we are afraid of feeling helpless, we strive so hard to hold on to the control of our own lives. But this struggle causes problems…

First, it’s exhausting. That rat race for security is never ending because you’re trying to control what can’t be controlled, and it wears you down. You just end up weary trying to keep your head above water. It’s a battle that will never end… and we just end up exhausted.

Second, if you’re anything like me, when you try to control your own life, you often just end up screwing it up worse than before. I’m not good at it. I make plans and I set up all those steps, then something happens to change it, and all my spreadsheets get thrown out the window. Or worse, I think I know the direction I want to be going, then GOD throws in a wrench and we start it all over again. The struggle to control every aspect of our own lives leaves us exhausted and frustrated, and we often just make matters worse anyway.

So what do we do? What’s the answer? What’s the response?

Well, that’s where our scripture for today comes in:

It comes from a section of the Bible called Proverbs. Proverbs is just that… a book of wisdom… wise sayings that can help us in life. The one I want to look at is in the 3rd chapter… goes like this:

**5Trust in the Lord with all your heart;  
    do not depend on your own understanding.  
6Seek his will in all you do,  
    and he will show you which path to take.**

I think the opposite of this fear of being out of control… is trust. And the author this passage from the Bible knew that. That’s why he put in that second line… “Do not depend on your own understanding.” If he thought our judgment and decision making was okay, if he thought we could do a good enough job controlling our lives, he would have said, “trust in the Lord a little bit, and trust yourself a little bit, too.” But he didn’t. He said, “Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart, and DON’T depend on your own understanding.”

*Share a story here of someone who gave up control of a situation in his/her/their life and ended up being okay with the result. For me the story was of a former church member who was diagnosed with breast cancer. And during a subsequent conversation, she said, “when, I gave up control of the outcome, when I trusted God with the result, a sense of peace just washed over me.”*

Giving up control of our lives means trusting God with the outcome. God still expects us to do the work, to walk the path before us, but we find peace in trusting God with the outcome.

What are you trying so hard to control in your life? Is it your job? Do the work and do it to the best of your ability… but trust God with the outcome. Is it money? Work hard for your pennies, save what you can, live within your means… but trust that God will take care of you. Is it a relationship? Pour yourself into others, be the best husband, wife, son, daughter, friend, boyfriend, girlfriend, whatever you can be… but trust that God loves you and will take care of you.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. We give up control of our lives by trusting God with the outcome.

Like I said, for Lent, I gave up giving things up… but don’t hate, because instead, I *added* a practice. And that practice is this… I’m praying one prayer every day as part of Lent.

**[hand out prayer bookmarks.]**

I want to challenge you to pray this prayer every day over the course of Lent with me, because this prayer is going to be the foundation of everything we do over the course of Lent. We’re doing to take one line each week for the reflections in worship. *It’s going to be the basis of the small groups that start today.* And hopefully it will be the foundation of the self-reflection that will prepare you for the celebration of Easter.

Now, what is this prayer? This prayer is taken from a guy named John Wesley, who started the Methodist movement in the 1700s. He put together what he called a Covenant Service that he had all his Methodist churches do, usually the first Sunday of the year, sometimes *on* New Years Day. And this prayer is taken from that service… with a little bit of my adaptation. But that’s why it’s got all the thees and thous and thines, in it… it’s old school.

But it’s called the Wesley Covenant Prayer, and we’re calling this series, “Covenant” because this prayer beautifully outlines the covenant, the relationship we have with God. See, that scripture we read is a covenant, “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and he will make your paths straight.” If we do our part, God does God’s part. That’s a covenant. And for Lent, this prayer is our part. We’re going to pray this prayer, we’re going to try to live up to this prayer… and then trust God to do God’s part.. that’s a covenant.

So what we’ve talked about today, giving up control, is the first line of the Wesley Covenant Prayer:

*I am no longer my own, but thine.*

When we say this line, we’re saying, “God, I am no longer in control of my own life. I am yours. I am trusting you with the outcome.” That’s what I want you to think when you pray this part of the prayer…

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Let’s pray this prayer together to close:

**Wesley Covenant Prayer**

I am no longer my own but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt,

rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed for thee,

or laid aside for thee.

Let me be exalted for thee,

or brought low for thee.

Let me have all things,

let me have nothing.

Let me be full,

let me be empty.

I freely and humbly yield all things

to thy pleasure and thy disposal.

And now, sweet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

I am thine and thou art mine.

And may this covenant made on Earth,

be ratified in heaven.

So be it.