

## Surrender

To conceive of the theological concept of surrender, it's helpful to remember that the Christian life is a journey. We are all pilgrims on The Way. We travel to Christ even as we travel with and in Christ. He is our goal and He is the journey itself.

Therefore, just as we get stuck in the process of becoming who we are, so we find ourselves stuck in our growth in faith. If you remember The Pilgrim's Progress, there are many detours along the way. These are not so much failures and times when we must let go of something old in order to grasp the new life that is coming to us but cannot be seen so long as we have a death grip on the past.

Surrender is the act of falling into the hands of a living God. It is the time when we cannot find our way and have to turn to God for God's direction and rescue.

Sometimes this is dramatic---someone in addiction surrendering the ways they have lived their life to accept a new way of being human. Or an event like Paul's on the Damascus Road when he was blinded and could no longer walk by his own.

Sometimes this is more subtle. It can be surrendering to a voice that has been calling you in a new direction.

Often the lure of the new is so overwhelming that letting go of the past is less of a struggle and more of a relief. In these cases to surrender to the new becomes more like an awakening than inner battle.

Think of a turning point in your life.

What alerted you to the need to let go of the old? What were the signs in your body? What were other signs? How did you know that some change had to happen?

How did the new show itself? Was it suddenly or gradually? Did others suggest it to you or did you find it on your own?

What resistance did you receive? What affirmation?

What happened when this changed occurred? Let us see the scene---give us the place, the people, the circumstances. Tell this story in as much detail as possible.

What did you feel like afterwards? What kind of reaction was there around you? Did the old way call you back?

How did you move into the newness?

## +Porter Taylor—Notes for Stories of Surrender

Joan Chittister writes:

Surrender is what cleans off the barnacles that have been clinging to the soul. It is the final act of human openness. Without it I am doomed to live inside the stagnant world called the self....Openness saves me from the boundaries of the self and surrender to the moment is the essence of openness.

Surrender does not mean that I quit grieving what I do not have. It means that I surrender to new meanings and new circumstances, that I begin to think differently and to live somewhere that is totally elsewhere....I surrender to the circumstances of life. Try as I might to turn back the clock, to relive a period of my life with old friends, in long-gone places, out of common memories...I come to admit that such attempts are the myth of a mind in search of safer days. The way we were is over.

Surrender is the crossover point of life. It distinguishes who I was from who I have become....Life as I had fantasized is ended. What is left is the spiritual obligation to accept reality so that the spiritual life can really happen in me.

Surrender is the moment in which we realize that it is time to become someone new. Surrender is not about giving up; it is about moving on.

There are times to let a thing go. There is a time to put a thing down, however unresolved, however baffling, however wrong, however unjust it may be. There are some things in life that cannot be changed, however intent we are to change them. There is a time to let surrender take over so that the past does not consume the present, so that new life can come, so that joy has a chance to surprise us again.

Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope. Joan Chittister, 58-60.

Sam Keen wrote about learning to fly the trapeze. His metaphor for the spiritual life is letting go of the first bar and reaching out to be caught by the person on the second bar. This letting go is a metaphor for spiritual surrender. He writes:

“It is reasonable to play it safe, not to leap—but it is not reasonable always to be reasonable. As Blaise Pascal said, “The heart has reasons the mind knows not of.” ...Faith, love, and flying all depend on a relationship that can be created only by an act of trust that involves taking the risk of falling into the void. Before the fact, all risks are folly. It is only after a successful flight to the arms of the catcher that the risky decision to trust is seen as the essence of wisdom.

“Why face danger?” is the wrong question. The right question is “What happens if I try to build a life dedicated to avoiding all danger and all unnecessary risk?” ...I need to live near the vital edge between fear and fascination to help me remember that, so long as I live, I will tremble and wonder.”

Learning to Fly—Sam Keen

### Biblical passages on surrender

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those would save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world and forfeits their soul? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everone for what has been done.

Matthew 16:24-27

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:38

<sup>35</sup>And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup>He said, "Abba,<sup>[a]</sup> Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." Mark 14:35-36

<sup>20</sup>It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,<sup>[a]</sup> who loved me and gave himself for me

Galatians 2:20

<sup>20</sup>And they brought the boy<sup>[a]</sup> to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy,<sup>[b]</sup> and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup>Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. <sup>22</sup>It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to him, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes."<sup>24</sup>Immediately the father of the child cried out,<sup>[b]</sup> "I believe; help my unbelief!" Mark 9



## Storytelling Topics

Abandonment

Bringing Good News

Brokenness

Community

Connection

Ecstasy

Exile

Home

Hope

Hospitality

Humility

Justice

Kindness

Mercy

Mystery

Peace

Prayer

Reconciliation

Repentance

Resurrection

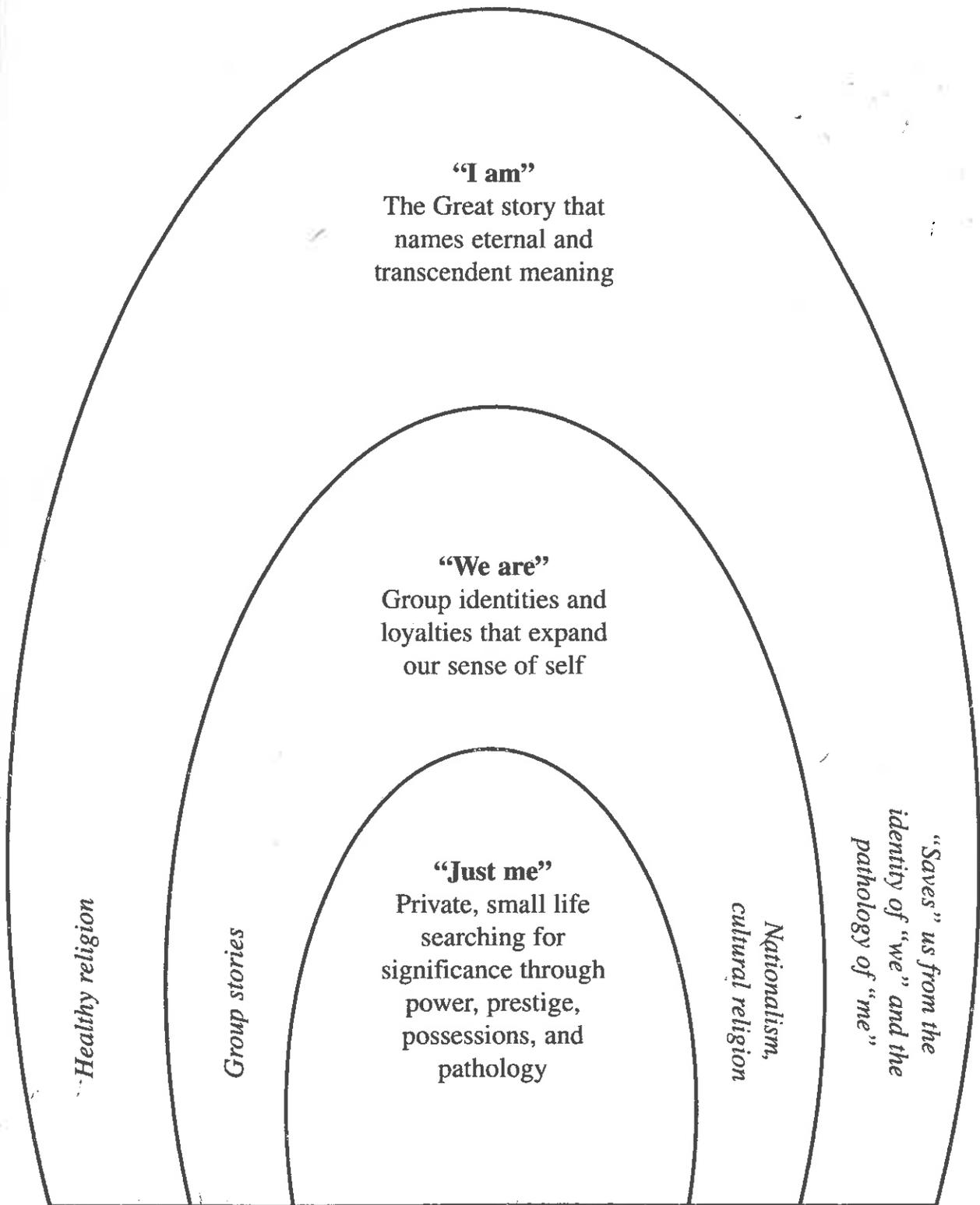
Self-Control

Service

Stillness

Waiting

Wonder



**“I am”**

The Great story that names eternal and transcendent meaning

**“We are”**

Group identities and loyalties that expand our sense of self

**“Just me”**

Private, small life searching for significance through power, prestige, possessions, and pathology

*Healthy religion*

*Group stories*

*Nationalism,  
cultural religion*

*“Saves” us from the  
identity of “we” and the  
pathology of “me”*

Awake at Night by Wendell Berry

Late in the night I pay  
the unrest I owe  
to the life that has never lived  
and cannot live now.  
What the world could be  
is my good dream  
and my agony when, dreaming it,  
I lie awake and turn  
and look into the dark.  
I think of a luxury  
in the sturdiness and grace  
of necessary things, not  
in frivolity. That would heal  
the earth, and heal men.  
But the end, too, is part  
of the pattern, the last  
labor of the heart:  
to learn to lie still,  
one with the earth  
again, and let the world go.

*Eating Poetry*  
by Mark Strand

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs bum like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.  
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.

I am a new man.  
I snarl at her and bark.  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

## **Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota**

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,  
Asleep on the black trunk,  
blowing like a leaf in green shadow.  
Down the ravine behind the empty house,  
The cowbells follow one another  
Into the distances of the afternoon.  
To my right,  
In a field of sunlight between two pines,  
The droppings of last year's horses  
Blaze up into golden stones.  
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.  
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.  
I have wasted my life.

James Arlington Wright

## TRANSLATION VS. TRANSFORMATION by Ken Wilbur from One Taste

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In a series of books (e.g., *A Sociable God*, *Up from Eden*, and *The Eye of Spirit*), I have tried to show that religion itself has always performed two very important, but very different, functions. One, it acts as a way of creating meaning for the separate self: it offers myths and stories and tales and narratives and rituals and revivals that, taken together, help the separate self make sense of, and endure, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. This function of religion does not usually or necessarily change the level of consciousness in a person; it does not deliver radical transformation. Nor does it deliver a shattering liberation from the separate self altogether. Rather, it consoles the self, fortifies the self, defends the self, promotes the self.

But two, religion has also served - in a usually very, very small minority - the function of radical transformation and liberation. This function of religion does not fortify the separate self, but utterly shatters it - not consolation but devastation, not entrenchment but emptiness, not complacency but explosion, not comfort but revolution - in short, not a conventional bolstering of consciousness but a radical transmutation and transformation at the deepest seat of consciousness itself.

There are several different ways that we can state these two important functions of religion. The first function-that of creating meaning for the self-is a type of horizontal movement; the second function-that of transcending the self-is a type of vertical movement (higher or deeper, depending on your metaphor). The first I have named "translation," the second, "transformation."

With translation, the self is simply given a new way to think or feel about reality. The self is given a new belief-perhaps holistic instead of atomistic, perhaps forgiveness instead of blame, perhaps relational instead of analytic. The self then learns to translate its world and its being in the terms of this new belief or new language or new paradigm, and this new and enchanting translation acts, at least temporarily, to alleviate or diminish the terror inherent in the heart of the separate self.

But with transformation, the very process of translation itself is challenged, witnessed, undermined and eventually dismantled. With typical translation, the self (or subject) is given a new way to think about the world (or objects); but with radical transformation, the self itself is inquired into, looked into, grabbed by its throat and literally throttled to death.

For authentic transformation is not a matter of belief but of the death of the believer; not a matter of translating the world but of transforming the world; not a matter of finding solace but of finding infinity on the other side of death. The self is not made content; the self is made toast.