

Entitlement

Entitlement is the belief that I inherently deserve certain treatment, or that I have the right to something. Entitlement can lead me to make assumptions like, *"I'm older than you, so I deserve your respect."* Or, *"I go to work all day, so I deserve to watch TV when I get home."* Or, *"I do well with what I have, so I deserve nicer things."* Or, *"Why am I still single, God? I've behaved myself, so I deserve a spouse!"* We've all felt entitled before. The good news is that we can recognize our own sense of entitlement, and take steps to surrender it to God. The aim of this essay is to help you move from a spirit of entitlement to a spirit of surrender.

Entitlement is dangerous as it keeps us from understanding the reality around us. For example, we might not be aware of how we treat others, because we're so consumed with attending to our own agenda. Entitlement is also dangerous because it ultimately means that my feelings are what govern my life. Being governed by feelings is a standard that will always lead to trouble. So, how can we move from a spirit of entitlement to a spirit of contentment and others mindedness? We should begin by recognizing the presence of entitlement in our hearts. Doing some self-evaluation can reveal where entitlement is dwelling. Questions to consider might be, *"Where am I discontent? Why am I feeling so disappointed? What do I think I need in order to live a godly life? Where am I comparing myself to others?"*

Ultimately, what you think about God matters most. If you don't know Him well, you're not likely to surrender yourself to Him. A lack of intimacy with God will likely make you hesitant to surrender to Him because you might think He's not faithful, or that He doesn't care, or that He's not enough for you. Those that know God intimately are able to move past these misplaced assumptions of God. Take for example, King David, who wrote many of the Psalms. He often expresses His surrender to the Lord because of how well he knows God. David knew God would always love him (Psalm 36:7). David knew that God would never leave him or forsake him (Psalm 139:7–12). David knew that God would always sustain him (Psalm 62:1–2). David knew God was enough (Psalm 27:4).

We can trust a good and loving God! This means that instead of being entitled, I can be content with what He chooses to give me, and content with what He chooses to withhold from me. He is enough, and when I delight in Him above all else, I can then understand what matters and what doesn't.

Philippians 2:3-5, ***"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."*** Consider this, that Jesus was the only human that's ever lived who had the right to be entitled to whatever He wanted. He never sinned! However, instead of choosing entitlement, He humbled Himself and took our consequences upon Himself. He gave up His own desires/comfort/life, so that others would benefit. We read in Luke 22:42, that Jesus put aside His entitlement and was content in honoring the Father in heaven, ***"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."*** The "cup" spoken of here, was death on the cross. Of all people, Jesus could have said, *"But I have the right to be comfortable! I have the right to be happy and safe!"* I'm so thankful to know Jesus, my loving God! Knowing Him compels me to want to follow His example and surrender my rights in order to honor Him!

An Exercise in Correcting Entitlement

Here's an exercise that I hope you're remember. Perhaps you'll write it down on the inside cover of a Bible. If you apply these three steps to any scenario or dilemma in your life, one where you're wrestling with your feelings, or where you have a sense of entitlement, then I'm certain you'll be able to see more clearly as to how to proceed with a spirit of contentment, instead of angst and entitlement. The three steps are 1) I give up the right to... 2) I'm willing to experience the emotion of... and 3) I will trust God...

The graph below provides examples of these three steps being applied to a variety of scenarios.

I give up the right to...	I am willing to experience the emotion of...	I will trust God...
Be controlling at home with my family.	Feeling frustrated, and not feeling valued for my opinion. Feeling annoyed that their doing things their way even if I don't prefer it.	To give me patience and empathy. To show me what really matters; relationships over my control.
Be liked, or popular, in social circles.	Going unnoticed, or feeling hurt for not getting the attention I think I deserve.	To be my security.
Have peace in my home.	Feeling inadequate as a parent, husband, and leader in the home.	To give me and my family His spiritual peace.
Experience immediate gratification.	Feeling frustrated and endure tension without giving in to quick pleasures.	To be my satisfaction and my source of strength in temptation.
Have my prayers answered how I want.	Disappointment in not having my plans come to pass.	To be a good Shepherd to me.
Be valued for my knowledge.	Not feeling valued, or smart.	To give me my worth.
Have a healthy affectionate relationship with my kids.	The pain of having my kids be relationally distant.	To show me how to best love my kids and to turn our hearts toward each other (Malachi 4:6)
Have a spouse that is faithful.	The pain and frustration of a spouse that I can't trust.	To sustain me in my faithfulness to my spouse while we work toward reconciliation.
Have financial security.	The stress of not knowing how our finances will be covered.	To provide for our needs.
Be happy with my life.	Unhappiness and disappointment.	To satisfy me daily and be my contentment.

I give up the right to... I am willing to experience the emotion of... I will trust God...

If you write down these steps, and fill in the blanks whenever you're feeling entitled, I believe you'll be able to see things in a refreshing and godly perspective. This is a practical tool about what surrender looks like. What might you need to surrender to the Lord today?