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August 27, 2023

Living Sacrifices
Romans 12:1-8

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your **bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your **spiritual worship**.*

***2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the **renewing of your minds**, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

***3** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think of yourself more highly** than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

***4** For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,*

***5** so we, who are many, **are one body in Christ**, and individually we are members one of another.*

***6** We **have gifts that differ** according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;*

***7** ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;*

***8** the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

What does it mean to you, when you hear the term ***living sacrifice***?

What do you think of?

I think of ***making a sacrifice***—

giving time and energy and resources, like to our kids or our parents.

I think of ***giving up*** what I want in order to serve someone else,

I think of those who ***give the sacrifice of their lives*** for their faith,

Or for their country.

What comes to ***your mind***?

Paul says that ***presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, is our worship!***

Which sounds different than just coming to church, right?

What if being a living sacrifice, is ***so much more***?

Listen to the way Presbyterian Pastor Eugene Peterson translated Romans 12 in *The Message Bible*:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God.

What do you think of that?

Take your *entire life*, and *give it to God* as an offering.

That's what a *sacrifice* is, isn't it?—

when you give something away,

when you give up what you have, for someone or something greater.

And that's what we are called to do!

Give *ourselves, our lives*, as a sacrifice to God!

Paul says that we give our *soma*—our bodies—

a Greek word that means body, and feelings, thinking, and actions!

In other words your *whole life*.

So, how can we give ourselves to God?

Well, Paul says it's by the *mercy* of God, the grace of God.

The Message says *with God helping you*.

In other words, we can't do it on our own.

We have to ask for God's help.

And, Paul says when we do this, it's *an act of worship*.

Which is a completely *different perspective* on worship, when you think about it.

Because aren't we usually coming here to see what worship *can give US?*

I mean, aren't we here to *RECEIVE* from God?

But *HOW do we truly receive* God's gifts?

What if we receive by *giving* ourselves to God?

Or, think about it this way--- Jesus said it was *better to give than to receive...*

what if that is *especially true* for worship?

What if we receive so much more when we are truly willing to give

our whole *voice* to the music,

our whole *heart* to the prayers,

our whole *attention* to the message,

our whole *self* to the people around us?

What do *you think* of that?

Paul says here in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12,
that we are *all members of the body of Christ*,
and we each have a part to play,
5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ,
and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ.

How often do you think about that when you come to worship?
That you have a part to play,
And something to give?

But that's who we are----*children of God*, made in the *image of God*,
And people with something to give.

Why is it so important to give?
Because, God is the *ultimate GIVER*.
So, *giving is the way* we imitate God.
giving is what we are called to do!

Which is really *countercultural*, isn't it?
I mean, we are surrounded by messages about *GETTING!*
About *taking what we want* from this world,
About *deserving more*, and more!
It's pretty rare that we are encouraged to *just give*—
Or self-sacrifice!

So the question might be: *how can we go from being TAKERS, to GIVERS?*
Paul says that we need a *transformation*:
Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God...

Be transformed.
It does not say transform yourself.
We can't transform ourselves.
And, it's *not* going to just happen spontaneously.
It's *got to be from God*.

It's got to be *Jesus who renews our minds*,
 because they get pretty junked up in the world, don't they?
 We need Jesus' help to be *renewed, and transformed*.

You know, in the Bible, we have some *incredible examples of transformation!*
And one is Paul himself.
 Do you remember his story?

His name was *Saul*.
 And he was the lead persecutor of early Christians.
 He would go door to door searching for Christians to throw in jail!

But one day his *whole life changed* as he was traveling to Damascus.
 This horrible man was blinded by a light from heaven,
 and heard the voice of Jesus asking him, *why are you persecuting me?*

Blind Saul was led into the city,
 And a Christian named *Ananias* had a vision from God.
 God told him to go help Saul. And Ananias asked God, *Are you sure you want me to help him?—the guy who's been persecuting us?*
 And God said '*he is an instrument* I have chosen to bring my name'.
 So Ananias laid hands upon Saul to restore his sight
 and *baptized* him into the Christian faith!

Then Saul started to *preach* the good news about Jesus Christ,
 and he became known as Paul.
 Paul *was transformed* by a renewed mind,
 And his whole life became a *living sacrifice* for God.

When I hear his story,
 I realize that *if Paul could become* an instrument for God—*ANY of us can!*
 And only God knows what amazing things can happen *through YOU!*
What if we were ALL willing to be living sacrifices?

All throughout Paul's letters,
 we see *this very stark choice* for life.
 We can either live for *ourselves*, which is the way of the *world, or the flesh*.
 Or we can live for *God*,
 which is the way of *Jesus, the way of the Holy Spirit*.
 Only two choices----*living for ourselves, or for God*.

So, how do we know if we are living for Jesus?

Well, one sign is that we *GIVE of ourselves to God.*

Remember, the way of our **world** is to be a *TAKER*,
But the way of the **Spirit** is to be a *GIVER*, like God.

God is the ultimate giver.

So, *Giving* is our calling.

And we are called to give our whole selves—*as living sacrifices.*

You know, that's really what that word *stewardship* is all about.

It's a word we associate with giving money,
but it's so much more than that.

Stewardship is knowing that *everything we have*,
and all that we are, is a *gift* from God.

That's what we *pray over our offerings* each Sunday.

We pray that God would use all that we have, and all that we are.

Why?

Because it's not ours—it's all a gift from God.

We're just giving back to God!

The world thinks *we earned it, we deserve it.*

So we should *keep* it.

The Bible says *It's ALL God's.*

And we are *just 'stewards' or caretakers* of it.

And we are called to be *'good stewards'* of our time, talent, and treasure....
giving back to God.

That's what it means to be a *living sacrifice.*

The question is---are we giving?

Are we giving our time, talent, and treasure,

Are we giving our whole lives to God?

The truth, is every choice we make about what we have
leads to something greater.

Every little decision about our time, talent, and treasure—
leads to something bigger.

Mother Teresa used to say she was just a *pencil* in the hands of God.
 Pastor *Shane Claiborne* spent a summer in the slums of Calcutta with her.
 And he wrote:

People often ask me what Mother Teresa was like. Sometimes it's like they wonder if she glowed in the dark or had a halo. She was actually short, wrinkled, and precious, maybe even a little ornery—like a beautiful, wise old granny. But there is one thing I will never forget—her feet. Her feet were deformed. Each morning in Mass, I would stare at them. I wondered if she had contracted leprosy. But I wasn't going to ask, of course.

One day a sister said to us, "Have you noticed her feet?" We nodded, curious. She said: "Her feet are deformed because we get just enough donated shoes for everyone, and Mother does not want anyone to get stuck with the worst pair, so she digs through and finds them. And years of doing that have deformed her feet." Years of loving her neighbor deformed her feet.

Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution* (Zondervan, 2006), p.167-168;

Talk about *giving, and being a living sacrifice*.
 Isn't that an amazing story?

So, the question is— are we living like that?
 For *ourselves*? Or for *God*?
 For *ourselves*? Or for *others*?

You know, even very *secular people* understand
 the *two options* in life—
 to live for *yourself*, OR for *others*.

In fact, if you listen to social media—
 We often hear that we should live for ourselves.
 “Do for you”.
 “You deserve it”.

But the Bible has a *different take* on life.
 Jesus would say that real life is about *living for God, not self*.
 Living for others, not just yourself.

I believe it's a *choice* we are faced with all the time, right?
 Some choices seem insignificant,
 but *every choice* leads to something greater, doesn't it?
 Mother Teresa combing through the donated shoes seems simple enough, until you
 realize that after doing that thousands of times,
 it changed her feet!
She was a living sacrifice.
 The question is: **ARE WE?**

And, *HOW are we doing that?*
 What are *your gifts*?
 How are *you giving* them to God?
 Paul says we have different gifts—and we all have something to share in the body
 of Christ.
What are your gifts?
Are you sharing them?

*I once heard an African fable about a boy who loved to play with marbles,
 and a shiny blue marble was his favorite.
 But one day, he passed by a young girl who had a hand full of chocolates,
 and he started to want those chocolates even more than his marbles...
 so he offered to trade her...
 but first, he reached down into his pocket,
 and feeling the special ridges of his favorite blue marble,
 he pushed that one down to the bottom of his pocket,
 and pulled out all the rest...trading them for the chocolates...
 and as he was walking away he looked back at the girl and asked her,
did you give me ALL your chocolates?...
 even though he was unwilling to give ALL of his precious marbles.*

Being a living sacrifice means **giving our ALL.**
 Giving our whole lives to God.

When **William Booth**, founder of the Salvation Army,
 was interviewed near the end of his life he said:
God had ALL there was of me.
There have been others who had greater plans, greater opportunities....
but from the day I got a vision of what God could do,
I made up my mind that God would have ALL there was of William Booth.
www.christianitytoday.com/history/sayings-of-william-booth

Does God have *ALL of us?*

I've always loved the saying by Winston Churchill,

You make a LIVING by what you get, you make a LIFE by what you GIVE.

Is there any better way to know how we're doing in our walk with God,
Than to look at how we are *giving?*

Paul never believed that being a Christian

Meant being on a *membership list* somewhere.

It was always about *giving and growing* with Jesus.

And that's why he emphasized being a *living sacrifice*.

Because in our *giving*, we find *LIFE*,

We find *LOVE*,

And we find *JESUS*.

That is the *Good news of the Gospel* today:

By the grace of God, *we too are living sacrifices*.

Our God is a *giver*, and we can be *too*.

And for that truth, all God's people said, Amen.