

Natalie W. Bell
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A New Way of Life
Romans 12:1-2

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a **living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your true act of worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the **renewing of the mind**, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

This passage from Romans is such a **gold mine of wisdom**.
It begins with an appeal -- to present our bodies as **living sacrifices**.
Bodies here doesn't just mean flesh in Greek—it's your **whole self**.

Present your whole self as a **living sacrifice**.

I wonder--what does that mean to YOU?

What do you think of when you think of the word **sacrifice**?

It's a word that gets a bad rap in our world today.

But to the early audience, it would be very **meaningful**.

Back then there were **three kinds of sacrifices**:

those that made **atonement**—where people received forgiveness

those that were for **celebration**,

and those that were for **dedication** to God

Lectionary commentary, Romans 12:1-2, John E. Guns, The African American Lectionary, 2008.

Since **Jesus is THE atoning** sacrifice for all of us,

Paul wants us to be thinking about living as a **dedication** sacrifice.

Setting ourselves aside for God.

This is why he goes on to call this 'your true worship',

which paraphrased from the Greek reads,

this is your life's work.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way in his **The Message** translation of the Bible:

*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 him.*

Paul reminds us that we are MADE to *give ourselves to God*, the one who made us.

This is what life is ***REALLY all about***.

In the words of Pastor Rick Warren, ‘*it’s not about you.*’ Life is really all about **God**, and giving our lives to God—that’s where we find our joy, our meaning.

But how do we do that?

We are to let go of the world, and the pressure to conform, and ***be transformed by a RENEWED mind***.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way:

*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, **fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.** Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the **best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.***

Notice that The Bible ***DOES NOT say*** go out and transform yourself.

It says ***BE transformed***, be changed, by a renewed mind.

And, the **ONLY** person that can do this for us is ***Jesus***.

So, ***what happens then?***

Once we give ourselves to God, and allow God to change us and renew us, we develop the ***humility*** we need as followers of Jesus, (we understand that life is NOT about us), and we start to think more about our ***community***.

We understand that life is about ***life together***,

Because, as Paul says, we are actually ***members of one another***.

We each have gifts that all work together in the body of Christ.

That’s really a ***summary of the gospel!***

True life is found in ***giving ourselves*** to God.

NOT to the ***world***, or ***ourselves***, but to God.

In that act of living sacrifice we find ***true, meaningful, joyful life***.

Jesus himself said, that whoever wants to ***save*** their life will lose it, and whoever ***loses*** their life for him will find it, in Matthew 16:25.

Trying to hang on to the life *the world says we NEED and DESERVE* will ultimately lead us nowhere.
But *giving up our lives FOR and TO Jesus* will bring us abundant life!
just as Jesus promised in John 10.

Years ago I read a great book by Jen Hatmaker.
called “*7: An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess*”
In the book she takes herself (and her family) on a seven-month journey
to rid seven types of excess in life—in order to grow closer to Jesus.

The first month is all about *Food*—
She tries to limit foods to seven healthy options for the month,
just to see how dependent we are on all the junk we all eat.

The second month she tackles *Clothes*,
by paring her own wardrobe down to 7 essential items.
Cleaning all the closets—and giving clothes away to others in need.

The third month she examines *Possessions*,
by reducing what they own, and what they purchase.
She researches how much the average American spends each week,
and how far that would go in other parts of the world.

The fourth month is about *Media*,
so she fasts from non-essential technology
like Facebook and web surfing.
(and she admits this is the actually the hardest month!)

The fifth month is about *Waste*,
so she commits to radically reduce, reuse, and recycle everything possible.
She learns how much Americans throw away every day!

The sixth month is about *Spending*,
And trying to wait to buy until it is a NEED, not just a want.
She learns what is produced in sweatshops, and commits to shopping responsibly.

Finally, the seventh month is about reducing *Stress*.
Which means a *Sabbath* day every week,
A complete break from work and praying at least 7 times throughout each day.

It's a challenging, and inspiring book—
I mean, most of us struggle with *every single one* of those areas of excess, right?

We are a small population of the world,
using a majority of the world's resources,
and all of that does NOT draw us closer to Jesus—it can actually pull us away!

Hatmaker's main *prayer* is this:

*Jesus may there be less of me and my junk, and more of you and your kingdom.
I will reduce, so You can increase.*

Hatmaker, Jen. 7: An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess, pg. 16.

It all reminds me of Romans 12.

And presenting our lives as a *living sacrifice--*
by *setting aside* the loves and habits of our lives
to commit them to God.

It reminds me of the power of *letting go* of the way the WORLD says we should
live,

and *being transformed* with a new mind
to learn what *really matters* in life.

How does that speak to you?

How can *God's kingdom* mean so much more to you---
than *anything* we own, or want to have?

How could we be transformed *by the renewing of our minds?*

There's a man in the Bible who illustrates such transformation--
His name is *Saul*.

And he was a 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.

When he was blinded by a great light from heaven, and heard the voice of Jesus
asking him, *why are you persecuting me?*

The blinded Saul was led into the city.

And a Christian named *Ananias* had his own vision from God.

God told him to go help Saul. And Ananias asked God,

Are you sure you want me to go to HIM—the guy 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 of Jesus Christ, and became known as *Paul*.

The Book of *Acts* tells his story, and his travels, as it describes the early church.

Paul *was transformed* by Jesus,
And a renewed mind!
He became a *living sacrifice* for God.

Talk about not being *conformed* to this world—
Paul was the *epitome* of a life transformed for the better!

When I hear his story,
I remember that there's nothing we've done that *God can't overcome*.
Nothing can keep us from *being used by God*.
If Paul could become an instrument for God—any of us can!
And God alone knows what amazing things can happen *through each one of us!*

Have you ever thought about HOW God can use YOU?

Paul's story reminds us that God always give us a *new chance*,
and a clean slate in life.

And as Paul writes in *2 Corinthians 5:17*
everyone who is in Christ is a NEW CREATION,
the old has gone, the new has come!

The truth is that every single one of us is an *instrument of God*,
a living sacrifice.

Mother Teresa used to say that she was a *pencil* in the hands of God.
Pastor and writer *Shane Claiborne* spent a summer in Calcutta with her.
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 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. "Hey Mother, what's wrong with your feet?"

*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;

You know, even **SECULAR people** understand the **two options** we have in life—live for **yourself**, or for one **another**. For yourself, or something bigger than yourself. We all know this, right?

In December 2014, GQ magazine had quotes showing these two worldviews. In the first article, actor **Matthew McConaughey**, GQ's "**Man of the Year**," said, "I'm a fan of the word **selfish**. Self. Ish.....Selfish has gotten a bad rap. You should do for you."

A few pages later award-winning fiction writer **George Saunders**, the man named "**Life Coach of the Year**," said, "*The big kahuna of all moral questions, as far as I'm concerned, is **ego**. How do you correct the fundamental misperception that we are all born with—[namely, the idea that] I am central? All of the nasty stuff in this life comes out of that misunderstanding.*"
PreachingToday 2014, Jessica Pressler, "Man of the Year," GQ (12-13); Byard Duncan, "Life Coach of the Year George Saunders," GQ (12-13)

That's kind of what it all boils down to:
Will we think of **OURSELVES first**?
Or **be God-centered**---which leads us to **LOVE ONE another**?
Isn't that the **choice** we are faced with every single day?
It's not easy.
We are all tempted to live for ourselves.
But what if we surrendered that desire?
What if we allowed ourselves to be transformed?

Seeking less for ourselves, actually frees us to do **MORE for others**.
Less of us, means more of Jesus, more of our neighbors.
Imagine the world, if we lived like that?

Isn't that the *new life* we want and need?
Don't we want the path to MEANING? And JOY?

*Friends, the Good News is that WE TOO can be transformed—
By the renewing of OUR minds.*

We don't have to live according to the ways of the world.

We have the chance to live *as new creations in Christ*.

May God give us the *courage* to do just that.

And for the gift of new life, all God's people can say together, Amen.