

How to Build a Life of Sacrifice Romans 12:1 (NIV)

Good morning! Tomorrow is Memorial Day and we're celebrating it today. Actually, I haven't celebrated it with you for the past five years. Why is that? It's because for the past five years, as you know, I have been celebrating it with our youth and our youth leaders in a faraway place like Camp Piankatank near Williamsburg. During Memorial Day weekend, many of us are gone together with the youth of other churches to have our youth camp. So, it feels unusual today because we're all here with you. And I hope you're glad I'm here with you.

We're taking a break from our series "Jesus Gives". I thought I'd share a message with you about sacrifice.

When you think of the word sacrifice what comes to your mind? An offering, something given up, a surrender? Some of us may even have a picture of an animal being slaughtered or, even a human being killed on an altar to appease a pagan god. Whatever picture you may have in your mind, sacrifice is not a term that many of us, if not, all of us, would embrace wholeheartedly. Why? Because it means giving up something that is most precious to us. But we would do that anyway at a great cost to us because of something or someone more precious. Like our fallen heroes, our soldiers who have given up their own lives for something more precious, our freedom. And our frontliners, who are giving up their own safety for something more precious, the health of others. Even all of us, we are giving up our freedom to go out of the house and mingle with others and do besobeso during this lockdown for something more precious, the prevention of more coronavirus cases.

In all these, there is pain that may involve every aspect of our being. Sacrifice is not an easy thing to do. But that is what the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to do with respect to their relationship to God.

In Romans 12:1, Paul says, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”*

This afternoon, I’d like to talk about “Why Build a Life of Sacrifice”. That may sound uncomfortable especially to many of us who have been used to a life of comfort and ease here in America. Many of us came here to America not looking for a life of sacrifice but a life of satisfaction.

I read the story of this newspaper journalist who was assigned to Jerusalem. He decided to get an apartment overlooking the Wailing Wall. After several weeks of watching, he realized that every day the same elderly Jewish gentleman would come and spend most of the day praying vigorously at the wall.

The journalist wondered whether there was a story here, so he went down to the wall and introduced himself. “I see that you come every day to the wall. What are you praying for?”

The elderly man replied, “In the morning I pray for world peace; at lunchtime, I pray for my fellow man. Then in the late afternoon, I pray for the future of this earth.”

The journalist asked how long the man had been doing this, and he told the reporter that he had been doing it for about 25 years. The journalist was amazed and asked how it felt to come here every day and pray so much.

“How does it feel?” the elderly man replied. “It feels like I’m talking to a wall.”

I have the feeling that this is what God feels like when He is talking to us, especially when it comes to being those living sacrifices wholly devoted to Him. Yet we are told that this is exactly what God desires us to be.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are told that we are to present ourselves as “living sacrifices,” with the full understanding that there is no such thing as a partial sacrifice. It is impossible to have a partial sacrifice. We are either fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, or we’re not. It’s impossible to be partially sacrificed.

There is a story about a pig and a chicken walking down a country road when they saw a sign saying, “Breakfast to Benefit the Poor.” Many of you have heard this before so it’s ok if you don’t laugh. The chicken said, “We should donate a ham and egg breakfast.” But the pig replied, “Not so fast, for you it would just be a contribution, but for me it would be a total commitment.”

The pig understood that it’s not possible to offer a partial sacrifice. To be that living sacrifice is to commit ourselves to God, which means that we are to yield, surrender, and entrust ourselves totally to God, which means to place ourselves completely at His disposal.

I think it’s safe to say that there are no take backs when it comes to sacrifices that have been offered. You cannot take back a sacrifice.

A sacrifice is something that we offer up to God. And Paul’s argument is that the appropriate response to the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf is to be those living sacrifices. When we do that, we are worshipping God truly and properly. Meaning, our relationship to him becomes significant and real.

Yet, when we look at these two words, “living” and “sacrifice,” they are what is called an oxymoron, that is, a combination of two seemingly contradictory words. Like pretty ugly and bittersweet and in our current lockdown situation, alone together. Yet, they are not, and it is important that they remain together.

You see, sacrifices are normally thought of as being offered in death, like the bulls and goats associated with the Old Testament sacrifices. But for the whole of mankind, Jesus has given His life as a sacrifice on our behalf, and has therefore offered the sacrifice of death for us. He took the punishment we deserve, death, because as the Bible says, the wages of our sin is death (Romans 6:23), and the reason Jesus did it is to bring us into a new life.

And so, to be those living sacrifices means that we are dead to sin and totally sold out to God, that is, alive to God, fulfilling His will in our lives and in this world. Therefore, the ultimate sacrifice on our part isn't death; rather it's living 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year being completely surrendered to the will of God.

General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army was asked the secret for God using him in such an effective way. Booth's answer was, "Other people have greater minds, more talent, and greater resources, but God has gotten all there is of me."

And Charles Stanley made this observation: "Why do you suppose that there are close to 100 million church members in America yet they are not making more of a moral and spiritual impact? Why is that on Sunday morning thousands of churches have more empty pews than full? Why is it that only 50 percent of the number of any church membership roll can be expected to attend? If Christians really believe in a real heaven and a real hell, how can we be so silent? The answer to all of these questions is tragically simple? God's people have made a decision about Jesus...but have never made a commitment to Him."

You see, folks, making a decision for Jesus Christ is not the same thing as being committed to Him. Therefore, we need to present ourselves to God as those living sacrifices; holy and acceptable to God, which is our true and proper worship.

C.T. Studd, who gave away his vast wealth and became a missionary said, “If Jesus Christ is God, and if He died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to give to Him.”

It is that word “give,” which is at the heart of building up a life of sacrifice.

A father took his son to McDonalds and ordered some fries for him. After sitting down, the smell of those fries got the better of the dad, but when he reached to take one, the boy slapped his hand and said, “Dad, you can’t have one. Those aren’t your fries.”

Three thoughts immediately went through the Father’s mind.

- First was that his child seemed to have forgotten just who it was that got those fries for him. His son forgot that he, the dad, was the provider of those fries, and without him his son would not have those fries.

- Second, the father realized that he was bigger than his son and could at any moment overpower him and take the fries he wanted. In truth, the son really didn’t have control over the fries, rather the father had that control, and as easily as he had given his son the fries, he could also just as easily take them away.

- And finally, the father realized that if it was fries his son wanted he could buy his son a truckload of fries.

But then he realized that he didn’t need his son’s fries, he could get himself an order of fries. What the father really wanted was for his son to learn to be unselfish.

In the same way God wants us to learn to be giving of ourselves and to give up those things that are dear to us. So, in our time together I’d like to share **why we need to give in order to build a life of sacrifice.**

1. Give because of what God has given you.

Our verse says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...”

Being a living sacrifice isn't accomplished by winning God's approval through good works; rather it's in response to God's mercy that He has shown to us, in that while we were yet sinners Jesus Christ came to this earth to die for us, to extend the Father's mercy towards us.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

So, we are giving as a sign of gratitude to what God has given us, his mercy.

A mother approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. Napoleon responded that her son had committed the offense twice and justice demanded death. The mother responded, “But I don't ask for justice, I am pleading for mercy.”

Napoleon responded, “But your son doesn't deserve mercy.” To which the mother cried, “Sir, it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for.” Napoleon then extended mercy and spared her son's life.

Therefore, to be a living sacrifice is based upon God's mercy, which is part of God's character.

“For the Lord your God is a merciful God; He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath.” (Deuteronomy 4:31 NIV)

God is merciful, and because of His mercy we don't get what we deserve, and that is, justice, leading to death. Instead we get grace, leading to eternal life.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious; He is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love. He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does He deal with us as we deserve.” (Psalm 103: 8, 10 NLT)

Therefore, God is a merciful God, giving us mercy, when we don't deserve it, along with great and precious promises, not to mention supplying all our needs when we seek Him and His kingdom first in our lives (Matthew 6:33).

2. Give because it will make you more like God.

The Bible says that we have been created into the image and likeness of God. And so, if God is a giving God, He created us to be givers as well. Think about the mercy and compassion God extends and gives to us, and how, through that mercy and compassion, He gets us through difficult times. The Bible then tells us that we are to give to others in the same way.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NKJV)

The apostle Paul gave his all to other people because he knew the great love and mercy that God has given to him. He was the number one persecutor of Christians. Many Christians died in his hands. And yet, God showed him mercy and saved him. That’s why when he became a Christian he went around preaching about Christ that others may know of God’s love and mercy as well.

In our own time, we know of Christians who have experienced God’s grace and spread the word about God’s love and mercy. An example is the Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias who passed away a few days ago. Ravi was a 17 year-old skeptic in Madras, India who tried to commit suicide because of depression. He was brought to the hospital and while lying down on a hospital bed, a Christian worker brought him a Gideon New Testament. Zacharias was so weak from dehydration after swallowing poison that he could not raise his arm. The worker directed Zacharias’ mom to read from John 14, which contains the words of the resurrected Christ to Thomas, one of the disciples. When sharing his testimony, Zacharias said that Jesus’ words in verse 19 touched him as an invitation to shift his life’s paradigm: “Because I live, you also will live.”

Zacharias often said that day was vivid in his mind: “The power of the word of God cracked open the encrusted heart of a young man who never had the wisdom to open it before. And I began to pray, ‘Lord, if you are the Lord of life, take me out of this hospital room. I will leave no stone unturned in my pursuit of truth.’” With a renewed purpose and committed to his promise, Zacharias rose from the ashes to dedicate the next nearly six decades of his life to preach the gospel and equip others to defend the Christian faith.

Folks, just think about how generous and sacrificially God has given to us; in that He has given to us His Son, Jesus, to die the death we all deserve because of our sins. Seeing all of this, we therefore need to be able to give back what He so generously gave.

Consider King David’s prayer.

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” (1 Chronicles 29:14 NIV)

David is saying that we need to be generous in our giving to God and to His kingdom purposes, because of His generosity to us. And when we do, then we are fulfilling that which God created us to be.

There was a time when Michael Jordan was the most popular person in the planet. He was so famous that every kid wants to be like Mike. You know, Be like Mike, as the Gatorade commercial said. Great as he might be, Jordan is just like one of us, a human being who is subject to failures and mistakes.

Why not be like Christ? Who is sinless? Doesn’t commit mistakes? Who has your best interest at heart always? That was Paul’s goal. He said, “And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1 NLT) When you give, you become like Christ.

3. Give because it will draw others close to God.

When Jesus told His disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and He will supply all they need, He ended with these words.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:34 NIV)

Wherever our treasure is, there is where our heart will be. Money is like a magnet. Wherever we put it, our heart will be drawn after that. When we give unto God, then it will pull our hearts towards God.

Now, God doesn't need our money. He can buy all the French fries He wants. But what God wants is what the money represents, and that is our hearts. It is said that giving is spiritual aerobics. It's good for the heart, enlarging it and making it stronger.

As parents, we desire for our children to be unselfish, and while we tell them of the need to be unselfish and give, do they see the same from us. Are we giving generously?

A father told his son to hurry up and get ready because the church van would soon be pulling him up to take him to Sunday school. The boy asked, “Dad, did you go to Sunday School when you were a boy?” The father replied, “Yes I did.” The boy then said, “Then it probably won't do me any good either.”

We need to be those positive examples of God's children to our children, because we cannot ask them to be what we are not.

When we live lives that are holy and pleasing to God, then others take notice. And they become curious. Which can then become a way for them to want to know who our God is. That's how some people have come to know Jesus. Sometimes, there is truth to the saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” We know that the word of God is powerful and God uses it for his glory. But it becomes more powerful when our walk lines up with our talk. Jesus says, **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)**

Folks, if you want to build a life of sacrifice, a life that is pleasing to God and gives him glory, learn to give. Learn to give of yourself, learn to give in to God, and learn to give up things that are dear to you.