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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 sacrifices***—

giving of time and energy and resources to our kids or our parents.

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

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

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

Because Paul is saying that

to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, is our worship!

That sounds like more than coming to church,
and just sitting in a chair right?

Being a living sacrifice, is ***so much more***, isn't it?

Listen to the way Presbyterian Pastor Eugene Peterson translates this passage 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 him.

I love that.

It's when you take your ***entire life***, and ***give it to God*** as an offering.
Think about it—that's what a ***sacrifice*** is, right—
when you give something away,
when you give up what you have, for someone or something greater, right?

So what does it ***mean to give our whole selves*** as sacrifices to God?
Paul says that we give our ***soma***—our bodies—
which in the original Greek translation doesn't just mean your physical self,
it means your body, and your feelings, your thinking, your actions!
He's saying we give ***everything*** to God.

How?

Well, Paul says it's by the ***mercies*** of God, The Message says ***with God helping you***. In other words, we do it by God's grace.
We can't do it on our own power.
We have to ask for help.

So think about this—
we are called to ***give our whole lives to God, as our act of worship***.

This is quite a ***different perspective*** on worship, isn't it?
Aren't we usually coming here thinking about what it ***can do for US?***
Aren't we here to ***receive*** the gifts of God?

But I wonder ***HOW we truly receive*** God's gifts?
Could it be by giving ourselves to God?
It's like the old adage about it ***being better to give than to receive...***
what if that is ***especially true*** in worship?

Don't you receive so much more when you are truly willing to give
 your whole **voice** to the music,
 your whole **heart** to the prayers,
 your whole **attention** to the message,
 your whole **self** to the people who have gathered around you?

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,
For as in one body we have many members, and not all .. the same function,
5 *so we, who are many, are one body in Christ,*
and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ.

Do you think about that when you come on Sunday?
 Do you ***consider that*** whenever you walk in our church doors?
 You have a part to play,
 something to give, and ultimately you can give your whole life.
You can be a living sacrifice!

Why would that be so important?
 I wonder if it's because we are ***children of God***, made in the ***image of God***—
 And God is the ***ultimate GIVER***.
 I wonder if it's because ***giving is the way*** to a meaningful life?
 I wonder giving is when we find ourselves in the ***presence of God?***

And if that's true, it is so ***countercultural***, isn't it?
 Aren't we surrounded by messages about ***getting?***
 About ***taking what you want*** from this world?
 About ***deserving more***, and more?
 Isn't it rare that we are encouraged to ***just give***—
 especially through sacrifice?

So how---***how can we go from takers, to givers?***
 Paul says here 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...

What does that ***mean to you?***

When I hear that, I think—*I can't do that.*
I can't transform myself.
 And it's *not* going to just happen.
 It's *got to be from God.*

It's got to be *Jesus who renews my mind*,
 because it gets pretty junked up in our world, right?
 In Greek, that word for mind--nous—doesn't just mean your brain,
 it means your reasoning, your soul, your thoughts, your feelings,
 everything inside of you.

In the Bible, we have some *incredible examples of transformation.*
 One is the life of Paul himself.
 Do you remember his story?

His name was *Saul*.
 And he was the lead persecutor of early Christians.
 He would even 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 great light from heaven,
 and heard the voice of Jesus asking him, why are you persecuting me?

The blind man 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 help 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 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, transformed people?

If you read a lot of Paul's letters, you start to see *a choice* in 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 Christ, the way of the Holy Spirit*.

How do we know if we are living the way of Jesus?
 Well, one sign is when we *give of ourselves to God*.

The way of our world is to be a *taker*,
 The way of the Spirit is to be a *giver*, just like God.

God is the ultimate giver.

So, *Giving* is our calling.

And we are called to give our whole selves—our lives, our bodies, our
 minds—*all to the service of God*.

That's really what that word *stewardship* means.
 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.
 Talk about *countercultural*.

But that's what I *pray over our offerings* on Sunday.
 We pray that God would use all that we have, and all that we are.
 Why?
Because it's not ours to begin with—it's all a gift.

This is definitely not what you'd hear in our world,
 Or even what we believe sometimes.
 We think *we earned it, we deserve it*.

But the Bible says again and again.

It's ALL God's.

Everything.

We are *just 'stewards' or caretakers* of it.

We are called to be '**good stewards**' of our time, talent, and treasure.... giving it to God, because **that's who owns it anyway!**

Think about it this way.

What if you looked at **everything you give**, every bit of time, talent, and every last dime... and you asked yourself:

Is this **helping or hurting the kingdom** of God?

Is this for **God's glory**? Or mine?

Is this me being a **living sacrifice**?

Because **every little choice leads** to something greater.

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

Mother Teresa used to say that she was just a **pencil** in the hands of God. Pastor and writer **Shane Claiborne** spent a summer in the slums of 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 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, making sacrifices**.

That's **humbling**, isn't it?

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

Yourself, or something greater.

I remember reading two quotes with these two different worldviews.
In the first quote, a famous actor argued, *"I'm a fan of the word selfish. Self. Ish. When I say I have gotten a lot more self-ish, I mean I am less concerned with what people think of me ... Selfish has gotten a bad rap. You should do for you."*

A few pages later was a quote from **George Saunders**, a man named **"Life Coach of the Year."**
Saunders 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."* "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:
Are we going to think of **ourselves first**?
Or are we going to **think of God? Of our neighbor before self**?
And are we concerned with **what God wants** for our lives?

I believe it's a **choice** we are faced with all the time,
every single day, right?
Be of the **world**, or be **transformed** by God.

What if we thought that way about our time, talent, money,
and asked ourselves
are we **helping God's kingdom**?
Are we giving to God before ourselves?

After all, some choices seem insignificant,
but **every choice** leads to something greater, doesn't it?
I mean Mother Teresa combing through the donated shoes seems simple enough, until you realize that after having done that thousands of times, it changed her feet!

Where are your choices leading?
Are we finding **real life**, by being living sacrifices?

Who here has looked at the ***back of your bulletin*** today?
 Do you notice what it says about every single person in this room?
 It says that we are ***ALL ministers***.
 Some churches reserve that title for ordained people, but not Presbyterians.
 We believe that every believer is a minister of the gospel,
 because everyone has been given ***gifts of time, talent, and treasure***,
 and everyone is called to be a ***living sacrifice***.
A minister.

1 Peter 2:9 says this beautifully: *But you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

We believe ***Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12***,
 which talk about us being members of one body of Christ,
 each playing our part,
 Each of us giving to the family of faith!

So, ***how are YOU ministering?***
 What are ***your gifts?***
 How are ***you giving*** to our wonderful little community?
 One thing I LOVE about this mighty church is that we have so many people
giving so many things.

Just think about ***all the gifts that are being shared this morning.***
 We have a young ***acolyte***.
 We have ***ushers and greeters*** welcoming people
 and gathering offerings.
 We have a ***liturgist***
 and a ***praise team***,
 we have ***banners*** made by one of our members...I could go on and on.

We ALL have gifts to give to God.
 And in our giving is where we really enter the presence of God.

The question is, are we willing to ***give?***
 And are we willing to give our ***WHOLE selves***, as living sacrifices?

*I once heard an **African fable** about a boy who loved to play with marbles, and his 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 the 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**.

That's **humbling**, isn't it?

That's quite a calling---but Paul says we can do it, **by the grace of God!**

And I believe that when we give,

As a **living sacrifice**,

Lives are changed—especially ours.

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 God would have **ALL there was of William Booth**.*

www.christianitytoday.com/history/sayings-of-william-booth

Does God have **ALL of us?**

I once read that at the end of World War I, **Herbert Hoover**,

later to become President of the United States,

led the allied relief efforts in Europe.

He kept hundreds of thousands from starving,

and a new word entered the Finnish language because of him.

In Finland, to "**Hoover**" means to be kind, to help.

And it gets you thinking—what if someone coined a word from your name, what would it be?

What's YOUR word?

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***?

How are we giving our time, talent, and treasure?
What about our attention, and energy?
What does it tell us about our walk with Jesus?

You know, Paul never saw being a Christian
as having ***membership*** on a roll somewhere.
It was always about a ***growing relationship*** with Jesus.

And I believe that's why he emphasized being a ***living sacrifice***.
Because in our ***giving***, we find ***life***,
We find ***love***,
We find ***Jesus***.
Isn't that what we all want?

Friends, hear the ***Good news of the Gospel*** today:
By the grace of God, ***we can be living sacrifices***.
Because our God is a ***giver***, we can be ***too***.
And to that, all God's people said, Amen.