

## **Abide with Us – Part 2**

*Romans 12:1-21*

**1. Physical Worship.**

**2. Living Sacrifices.**

**3. Practical Holiness.**

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## **Abide With Us<sup>1</sup>**

### **Romans 12:1-21**

Sacrifice is a word and a concept that most of us are familiar with. Pretty much every day, in some way, we are having to make some kind of sacrifice.

Parents know they have to sacrifice things in order to raise their children. Like how we sacrificed sleeping through the night. I remember when the boys were babies I wondered if we'd ever sleep through the night again. We had them two years apart, so just as one was starting to sleep, along came another. Three boys. Six years. I thought we were out of the woods, then they became teenagers. It didn't even matter if they were at a youth group event – I still wouldn't sleep until they were home. Then, I'm told that if you have girls, you have to sacrifice using the bathroom to yourself ever again.

Sacrifice is also required in order to have a good relationship with a spouse. I won't talk about all the sacrifices I've made for Shelly, because I value my life... and I like my wife and I want her to keep liking me! Truth be told, I know for a fact she's had to make a whole lot more sacrifices for me! Honestly, she chose to follow our calling in ministry over the years, over her own career. And yet God has blessed her with the amazing career work she does now at ESD that impacts not only the 25 school districts she works with, but the entire state of Washington.

But there are all kinds of other sacrifices we make; you also must sacrifice to go back to school, to move somewhere new, or to take a dream vacation. Usually choosing one thing means sacrificing something else. Life is filled with sacrifices.

Sacrifice isn't meant to be easy! It's supposed to cost us something. I'm reading through the Bible again this year, and I've just finished Leviticus – all about the Law and the sacrificial system at the altar and in the Tabernacle. The imagery of sacrifice in the Old Testament involves blood, death, and fire—definitely not ease and comfort. In one story, King David wants to dedicate a field to the Lord, and the owner of the field offers to give it to David for free, but David's response is that he will not offer the Lord something that costs him nothing.

Sacrifice costs us something, which makes it hard, and the passage we're going to look at today in Romans 12 means we're going to have some choices to make.

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I'd like to read that passage to us, so would you be willing to stand one more time with me? It's a way to honor God's Word, and to put ourselves in a posture of attentiveness to hear it.

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. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

*Can I re-read those first two verses to us? These are important and we'll spend most of our time on these:*

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. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(Romans 12:1-21, niv)

Thank you for standing with me; you can be seated. I know that was a long chapter. I pray God will reveal himself to us from his Word.

So the first thing we need to see from this is...

## 1. Physical worship.

We need to understand these first two verses if we're going to understand what this whole chapter means for us as believers in Jesus. This chapter starts with the word "therefore," and it is the most important "therefore" in the entire book of Romans. Earlier Paul wrote of the great work of God to save us by the life and death and resurrection of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Then he wrote of the power of the resurrection in baptized believers. So, because of those things, or *therefore*, Paul tells us what's next. And he says, "In view of God's mercy..." or "because of the incredible love God has shown us through these things," we ought to live in this certain way. Remember last week we talked about the guy who was forgiven the astronomical debt? That guy is us. God has forgiven us a debt of sin that we could never repay with 150,000 years' worth of salary. His love is immeasurable and unbounded toward you. Jesus Christ, God himself, suffered and died, taking the entire world's sin on his shoulders, making his suffering and death infinitely severe. He did that for you because he loves you. Because of that love, there is a response from us that is necessary and fitting. And it involves sacrifice.

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus it talks about proper sacrificial worship. And the word for "sacrifice" means something totally and completely devoted to God. It means, literally, chosen for death. That means for us to truly worship God, we are to be totally devoted to God.

When Paul calls us to this sacrifice, he addresses them as members of this new community; brothers and sisters – the Christian family. So he uses plural nouns. But when he uses the word "offer," it is singular. Here's his point: we present ourselves totally to God as individuals, but our sacrificial offering is a community project. We are in it together.

So, individually and together, we are to respond to God's love by giving him our entire selves to glorify him with our lives, which includes our physical bodies. So this statement to offer ourselves as a sacrifice is to be taken literally. But not as the kind of sacrifice that means the physical death of our bodies, like we read about in the Old Testament; we are to be *living* sacrifices. We are to worship him with *everything* we do; our entire life is to worship him. One pastor has said, "If worship is *just* one thing we do, everything becomes mundane. If worship is *the* one thing we do, everything takes on eternal significance."<sup>2</sup> That includes what we do with our bodies.

We are told that offering our bodies as a living sacrifice is "true and proper worship;" that means that our physical bodies matter. Sometimes we might get the mistaken notion that our spirit is more important than our body – after all, we think, these bodies won't last forever. So we say the body doesn't matter, only the spirit, but this type of thinking is not at all in line with our Christian understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Christenson, *Leadership*, Vol. 8, no. 2.

Our very earliest statement of faith – The Apostles’ Creed – affirms the resurrection of the physical body.

The fact that Jesus came to us in a physical body – it’s what we call the incarnation – that fact shows us how much our physical bodies matter to God because God chose to become a human with a body. Jesus didn’t die on the cross just to save our spirits; he died to save our whole beings, including our physical bodies. Remember, Jesus actually died *in the body*, and he actually rose again, *with a body*. That’s a huge part of the point of the story of Thomas, who had to touch Jesus’ physical scars to believe.

During Jesus’ ministry, he showed how much he cared about bodies by feeding them, healing them, and existing in one. Bodies matter to God, which means they should matter to us! Which means what we do with our bodies matters.

So it might be easier to think what it means by “living sacrifice” is a spiritual command and not a physical one, but that’s impossible to get from this passage.

What we do with our bodies, how we exist in our bodies, and how we treat our bodies, as well as how we treat the bodies of others, all matters.

What we do with our bodies is connected to worship because there is no such thing as worship that is not embodied. When we worship, we sing, we move, we pray, we stand, we sit, and we stand again, we listen, we read, we taste, we touch. Worship involves our bodies, and it is a lifetime of worship for us. Jim Elliot, the famous missionary to the Huarani people of Ecuador, said it this way: “One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime.”<sup>3</sup> We spend every minute of our lives living them in worship to God.

Worship and our bodies are also connected in the ways we care for others, and that’s the point of the rest of that passage: clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, offering food and water to those without it. These are all ways that we use our bodies to worship God by caring for the bodies of others.

So let’s look a bit more at what it means by...

## **2. Living Sacrifices.**

Being a living sacrifice means we don’t conform to the patterns of this world. The patterns of this world include desiring power, wealth, fame, beauty. If we don’t conform to those patterns, then first of all it means we think differently. We allow God through his Spirit to transform the ways we think. We don’t think like the world thinks anymore. This Scripture is very clear that there is a way of thinking that is so pervasive that our entire culture and world is totally immersed in it, and we are to think different than that. In Scripture, the mind means more than our human thinking capacity; it is the character, the inner disposition, the motivating center of our personal lives and our lives together as the

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<sup>3</sup> *Jim Elliot, Leadership, Vol. 7, no. 2*

church.<sup>4</sup> So you and I have to make up our minds to surrender ourselves to God through Christ. Someone once said, “If you don’t make up your mind, your unmade mind will unmake you.”<sup>5</sup>

In this world we are surrounded by sinful, selfish, narcissistic thinking that is the driving force for the worst and the least kinds of evil. Friends, we are swimming in the ocean of sinful thinking. The pressure is constant on us to conform to it. To be conformed is to be shaped from the outside in. To be transformed is to be shaped from the inside out. It is the very Spirit and presence of God himself that changes us – transforms us – from the inside out.

Deep sea diving submarines need pressurized spaces to keep the immense pressure of the ocean from crushing them. The strength and pressure inside the diving chamber has to be strong enough to push against the pressure outside of it. Otherwise, it will be completely obliterated, as we saw last summer in the tragic case of the Titan submarine that imploded in a fraction of a second as it was going down to observe the Titanic wreckage. Don’t think for a moment that living in this sin-pressurized world is any less dangerous. Only the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit enables us to withstand it, and in fact, to live as if that pressure didn’t exist. We live in an entirely different way. Jesus said we are living in the Kingdom of God while here in the sin-pressured world. That transformation changes our character and nature; the way we think and act.

So, we do not hate, mistreat, or abuse our bodies, even if the world around says they don’t look the right way.

We don’t use our bodies to get ahead, and we don’t treat other people’s bodies as means to an end for ourselves.

This is where verse 3 also comes into play: “Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought.” So we don’t create a hierarchy where you are better than others. The early church focused a lot on pushing against the hierarchy-based systems of the day, which meant that early Christian congregations were made up of people from all over the social and cultural spectrum, when normally they would be expected to be separated out by status and culture.

This living sacrifice life means don’t be arrogant about who you are. Titles and social class are irrelevant in the kingdom of God.

That’s why that passage teaches that we each have different gifts, and we are expected to use those gifts to build up the body of Christ—whether serving, preaching, encouraging, or any of the other many gifts God has given to God’s people; being a living sacrifice means offering our gifts in unselfish ways to the community of faith and people around us. We use our gifts and talents and resources for the betterment of others instead of as a way to get ahead for ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, *Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 135.

<sup>5</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *Leadership*, Vol. 17, no. 2.

That means we also recognize where we are *not* gifted, and so we allow others who *are* gifted in ways we are not to flourish and thrive, and to meet our own needs. We need one another. Humility creates space for us to work together as the body of Christ.

Here's the deal about being a living sacrifice of a transformed life: it is ultimately centered in love, lived out amongst one another in the church. One scholar says this:

"Communal cooperation is called for. This is not a call for rugged individualism—you all are involved. Sanctification (or living the Spirit-filled, Christ-like life) is not a solo performance; it demands a choir, an orchestra, a community of saints. This was John Wesley's point when he wrote: "Holy solitaires" is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than "holy adulterers." The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. (1870, 1:xxiii)

One cannot be holy alone. Holiness is experienced only within the context of a holy church, more specifically a particular local community of believers.<sup>6</sup>

So love in this passage is described in embodied ways: Being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Sharing with those in need, practicing hospitality. Blessing those who persecute us. Rejoicing with those who rejoice, mourning with those who mourn. Living in harmony with one another and not being conceited. Not repaying evil for evil but doing what is right. Living at peace with everyone. Not taking revenge on our enemies.

All of this means that our lives of worship are...

### **3. Practical holiness.**

We tend to think that the whole season of Lent is about giving things up; that we need to show our sincerity in seeking Christ by repenting and fasting. And that is one side of the coin. But Lent is as much about what we DO as it is about what we DON'T DO.

During Lent we take intentional time to put into practice embodied spiritual disciplines like fasting, but also love in action. The way we use our bodies can draw us closer to God and to one another, or further away. So we find ways to live out this transformed life in love toward others.

You know, we often get worked up about finding what God's will is for our lives. Should I move there? Should I take that job? Should I marry that person? But Paul says here that when we live our transformed lives as a living sacrifice that glorifies God and loves others, then we *prove* what God's will is with our lives. Here's the point: God's will is more about WHO you are, first and foremost. It is about the kind of person you are and how you live. God's will is more about who you are than it is where you are. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (meaning living the Kingdom of God life of holiness; Christlike love), seek first the Kingdom of God and his

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<sup>6</sup> William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, *Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 131–132.

righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” In other words, if you are living as God has called you to, He will take care of the where’s and the what’s. God’s will is about who you are, and then he’ll get you what you need and where you need to go. He promises that.

So yes, when we pray and fast, we are reminded that we are dependent on God, but also on a community of faith. We aren’t meant to do it alone.

So think about your life. If you want to live a life of worship that glorifies God, ask yourself, “What gifts do I have to contribute to the body of Christ? Where do I need to live more humbly with others? Am I living at peace with others? Who do I need to forgive? Who do I need to ask to forgive me? Am I being overcome by evil, or overcoming evil with good? Am I rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn? That’s the point of all of the rest of the chapter.

Part of the reason for Lent is that we get serious about taking a hard look at ourselves to make sure we aren’t thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. So we humble ourselves and fast in order to be honest about ourselves.

Dr. Tasha Eurich writes of “a psychological study done with prisoners serving time in the south of England. Psychology professor Constantine Sedikides and his colleagues gave the prisoners, most of whom had committed violent crimes, a list of nine positive personality traits and asked them to rate themselves on each in comparison to two groups: average prisoners and average non-incarcerated community members. The traits were: moral, kind to others, trustworthy, honest, dependable, compassionate, generous, self-controlled, and law-abiding.

Now imagine you find yourself in jail for, let’s just say, armed robbery. It seems hard to believe that you’d use any of those traits to describe yourself, right? And yet the prisoners did. In fact, not only did they rate themselves as superior to their fellow inmates, on no fewer than eight out of nine traits, they even thought they were superior to average non-incarcerated community members. The one exception was, “they rated themselves as equally law-abiding compared to community members.”<sup>7</sup>

That has become a case study for how we are not very honest with ourselves about ourselves. Lent is a time to ask God to take off the blinders and reveal to us the ways we are thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. When we ask God to show us how we really are, to repent, and to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is our true worship. And we live it out toward others.

This living out of faith, this caring for one another, this humbling of ourselves—this is worship to God. It costs us something, but it’s also our *only* true and proper worship.

*Prayer*

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<sup>7</sup> Tasha Eurich, *Insight: The Surprising Truth About How Others See Us, How We See Ourselves, and Why the Answers Matter More Than We Think* (Crown Publishing Group, New York, 2018), 53.



*Benediction:*

*From Romans 12:1-2:*

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. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will...

*And from Romans 15:5-6:*

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.