

Is Your All on the Altar?

Romans 12:1-2

Paul wants his service to God to be personal. I want to make serving God personal, just like Paul made it personal. After the great doctrinal section of Romans 1-11, Paul begins talking devotionally, practically, and personally about how we live the Christian life.

There are four sermon sections in Romans:

God's Good News (Romans 1-4)

New Life in Christ (Romans 5-8)

Understanding God's Plan (Romans 9-11)

The Transformed Life (Romans 12-16)

Chapter 12 begins with an appeal and an invitation by the great apostle Paul, "*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercies to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship.*" Romans 12:1

"Is your all on the altar?" That's the question Paul was asking. He is very pastoral in his approach. He's not demanding. He's saying, "*I urge you.*" The old King James word was, "I beseech you." It's almost as though he's down on his knees. He's pleading with you as your pastor. There is passion, and there is emotion because of the mercies of God. I plead with you, I urge you to give your life over, to offer yourself unconditionally, wholly and completely, as a living sacrifice to God.

We have been in a great series since Father's Day on Altars in the Bible. So many of the great things that have happened in our life have happened at an altar. When we refer to an altar in our church, it is a place of decision. Through the years, all the biggest moments of our lives happened at an altar. When I was a little boy, I gave my life to follow Jesus at an altar, where I went forward and prayed for salvation. As a 9-year-old boy, I went forward to the altar at Falcon Youth Camp in response to the invitation to put my all on the altar, and at that altar, I gave my life publicly to preach the Gospel, and it changed everything for the rest of my days.

31 years ago, I stood at this altar with Lynne, and we said our "I do's." She said yes. I said yes, and we were married. We made a commitment at an altar. We have stood at this altar 4 times and committed our children to the Lord.

If we're going to change the world, it won't happen with casual, conventional, cultural, or convenient Christianity. It will happen with a consecrated Christianity. Consecrated Christians who are wholly and holy offered to the Lord.

Who remembers the song, "The Hokey Pokey"? When I was growing up in church, it was the only dance you could do. "You put your right hand in, you take your right hand out, you put your right hand in, and you shake it all about. You do the hokey pokey." For too many Christians, their commitment to Jesus Christ is like doing "The Hokey Pokey"—put it in, take it out, turn around, turn about.

God has called us, not to a hokey-pokey, but a holy, H-O-L-Y and W-H-O-L-L-Y, devotion and consecration to the Lord. Too many Christians have a hokey-pokey religion. Whoever said that we could have a half-hearted, half-in, half-out, fringe, come when you feel like it, live for Jesus when you want to, when it's convenient... Who said that? Who made that a possibility? Not God! Not Jesus, who said in the Gospel of Matthew, He said, "*If anyone's going to follow after me, (do what?) 'take up your cross,' (die to self) 'and follow Me.'*" Mathew 16:24

Our faith is based on the cross and the resurrection. Not only do we believe in the cross and boast in the cross

alone, but we bear the cross as an act of sacrifice and surrender to the Lord. Christianity is about putting our all on the altar.

“Present your bodies” is a reference to the flesh that you and I wear. We are being commanded to yield our bodies to God. God is calling on us to present all that we have, are, and ever will be to Him for His glory and for His use. The word *“present”* means to *“place at one’s disposal.”* It means that we are no longer holding anything back from God, but we have placed our all on His altar, and we are His disposal!

1. It Is A Living Sacrifice.

“In view of the mercies of God, Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Romans 12:1

C. T. Studd was an athlete in England over a century ago, a cricket player. He once said, “Only one life, will soon be past, and only what’s done for Christ will last.”

C. T. Studd left a professional career and answered God’s call to full-time ministry as a missionary. When people said to him, “Why leave your life behind in Britain and go to distant places?” He said, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice for Him could ever be too great!”

“In view of the mercies of God, Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Romans 12:1

The Bible is a mercy Book. It drips with the blood of God and His mercy. Mercy drops. It’s all about God’s mercy. The mercy of God is the great sections of the core of Christianity.

“The wages of sin are death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23

“God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

“Neither height nor depth or devils or angels, nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:38-39

The picture of a living sacrifice comes from the worship of the Old Testament where the priests daily killed bulls and goats and offered them before the Lord. If you took all the bulls and all the goats and all the lambs and all the rams and all the other animals that were offered in sacrifice to God and looked at all those sacrifices made over 1500 years, it would be a river of blood. Though you had the river of animal blood before you, not one sin could it forgive. Not one. *“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”* Hebrews 10:4

It is right at this point that we discover the difference between Old Testament religion and New Testament Christianity. The entire legal system of the Old Testament was meant to prepare the Jews for the day when John the Baptist saw Jesus and exclaimed, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* John 1:29

- He is God’s lamb sent from heaven to earth.

When God offered a “lamb,” that “lamb” is his own Son. He is the perfect sacrifice. All those animals the priests put to death were meant to point directly to Him.

- He is God’s lamb offered for our sins.

The word translated “takes away” is used elsewhere for the rolling away of the stone that sealed the tomb of Jesus. When our Lord died on the cross, He “rolled away” our sins once and for all. They are gone, removed, blotted out, covered, and rolled away forever.

He is God’s lamb who rolls away the sins of the world. The blood of Jesus is so powerful that it is sufficient payment for the sins of the whole world throughout all of time. Anyone, anywhere, at any time can be forgiven through Christ. There are no barriers that stand between you and eternal life because Jesus paid it all.

In this act of consecration, we give, not our dead bodies, but rather we make a living sacrifice. A “living sacrifice” sounds like an oxymoron. A living sacrifice is more difficult to give than a dead sacrifice. A living sacrifice means something to us. It has intrinsic value. Dead sacrifices have no value. They don’t mean anything to us. Living sacrifices cost us something. Dead sacrifices cost nothing.

There were two “living sacrifices” recorded in the Bible. These two examples give us a clue as to what it means to offer a living sacrifice. Both were acts of worship. The first was Isaac. He willingly put himself on the altar and would have died in obedience to God’s will, but the Lord sent a ram to take his place. Isaac “died” just the same—he died to self and willingly yielded himself to God’s will. When he stepped off the altar, Isaac was a “living sacrifice.” The second was Jesus. He was the perfect “living sacrifice,” because he actually died as a sacrifice, in obedience to God’s will.

What does God want? Living sacrifices! He wants men and women who, having received His divine mercy through Christ, and having been raised from spiritual death, and having drunk deeply at the fountain of grace, will now gladly offer themselves as living sacrifices to the Lord.

If we know the Lord, this is the only reasonable thing to do. Nothing else makes sense. This is our “reasonable act of service” to the God who saved us, or, as the Contemporary English Version puts it, this is “the most sensible way to serve God.”

A young President John F. Kennedy, stood before the nation in his inaugural address in January of 1961, and he made the well-known statement, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

That is the same appeal of the Bible. What if you began saying, "Ask not what God could do for you, but what you can do for God."

God gives us mercies, more and more mercies. *“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”* Lamentations 3:22-23

When we recognize that God has given us every blessing, life becomes less and less about, “Bless me,” but now, we bring our lives to the altar, and we say, “Lord, send me. Use me for Your glory.”

In the Old Testament, there were two kinds of sacrifices. One sacrifice was called the propitiatory sacrifice. That was the sacrifice for forgiveness.

The other sacrifices were called dedicatory sacrifices, giving thanks to God for His provision, for His goodness, and His salvation. So our propitiation sacrifice was made by Christ who died to save us from our sins. That's His sacrifice.

Our sacrifice is the dedication of our lives in response to his propitiatory sacrifice, where we bring, not dead animals or grain, but we bring our lives and put ourselves on the altar.

Living in the sense that it is you on the altar. Christ died and now you live. We are alive on the altar because of the sacrifice of Jesus. We are living sacrifices.

You may be thinking, this is good for the missionary, it's good for the preachers, for the clergy; it's good for those kids who say they're going to go into full-time ministry. That's good for them, but that's not me. I'm more part-time in my faith. I'm not all in, I'm just partly in when it's convenient. It is easy to think this is for the extra-Christianity, extra-Christian faith. This is for the superhero kind of Christian, all on the altar. No, it's for all of us!

I like the way it is translated or paraphrased in The Message *“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, your eating, your 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 that you can do for him.”* Romans 12:1

Living sacrifice does not mean some ultra-kind of experience but it is your everyday walk with God. It is your walking around faith; it is your living faith; This isn't just for the super spiritual people. This is for all of us because of what Christ has done for us.

- A living sacrifice means that we are to be on the altar wherever we are. Regardless of the geographical surroundings, we are to remember that this body, and all it is, belongs to God. There is never an instance in life when we are out of His view or free to live as we please.
- A living sacrifice means a constant, continuous sacrifice. This is not something we do from time to time. We are to offer this body up to the Lord and never ask for it back again!
- A living sacrifice means that the body sacrifices its own desires for those of God. To be a living sacrifice will require that the body does not live for the world, the flesh, or the devil, but that everything the body does is held to the guidelines of the Word of God.
- A living sacrifice means that the body is devoted to the task of serving God. This means that we are to lay down the ambitions and desires of the body and commit ourselves to doing nothing but that which God bids us to do! We are to be His vessels through which He can live and work in this world.

2. It Is A Lasting Commitment.

“I appeal to you, brother, that you present your body as a living sacrifice. Neither height nor depth or devils or angels, nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” Romans 12:1

That's kind of a one and done kind of word there—that you do it as a definite act of dedication and devotion to God. The problem of a living sacrifice is... dead animal sacrifices don't go anywhere. Living sacrifices can crawl off the altar. From time to time, we have crawled off the altar. We are no longer on the altar of God. It can happen to anyone. What needs to happen when that happens is I need to crawl back up on that altar and not quit! This is not a category for a few but a call for all. Everything we do is to be surrendered to the lord.

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” Colossians 3:17

We've all seen drifting, and then diminishing, and even deconstruction of faith. People come back and say, "I don't even have a faith." They quit. A living sacrifice never quits. They just keep getting back on the altar when they fall, when they fail. When you choose the wrong way, when you choose to get off, there comes a time when you get back on the altar. Get yourself back up there.

Young men and women, high school students, graduate, leave, go to college, maybe join the military, maybe enter the labor force, but they leave home and leave their faith behind. I want to challenge you, when you leave your home, when you leave your family, your parents or wherever you're living, don't leave home without Jesus being the Lord of your life and that you're on the altar with Him. It's lasting, don't quit.

Everybody wants to quit today, if it gets hard, if it gets uncomfortable. If I fail, I just quit. No, this sacrifice is a living sacrifice. It's a lasting sacrifice. You're on the altar, and you keep yourself there.

You may ask how to do that? This is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Just like Moses when he was in the desert. He thought his life was over, and yet God called him out of a burning bush. He saw the bush aflame, and he thought if I could just get the fire in my bones again. If I could just get the fire back, maybe God could use me again.

A sacrifice burns, doesn't it? So you get the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit to burn in you, to reignite you, if you will, and to keep burning and shining for Jesus. It's a living sacrifice. It's a lasting sacrifice. It becomes a daily decision.

3. It Is A Logical Response.

"In view of the mercies of God, offer yourselves, your body as a living sacrifice unto God, holy and acceptable which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1

Some translations say, *"your reasonable service."*

We get our word logic from the word that is translated *"spiritual worship or reasonable worship."* Some versions say, *"true worship,"* others say, *"proper."* It's logical, it's reasonable to do this. The giving of your life to God is a living, lasting, logical sacrifice.

"What, do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? That you are not your own; that you are bought with a price. (the precious blood of Jesus) Therefore, glorify God with your body which belongs to Christ." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

When he says, "Present your bodies to Christ" in Romans 12, it means all of you, including your body. We live in our bodies. I make sure that my all is on the altar.

Here is a prayer to pray everyday:

"Lord, I give You my mind. I love You with all my heart, my mind, my soul, and strength. Lord, may I think true thoughts and praiseworthy thoughts. Guard my thoughts, O God, and remove and transform the way that I think. May my thoughts be honorable and pleasing to You, O God. Help me that my thoughts would be filled with faith and love for You."

"Lord, I give you my eyes, what I see, because the eyes are the light of the soul. Help me look beyond today and my circumstances, and to see the eternal, to take the long-distance view and have an eternal perspective. Lord, protect my eyes from seeing things that are ungodly, immoral, or impure. May I see through the eyes of Christ, to see people around me who need You. May I see the hurting and the helpless and the hopeless and love them. God, I give You back everything. Lord, may I have the eyes of Christ?"

"Lord, may I hear Your word spoken in the wonders of creation and especially in the wonders of Your Word, and in the whispers of Your Spirit. Lord, help me hear every detail. Let me so listen that I will obey You and live for You. Lord, You said, *'He that has ears, let him hear.'* Lord, let me hear what You want me to do, and especially, Lord, that I would hear Your call." God is calling you today, maybe, to preach, but to do something

in the center of His will. Are you hearing the call of God? Your answer is always, “Yes, Lord.” Because the moment you say, “No, Lord,” He’s no longer Lord of your life. “Lord, let me say yes to You and what you call me to do.”

"Lord, the words of my mouth, I give to You. May the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. Lord, may my tongue glorify Your name with the words that I speak. Help me to use words that equip and encourage others around me. Lord, use my mouth to proclaim Your name, to share Jesus, to tell people about Jesus".

“Lord, I give You my heart, because that’s Your throne. Take Your rightful place of preeminence in my life on the throne of my heart. I get self out of the way, Lord, that You may reign and rule and live in Lordship in my life. Protect and guide my heart for *‘out of the heart flow all these issues of life.’* So Lord, I give You my heart.”

“Lord, I give You my hands. May You use them to work for You, to serve You in the ways that You have assigned them. Lord, may my hands be open to You and giving to others. Lord, let me not live with hands clinched, holding on to what I have, but Lord, that I would open my hands and serve You with gladness and joy. Lord, let me lift my hands in praise and adoration to You. Lord, I give You my hands.”

“Lord, I give You my feet. Lord, let them move at the impulse of Your love, at the direction of Your Spirit. May they go where You want me to go. Lord, I walk in Your will wherever, whenever, whatever, however. Lord, I give You my feet. Send me and use me.”

Is your life on the altar? Is it a living, lasting, logical, reasonable offering of your life to the Lord?

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Romans 12:1

“Take My Life and Let It Be” by Frances Ridley Havergal

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee;
Take my voice and let me sing, always, only for my King.

Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee;
Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.

Take my moments and my days, let them flow in endless praise;
Take my intellect and use every pow’r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store;
Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.