



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Connection! Sacrifice

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Romans 12:1-2

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.” Romans 12:1

Okay, this is hard. Talking about sacrifice is hard. In my mind, I don’t like sacrifice. Sure, I like the sacrifices of others: my parents’ sacrifice in raising me; Leigh’s sacrifices to make our house a home; my kids’ sacrifices in behaving so they treat each other right; those 12 people of Dexter 176 years ago in starting this church; some of you who are still around who sacrificed in order to buy this land in 1985 and those who sacrificed in order to build on it. But I sure don’t like the idea of me having to sacrifice...

But in a way, that doesn’t make any sense, either, because thinking back, the greatest joys of my life come from times when I gave more than I thought I had for God’s purposes; when I sacrificed.

- Standing up for my faith as a kid by treating the unlovable kids the same as everybody else.
- Giving up my dreams for whatever dream God had in mind for me.
- Going back to seminary 6 years ago, this time with a wife and 4 children! (It was a family-wide sacrifice). But it was an amazing time.
- Finishing the degree with a 140 page dissertation. (Talk about a long sermon!) ☺
- Saying “yes” to a strange woman over the phone (not Leigh), but a woman named Lita, when she asked if we would be the host family for 5 months for a 2 year old from Guyana with her bladder on the outside of her body. (The Schantz’s are hosting a baby this fall!)
- Getting married. (My sacrifice was nothing compared to Leigh’s). ☺
- Realizing God was calling this church to reach it’s maximum redemptive potential, to do what it took for God to grow us into the church He had in mind. (He’s not done with us yet!)
- Please realize this is a pretty short list. There were plenty of areas in my life I chose not to sacrifice to God. Plenty of areas I don’t go deep and don’t experience joy. But looking back, those areas of greatest *joy* to me are from those times when some sacrifice (or many sacrifices) were made.

As much as I hate the thought of *more* sacrifice in my life, I realize that those sacrifices were good things. Great things, actually, in my life. And strange as it sounds, it *is* a discipline. To be good at anything, and experience joy from it, you have to sacrifice: whether it’s a strong marriage, a talent in music or sports, to physical or spiritual fitness, a depth of faith or depth of friends, family closeness or love. Not once, but over and over. You have to sacrifice other things in order to find depth and joy in some things. So sacrifice has something to do with depth and something to do with joy.

I wonder if you find that true in your life. If you feel nervous dealing with sacrifice, tired of the lack of depth; or tired of the lack of joy. **What stops us from sacrifice?**

- Maybe it’s fear. If I give this treasure or time over to God, how will I be taken care of?
- Maybe what stops us is our extreme spiritual ADD. Like we’re dancing the Hokey Pokey. “Put your right foot in, put your right foot out...” We never stay “in” with God long enough to experience depth or joy of living as a Christ-follower.

- Maybe what stops us is an idea like: doing more means *being* more, to the point of fatigue. Maybe we mistake our fatigue for sacrifice, when it's just our inability to sacrifice doing lots of *lesser* stuff for making a true impact in a few important ways. We try to please people more than God.
- Maybe we don't sacrifice because we think our purpose is to arrive "safely at death." So we never risk anything unpredictable, let alone sacrifice for it.
- Maybe we fall for the media blitz that says "Life's all about ME. My comfort, my desires, my dreams, my plans." Let's get real. It's not all about me. Or you.
- Do you know God told the Israelites over and over He didn't want their sacrifices in worship? He wanted them to care for widows and orphans and the oppressed. That was God's idea of worship and sacrifice and going deep. Two times Jesus says "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*" (Mt 9:13, 12:7).

God must have known we would struggle. Look again at what Paul writes: "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*" Romans 12:1

Strongly, Paul urges us: we are to "*offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.*" Here's the problem: living in the 21st century, we don't understand the whole sacrifice on the altar thing. Sacrifice was the ritual through which the Hebrew people offered the blood of an animal to God as a "substitute payment" for their sin. It originated in the Garden of Eden right after Adam and Eve fell from God. God killed animals to make skins to cover them. It continued with Cain and Abel. Abel had the better offering for God because Abel recognized that the fair penalty for sin was death, and he offered God an animal. He believed God and held close to God's promise. When Noah came out of the ark, his first act was to build an altar upon which he sacrificed animals. Noah recognized his sinfulness, its penalty, and God's provision and promise. And so it went until Jesus Christ Himself became the ultimate offering for all of humanity. So, when Paul says "offer your bodies as living sacrifices," he's not just saying "skip dessert;" he's talking about a way of life, loyalty, and love for God, created for us from the beginning.

The other problem is Paul's not talking about a dead sacrifice. A living sacrifice can crawl off the altar; which we do, over and over and over. We have to continuously commit ourselves, even when the trials come and life is hard. He's pleading for you to give up your life as you continue living it, in every moment. When you wake up, when you arrive at work, when you put in your hours, as you interact with people, as you play, as you fall back in bed, do each act deliberately as though you are serving Christ. When you do that, you are practicing the presence of Christ living for Him in every moment. And that path leads you to become a living, breathing sacrifice—dead to what God hates, devoted to everything God loves.

Through the Gates of Splendor is a book about the 5 young men who were murdered—really martyred—by a small tribe of Auca Indians in Ecuador in the 1950's. These young men had hearts that beat for Christ. Their passion was to win the hearts of that tribe of Aucas for the singular purpose of introducing each of them to the Lord Jesus, who had died for their sins. Their ultimate hope in life was not self-centered. One of the young men wrote in his journal "**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**" When you let that settle in, your whole attitude toward life transforms.

Elisabeth Elliot, the wife of one of the young men wrote these words: "These men didn't go on a suicide mission. Their goal was not to die. **Their death was the result of living a habitual life of sacrifice to Christ.** Their lives ended near a river in the middle of Ecuador in 1956, but they were no fools. They were heroes of the life of faith." Their deaths were the result of their truly living, alive in Christ; connected.

The question is will you consider a life of sacrifice? In order to live deeply, in order to live joyfully, will you give to God your time, your talents, and your treasure? **Personal sacrifice begins with a choice: who will we trust to meet our needs?**

Will you trust God with your family? What if God calls your kids to a crazy counter-cultural ministry or mission? To another culture or to the inner city? It really is up to God to take care of us, even our family. Listen to these words of A.W. Tozer: "We struggle because we fear for our loved ones' safety. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not committed to Him..."

One more thing about sacrifice: the real reason behind it? **It really is joy.** Jesus showed us. It cost Jesus his life. It might cost you yours. “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” Hebrews 12:2. Not for the love set before Him, or the hope set before Him did Jesus endure the cross and scorn its shame; but for the joy. **Joy is love seen all the way through.** And in the end, love manifests itself as sacrifice. Jesus told us that the way the world will know that we are his disciples is *if we love one another.* (John 13:34). Jesus laid the foundation for the entire movement. In John 15:13, Jesus gives us the practical expression of love. He says, “*Greater love has no one than this, that you lay down your life for your friends.*”

Seeing love *all the way through* will cost you something. It cost Jesus His life. If you want to live it out, it’s a major sacrifice. Actually, it’s not just one major sacrifice, it’s a lifetime of little day-in, day-out sacrifices. (We have to keep crawling back up on the altar). But Jesus himself promises when you do, *that joy* can’t be taken away.

How many people in the world today never experience joy because they’ve never even heard of this kind of love? They’ve *never* been loved all the way through, let alone even *seen* it. And we believe every price was paid for every human being in history to be made right with God again. Was it a pain in the neck to live for God? You bet! Is it a pain today? You bet! *Life’s* a pain! Was it a pain in the neck for Jesus to challenge the religious leaders and the status quo? Yes. Is it a pain in the neck to challenge the status quo of what everyone else thinks and does today? Yes. Is it a pain to change your direction today? You bet! It’s a risk to be a part of a church that’s seeking to stop playing church and start living it out. And it requires sacrifice—

But may you approach your next opportunity to sacrifice with the confidence that it will bring you closer to God than ever before. And may your connection with Jesus fill you with the same love, the same depth, and the same joy, and the same resurrection power of Jesus as you live for Him, today and forever.

Study Guide

Monday: Review your sermon notes. Ask God to show you what causes you to “crawl off of the altar.” And give that to God. Ask Him to show you more. And as you hand it over, pray for courage and endurance today.

Tuesday: Read Matthew 6:19—33. This is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. There are two messages woven through His words. First, Jesus speaks against hoarding. Ouch! Financial sacrifice overcomes our love for ourselves, money, and possessions. Imagine being free of that sidetracking love! Envision what it would be like if you strive to be freed of that, unimpressed by “all that.”

Wednesday: Reread Matthew 6:19—33. Look at the second, underlying message: Jesus is calling us to trust God, and to serve Who we trust. Ponder this in conversation with God. Remember 911? Remember seeing clearly what was important? Remember where trust came from during those dark days? Imagine now repositioning those 911 priorities into your life today. God, for one. Your loved ones second. Can you take time to sacrifice for those priorities?

Thursday: Read Genesis 22. This is a vital account of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering to God. Note what Abraham does. He explains it to his servants. “We will go.” And then? “We will worship.” Notice too “and return to you.” He was willing to give everything to God, because he trusted God to keep His promises. Do you have a favorite promise of God? Are you really willing to put God before those relationships? Can you give your relational life over to God?

Friday: Read 1 Timothy 4:7 and Philippians 3:10. Remember the ultimate goal of spiritual discipline? To be close to God, and live the rest of your days in the confidence of knowing Him, knowing that you have a unique role to play in God’s meta-narrative of history. That God wants you to be close to Him so that you can know His goodness, know His will, know His purposes, His truth, and His love. Just spend some time in prayer, thanking Him for revealing Himself to you through His Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You, Lord! Amen.