

## THE SECRET OF SACRIFICE Romans 12:1-2

### INTRODUCTION:

We can all stand and pledge our allegiance to the flag...and we should. We can all sing The National Anthem...and we should. In a few weeks, we can set off fireworks, watch pyrotechnics and eat a hotdog in the name of independence and there's nothing wrong with that, either. We can profess our love for our country in a wide variety of ways. And we should.

But our Lord said that there is no greater love than that which is shown when someone lays down his life for a friend. On Memorial Day, we honor those who laid down their lives for us.

The sacrifice of a life is not only something people do for their country, it is something they must do for their homes. People sacrifice for their families because of love. In fact, I would assert that where there is no sacrifice, there is no love. Love means sacrifice.

We are all familiar with John 3:16 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* I used that as the verse as the text for my sermon two weeks ago.

That's John 3:16. 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:16 is a corollary verse by the same author. In I John 3:16, John wrote: *"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."* (NRSV) The New International Version translates the verse this way: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."*

Let there be no doubt: love means sacrifice. We do not know what love truly is by reading romance novels. We do not know what love truly is by reading erotic magazines. We do not know what true love is by listening to love songs on the radio, watching talk shows on television or by observing the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Many will never know the true meaning of love by emulating their parents.

But you can know the true meaning of love. Look to Jesus. Again, as John wrote, *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."* And then John told us to similarly sacrifice our lives for one another.

Sacrifice? Not like the corpse of a slain animal that is incinerated on a stone altar. Sacrifice? Not like Romeo and Juliet who committed suicide as some misguided expression of love for each other. What love requires is not a sacrificial death but rather a sacrificial life.

Listen to Paul's words in Romans 12:

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer 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.*  
(NIV)

What Paul writes about sacrificial living not only finds application in our relationship with the Lord, it also finds application in our marriages and in all of the other relationships in our homes. May I tell you what I mean?

#### **I. SACRIFICIAL LIVING DEMANDS PHYSICAL ILLUSTRATION**

The apostle Paul urged that the Christians in Rome present their bodies as living sacrifices. Love means sacrifice and sacrificial living must be demonstrated physically, tangibly.

Every once in a while, you will hear of someone who donated a kidney for a family member. That's a physical sacrifice prompted by love. But in much more ordinary ways, most of us have learned that sacrificial living demands some kind of physical illustration.

Parents understand this. They love their children. But that love is not merely some feeling of emotional warmth or an affectionate connection. It is a commitment to sacrificial living that costs them something: it makes physical demands of them.

Love for their children costs parents some sleep. Little kids don't want to go to bed at bedtime; they want a drink; they want a story; they want to pray; for the only time in their days, they want to brush their teeth.

Little kids don't like to go to bed and they don't like to stay in bed. Our granddaughters stayed with us last weekend. Cherish, our daughter, asked Starr what she like most about staying with Papa. Starr said what she liked most was getting up early. Cherish said, "Why do you like to get up early?" And Starr said, "I like to sneak." It turns out that she likes the fact that when she gets up at 4 a.m., I try to keep her from waking her sister or her grandma so we whisper and I give her whatever she wants so she'll be quiet. She's figured out that sneaking has its rewards. Loving your kids will cost you some sleep.

And that doesn't change when they become teenagers, learn to drive and go out on dates. When they were little, they wouldn't go to sleep as long as you were up. When they get to be teenagers, you won't go to sleep as long as they are up. You stay awake and listen for them because you love

them and love finds physical illustration in the sacrifice of sleep that your body craves.

When you have kids, your love for them will lead you to make physical sacrifices. When you love your husband or wife, it will lead you to sacrifice some of your physical wants and desires for the sake of your life partner. You may lose some sleep to serve your spouse. You may not be able to buy all the latest trendy fashions. You may not purchase all the toys, collectables and hobby supplies you otherwise would. Because of love, people make tangible, physical sacrifices for those they love.

We may believe that those we love should know that we love them because we have told them that we do. But in reality, love must be demonstrated. Love leads to sacrificial living and sacrificial living must find physical illustration.

## II. SACRIFICIAL LIVING DEMANDS SUITABLE EXPRESSION

Paul, *“I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...”*

Note those two words: “holy” and “pleasing.” God is holy, righteous and pure and the only sacrifice that is suitable for Him is one that is similarly holy, righteous and pure.

In the past, I've talked with people about giving their lives to Jesus and I have encouraged them to do that now while they can. Too many times, I've been told, “Oh, I intend to do that some day but not now. There are a lot of other things I'm going to do first.” And then, when they get around to giving their lives to the Lord, they've not given Him much. They don't have many days left to give Him; they don't have much strength left for Him; they don't have much potential to offer Him. All they give Him are the scraps that are left from a life lived for self. God deserves more. He deserves better as a suitable expression of sacrifice. As an old gospel song encourages, *“Give of your **best** to the Master; Give of the strength of your youth.”*

Sacrificial living demands suitable expression and there is nothing suitable or appropriate about giving God the leftovers of our life.

- Not the leftovers of our money after we've done all we want first;
- Not the leftovers of our time after we've done all we want first;
- Not the leftovers of our abilities and our opportunities after we've done all we want first.

There is nothing suitable or appropriate about giving God the leftovers of our lives. He demands and He deserves first place. He won't play second fiddle.

There is also nothing suitable about giving our families what's left of our lives after everyone else has had a piece. Careers are important but it is appropriate to put family first. Hobbies can be beneficial but it is appropriate to put family first. Friends are a blessing but it is appropriate to put family first.

So what does it look like to put family first? What is a suitable expression of a living sacrifice in the home?

- When a parent puts the needs of the children above self, that is a suitable expression of sacrificial living.
- When a teenager willingly obeys his parents even when he'd rather do otherwise, that is a suitable expression of sacrificial living. But when he only obeys because he's forced to do so, there is nothing suitable or sacrificial about that.
- When a couple decides to take an aging parent into the home, that is a suitable expression of sacrificial living.

In the home, a suitable expression of sacrificial living is giving the best we have to our family.

Similarly, when a young adult puts on a uniform and lays his life on the line for his nation, for his friends and for his family, that is a suitable expression of sacrificial living. On Memorial Day, we honor the sacrifice of those who gave their lives for our country. Sometimes we mistakenly say that they lost their lives. They did not. They gave their lives. Their lives are only lost if we fail to remember, if we fail to honor, if we fail to memorialize their sacrifice.

If you read obituaries in the newspaper, sometimes you will see that a person is to be buried with "full military honors". Those three words mean that the service will include certain ceremonies that are suitable expressions to recognize the sacrificial living of the one who is being honored. You see, sacrificial living demands suitable expression and it deserves suitable recognition.

### III. SACRIFICIAL LIVING DEMANDS INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION

When Paul wrote Romans 12 in the Greek language, the word he choose to use that the NIV translates as your "spiritual" act of worship is the Greek word *logicos*. Literally, Paul wrote that suitable physical sacrifice is logical.

In baseball, when a batter lays down a bunt or deliberately hits a deep fly ball to help his teammate advance, it is called a sacrifice. Tony La Russa frequently makes use of the sacrifice fly or the sacrifice bunt as a part of the Cardinal offense. But don't you wonder why any player would choose to make an out to advance another? It is for the sake of the team. That's reasonable, sensible and logical. It displays wisdom.

Family members often have to bunt for the sake of one another. They have to lay down their own ambitions, goals and aspirations for the common good of family.

Have you ever known of a highly intelligent, professionally capable wife who put her career on hold so her husband could get his degree and get established in his line of work? Have you ever known a husband who worked overtime to get the money to buy the house his wife always wanted?

If you watch CNN, you are surely familiar with Dr. Sanjay Gupta. Dr. Gupta is a neurosurgeon who is the Cable News Network's chief medical correspondent. You probably know that President Obama had asked Dr. Gupta to become the nation's Surgeon General. But after careful consideration, Dr. Gupta withdrew his name from consideration for that prestigious post. The 39-year-old physician and his wife were expecting their third daughter at the time, and the government job would have meant long periods away from his family, he said. He was willing to sacrifice a major career move for the sake of his family.

Many parents have done the same thing because they knew it was the right thing to do. They knew it was the sensible thing to do; the appropriate thing; the logical thing.

In a world that tells us to protect ourselves, indulge ourselves, express ourselves and assert ourselves, the voluntary decision to live a sacrificial life seems counterintuitive. But it is not. It is perfectly logical to sacrifice for one another. Just like the baseball player who sacrifices to advance the runner, when any of us sacrifice for the family, the whole team wins and since we are part of the team, we win because we sacrifice.

**CONCLUSION:**

Memorial Day reminds us that liberty never travels without its companion: sacrifice; and that sacrifice is fueled by love.

It is the blood of sacrifice that purchased freedom for this nation. And it is the blood of sacrifice that purchased for each Christian his freedom from the penalty of his sin. Paul says that in light of the Lord's sacrificial death for us, it is suitable for us to give sacrificial lives to Him.

Sacrificial living will transform you. If you sacrifice your life to God, it will transform your relationship with Him. And if you sacrifice your life to the members of your family, it will transform your home.

**INVITATION:** #590 – *"I'll Live For Him"*