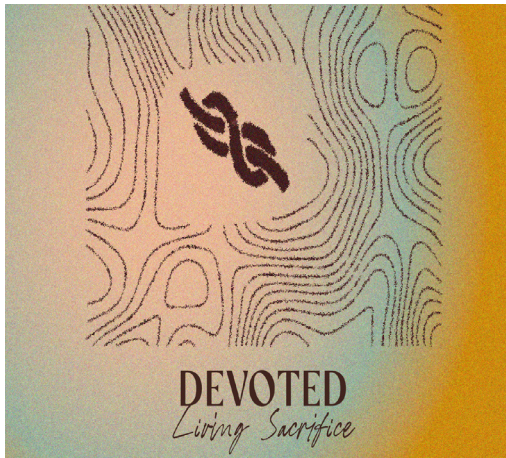




Sermon Growth Guide

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DEVOTED | Romans 12:1-2

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Key Verse: Romans 12:1 – “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.”

Big Idea: Paul urges his readers to contemplate the manifold mercies of God which he has laid out for them in Romans 1-11 in order to encourage them to offer their lives fully to God as their response of discipleship. He calls this a “living sacrifice” and argues that it is not only holy and pleasing to God but it is their “true and proper worship.”

Foundations

In both the ancient Hebrew and pagan worlds, worship was always attended by some kind of sacrifice. When animals were offered, they were of course ritually slaughtered before being placed on an altar. Paul changes the imagery with the word “living”, highlighting that for Christians the sacrifice we are called to give is not our death for past sins (that has already been accomplished by Christ) but rather our existing lives – we are to present our daily lives before God, fully submitted to His will and purposes.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Romans 12:1-2. Paul begins by pointing us to God’s many mercies revealed through the gospel, motivating us to respond in three ways: offer our bodies as living sacrifices, refuse to conform to the patterns of this world, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Offering our bodies means surrendering every part of our daily lives to God so He can use us for His Kingdom. Rather than adopting the world’s values and priorities, we are called to let the Holy Spirit transform us from the inside out. As we yield to His work, our desires increasingly align with God’s, giving us greater clarity to discern and joyfully follow His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Applying God’s Word

Reflect on what it means to offer your life as a living sacrifice to God. Where is that evident in your daily choices, and are there areas you’re still holding back? What makes those areas difficult to surrender? Romans 12 also calls us not to conform to the patterns of this world. Since we’re often influenced by

those around us, what helps you resist worldly pressures? Where do you feel the world has shaped your thinking or priorities, and what is one step you can take toward faithful non-conformity? Finally, consider how you’re renewing your mind. Are you regularly immersing yourself in God’s Word, spending time in prayer, and listening for the Holy Spirit? How are you learning to recognize the voice of Jesus above the competing voices of the world?

Witnessing God’s Word

Many people would love certainty about God’s will for their lives, but they have never thought that this entails a life of absolute surrender, of living sacrifice. As we believers become more devoted to a life surrendered to God, we will shine as lights in the fog of worldliness, and provide hope to many who yearn to discover that there is actually a God who loves and guides His people to a life filled with purpose and contentment and future hope. We can radically change the world around us, not by some new invention or discovery, but by becoming living sacrifices to God, fully surrendered to His good, pleasing and perfect will. Those hungry for life with meaning will sit up and take notice, drawn to heaven’s light shining in this present darkness.

Judson VanDeventer was an art teacher and aspiring artist when he faced the culmination of a 5-year internal battle about the course of his life. He was also a part-time evangelist who felt the tug of God to give his life fully to reaching the lost for Christ. In 1896, while conducting a revival meeting in East Palestine, OH, the die was cast. He would give up his worldly dreams of success, and offer himself fully to Christ. He wrote the words to what has now become a classic hymn of consecration:

All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.
I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

What does a fully surrendered life look like?

My first glimpse of such a life happened in Saudi Arabia during the summer of 1973, two years before I gave my life to Christ. It had nothing to do with Christianity, but everything to do with voluntary surrender. By some twist of fate, I was offered the chance to be a guest of the Emir of the Asir province of Arabia, the most beautiful mountainous and lush region of the peninsula. Amid horse races, shooting competitions among the prince's bodyguards, a sheep roast hosting some hundred men in the wilderness, a formal dinner in the palace, and the freedom to roam the grounds outside my guest house, I was included in an evening get-together for 40 or so friends of the Prince Khalid, sitting on Persian carpets cross-legged in a circle sharing stories. We were offered sweet, hot tea in crystal glasses by the servants, followed as is tradition by bitter Arabic coffee in small ceramic cups. But the servants had disappeared by this point, and we were all served by the prince's chief bodyguard, holding 40 cups in his right hand and a dallah in his left, skillfully pouring into cups and handing them to guests without spilling a drop. That was impressive. But even more impressive was the man himself. A Bedouin of the desert, about 6 feet tall, clean-shaven leathery skin, keen eyes, aquiline nose, ramrod straight back, athletic physique covered by a mahogany-colored thobe and a red-checkered keffiyeh, he moved with grace and efficiency. Almost unnoticeably in the midst of his ministrations, he would glance back to the prince, ready to stop his actions to respond to any new directives from his master. It was absolutely clear that this bodyguard lived for the pleasure of the prince, and was impervious to the wishes of anyone other than his lord. Even today I remember with admiration that remarkable display of loyalty to one man and his cause.

There are many reasons one might swear full allegiance to another person or cause. In our passage today, Paul urges this kind of pure surrender to God because of the infinite magnitude of God's mercy toward those who confess Christ as Lord. Romans 12 sits on the summit of all the truths in chapters 1-11 that Paul has piled up to show his readers what God has done for them in Christ and why it is completely appropriate that human beings should fully surrender themselves to Him and His will for them. Let me remind you of a few of these mercies:

* in the midst of our rebellion, God has demonstrated kindness, forbearance and patience

* He has expunged the guilt of our sins by expiation through the blood shed by His Son

* He has declared us righteous by sending His Son to die for us

* We now have peace with God because we are justified by faith in the victory of Jesus

* Our eternal hope is secured by the Holy Spirit whom God has poured into our hearts

* God's grace came to us while we were helpless sinners - unable to offer Him anything in exchange for His priceless gift

* There is therefore now no condemnation for those who belong to Christ

* We who were formerly "frail children of dust" God has transformed into Spirit-filled children of God who now have the privilege of calling the Creator and Judge of all "Abba," Papa.

* We have become heirs of God's Kingdom and joint-heirs with Christ

* The sufferings of this present age pale in comparison with the glory that is to be revealed to us in the age to come

* Both the Holy Spirit and God the Son have committed themselves to interceding on our behalf before the Throne of the Father.

* Since God is for us, and will withhold no good thing from us, we are more than conquerors through Christ.

* Romans 8:39

This God, the one true God, who is above all pretenders, He is the only one worth committing yourself to in full surrender. So Paul says, in light of all God has done for you and promises to do in the future, who else's hands would you want to put your life in? Therefore, this is how you should live before God: three imperatives:

Offer your bodies to God as a living sacrifice

Stop conforming yourself to this world

Receive the transformation of your mind and heart through God's supernatural work within you.

These commands are then followed by a promise: Then, you will discern what God good, pleasing and perfect will is for your life.

I love the way J. B. Phillips translates these two verses:

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.

Let's look at each of these thoughts in turn:

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, your true and proper worship

Paul uses the very concrete term "body" here – who you are "in the flesh" as it were, in the rough and tumble of everyday life, at work, in the house, on the road, shopping for groceries. Offer your hands and feet, arms and legs, your physical presence in this world, to God.

How? As a living sacrifice. In the OT, animal sacrifices were placed on an altar – wholly devoted to Him. Of course, they were first killed and then placed on the altar for God. Paul envisions us as living sacrifices figuratively placed upon God's altar. Of course, the problem with living sacrifices is that they may crawl off the altar – make the decision to do something else with their lives. Paul acknowledges that this is a choice that every human being has to make on his/her own. No one can offer your life for you and it is meant to be a once for all-time commitment. Settle in your mind and heart that you now belong wholly to God as a living sacrifice, ready always and immediately to serve Him rather than yourself or some other master. This attitude of sacrifice, Paul says, is holy (i.e., something that sets you apart from the world, dedicated to God's purposes); it is pleasing to God – not just "acceptable" to Him, as some translations assert, but a stance that brings a smile to God's lips (He is pleased with those who fully surrender themselves to Him); and it is "your true and proper worship". True and proper is the NIV's attempt to translate the Greek word from which we get our English word "logical". What Paul means by this word is that because of who God is and how He has made human beings and shown us His love in Christ, a response of full surrender to God is the only lifestyle that makes sense, that fits with reality.

Stop conforming yourselves to this world.

Because of our sinful natures, we are from infancy geared to love this fallen world which has rebelled against God. We live for our own pleasures, our own self-centered dreams, our own priorities. Captains of our own ships, masters of our own fates, following the passions of our own hearts, dancing to the drumbeats of the world around us. We are so easily molded by the pressures around us, and will naturally conform rather than resist the world.

In the late 1980s a social science experiment was conducted involving hundreds of high school and college students. Ten students at a time were gathered in a room and shown different sets of cards with two uneven lines on them, labeled A and B. They were told to vote on which line was longer. Here are three representative slides. Sounds straightforward. The wrinkle in this was that of the ten students only one was an actual test subject. The other nine had been instructed ahead of time to always choose the shorter line – i.e., to lie.

As the test started, the actual test subjects began by rightly choosing the longer line. But they quickly noticed that the others in their group all agreed on the other line being longer. Soon, the test subjects began to hesitate, looking around to see what the others in the group chose. Then, they would raise their hands in agreement with the majority. In the end, almost of the test subjects gave in to the pressure to conform. Even though their eyes could confirm which line was truly longer, most people chose to go with the crowd than believe in their own capacity to answer the question correctly.

The apostle Paul calls Christians to be non-conformists when it comes to the priorities and pursuits of the secular world around us. When we give in to the worldly culture around us, we import into our souls the values and desires that end up destroying our life individually and as a church community.

If Instagram is any indicator, the top 10 individual accounts with the most followers are the following:

10. Justin Bieber	286 million
9. Khloe Kardashian	292 million
8. Beyonce	300 million
7. Kim Kardashian	344 million
6. Ariana Grande	363 million
5. Kylie Jenner	382 million
5. Dwayne Johnson	382 million
3. Selena Gomez	404 million
2. Lionel Messi	512 million
1. Cristiano Ronaldo	676 million

What most influences the world's interests and priorities according to Instagram? Two professional footballers, four pop singers/musicians, one WWE actor, and three Kardashians. Perhaps not the best models to shape our souls for eternity...

But this is an illustration of what happens to the human soul when we conform ourselves to the fallen world, attracted by the sights and priorities and pleasures which it promises, all the while bringing the seeds of spiritual destruction into our hearts. So Paul says "Stop doing that! Stop allowing the world to press you into its mold, determining your values, setting your priorities, blinding you to its danger. Instead, we are to

Receive the transformation of your mind and heart through God's supernatural work within you.

It seems rather strange to have a command issued in the passive voice. Normally commands are issued in active terms: "Do this!", but Paul here is saying, "Allow this to be done to you." It is a recognition that we cannot achieve true spirituality by our own efforts. The "mind" is the

faculty by which we discern between right/wrong, good/evil. Because of sin, our natural capacity for rightly discerning these things is messed up. Conforming to the world around us makes things even worse. Renewed minds and hearts transformed are the work of God. We cannot make them happen, but we can place ourselves in the position of actively preparing to receive what God is all too willing to bring to life within us. This brings us back to the idea of offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice – we surrender our hearts and minds to God's ways by taking time to listen to God in prayer and to soak in His thoughts through systematic reading and meditation upon His words in the Scriptures.

Paul's promise to us is that as we devote ourselves to God in surrendering our own ways in order to pursue His, God will make His will become clear in our lives. Have you ever obsessed over how to know the will of God in your life? Many treat prayer for God's will in their lives like using a Magic 8-ball. Remember those? You ask a question and then turn over the 8-ball. It turns out there are 20 possible answers: 10 yes, 5 no and 5 non-committal. You may remember some: "Outlook good"; "Don't count on it;" "Reply hazy, try again." But this kind of transactional approach is not the way God typically works. He's not a cosmic Magic 8-Ball randomly spitting out answers to our questions. He is the God who calls us into a relationship of grace, mercy, purpose and meaning, and who invites us to walk in His ways into the future He has fashioned for His redeemed creation. When we offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices, we enter into the flow of His will, and then discover rather quickly which decisions keep us in God's flow and which ones move us out of His current or even have us trying to swim against the tide. We learn what is, in God's eyes, good, pleasing and perfect – i.e., what proves beneficial for your life and those around you, what puts a smile on God's face, and what leads to the ultimate end goal of God's plan of salvation.

What would a devoted, fully-surrendered life to God look like? D. L. Moody, great preacher and evangelist of the 19th C. once said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with a fully consecrated man." Perhaps he was right. But there have been some shining examples to light the way.

William Whiting Borden was born into a wealthy Chicago family in 1887. Though he had all the prospects of an easy life ahead of him, Bill became an ardent follower of Christ. Upon graduating from high school, his parents gave him the gift of a trip around the world to broaden his horizons. That trip served to fire his passion to become a missionary to reach the lost. He returned to enroll in Yale University where he started a prayer and Bible study ministry among the students. His own devotion to Christ was

reflected in a personal journal entry: "Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time." By the end of his freshman year, 150 undergraduates were involved in these meetings. By his senior year, 1000 of 1300 undergraduates were engaged in these weekly gatherings. But he was concerned also with the downtrodden and needy. While at Yale he provided from his own wealth to start the Yale Hope Mission, and could often be found in the evenings in the lower part of the city, bringing people off the streets for a hot meal or a safe bed. So impactful was his ministry that when he enrolled at Princeton Seminary the next year with a view to becoming a missionary, he was invited to serve as a board member of the National Bible Institute in NY, and as a director of the Moody Bible Institute, and then a member of the North American Council of the China Inland Mission. But his heart was set on reaching the lost where no one yet had proclaimed the gospel. Back during his freshman year at Yale, Bill attended a Student Volunteer Conference in Nashville where he heard Samuel Zwemer (later known as the apostle to Islam) preach about the 15 million Muslims of China to whom no missionary had ever gone. He resolved that he would give his life and resources to reach the Hui Muslims in the Gansu province of NW China. In December 1912 he sailed off to Cairo, Egypt to study Arabic and Islam from Zwemer himself, but in less than four months he had contracted spinal meningitis and died. It's been said that in his 25 years he touched more lives for Christ than most people three times his age. And his legacy continues. Between the monies he gave to various causes while in college and seminary, and the fortune he bequeathed in death to the China Inland Mission, it is estimated that in today's dollars he contributed over \$235 million to spread the love of Jesus to the world. A living sacrifice. An editorial tribute in the Chicago Daily Tribune said of Bill Borden, "Apart from Christ, there is no explanation for such a life." What a statement!

Whether short or long, that's what a life devoted to Christ looks like. You don't have to be a millionaire; you don't have to go to China. All you need is to offer your body to Christ as a living sacrifice where you are. "Take my life, Lord. I hold nothing back. Let me serve You as Your desire, whatever that entails." And then, hang on as He takes you where you never could have imagined, where others, reflecting on you, will say, "Apart from Christ, there is no explanation for such a life." And imagine, if a church of 3000 deployed such devoted followers of Jesus into the city. What kind of impact would that make? Wouldn't it be a great testimony to hear Colorado Springs say, "Apart from Christ, there is no explanation for such a church?" May we as individuals become living sacrifices, devoted to Christ. May we as a congregation live in such a way that the world has no explanation for us apart from Christ alive in us! Living sacrifices. Non-conformists. Devoted to Christ! May it be so!