

# A Living Sacrifice: Christian stewardship

Romans 12:1

**MPS: Christians glorify God as a living sacrifice when we live as faithful stewards.**

**OBJ: Every Christian should live as a faithful steward because of three motivations.**

**INTRO** This past week a guy skydived from 25,000'. The unusual part of the story is that he did it without a parachute, and landed in a net. "WHAT?!?"

My mother used to ask me, "Well, if everyone else jumps off a cliff, are you going to jump to?" Now mother's everywhere are asking, "well, just because one person jumped from a plane at 25,000' without a parachute, are you going to do it too?" What do you think his wife said when he first told her, "honey, I'm going to jump from an airplane at 25,000...(long pause)...without a parachute."? I can tell you the fall would not have been as scary as telling my plans to my wife.

**What compels a person to do such a thing?** The only reason I've heard given was that he wanted to be the first to do it. Well friend, "THERE'S A REASON NO ONE ELSE HAS DONE IT!" **How does being "the first" motivate a person to attempt such a feat?**

- **Q? What kind of motivation is so strong and so great that it justifies risking your whole life?**

**TRANS** I want us to consider today a motivation so compelling and glorious that it is worth your whole life.

**Background:** Romans 1-11 lays a foundation of spiritual truths of all God's provision in Christ for eternal life. He's provided his most thorough teaching on the gospel and salvation in Jesus Christ. Then, Paul makes a strong appeal to believers in Rome. The last five chapters of Romans explain HOW we live out our salvation. Paul exhort the Roman Christians to live in such a way that demonstrates the truth of the gospel.

*"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

**God designed the Christian life as a living expression of His truth.** The Christian life is a living sacrifice from first to last. We are not our own, but bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20), purchased with blood for God (Acts 20:28; Rev 5:9), and authorized to live in this world to demonstrate by faith and reflect the glory of His truth.

**Q? What does he mean by our lives are 'a living sacrifice'?**

**MPS: Christians glorify God as a living sacrifice when we live as faithful stewards.**

**OBJ:** Three MOTIVATIONS for every Christian to live as a faithful steward of the Lord Jesus.

## I. **Jesus' sacrifice on the cross compels a Christian to live for God.**

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present..."*

Paul makes an emphatic plea to Christians that stems from the extreme nature of Jesus' suffering and the ultimate accomplishment of Jesus' sacrifice for our salvation, which he has explained in detail in Romans 1-11. This appeal is not to one of pity. You can look at Jesus' cross and feel bad, yet walk away unchanged and unaffected. Rather, he urges each one to consider God's mercy displayed by Jesus on the cross.

**ILLUS** **When was the last time you experienced something that changed your life?** I'm not talking about for a moment. We can be so quick to claim "some big change" that produces "no lasting result". I mean, **"when was the last time you experienced something so powerful, so moving that it literally changed the way you lived your life?"** The changes may have been big, with immediate and stark changes produced. Or, the change may have initially seemed small at the moment, but it has produced bigger results than you imagined it might. Sometimes the gospel seems to strike like an acutely guided missile to the heart, but usually begins as a seed to grow. **When one looks upon the cross of Christ and believes, it**

produces a life-transformation that lasts for eternity.

You can't look at Jesus' cross and remain an admirer, a fan or a neutral bystander. The cross produces a distinct response of either worship or walking away. When you look and believe what Jesus has done, He becomes your personal Savior and Lord. [The cross of Jesus either compels you by great love to worship, or repulses you in unbelief to scoff at God.](#)

**HOW one lives reveals their response to the cross.** This includes how we outwardly act, but also how we perceive, process and rationalize our actions and life. Not one passing thought should cross our mind that doesn't flow from or get taken to the cross of Jesus in order to be "filtered" by the work of his blood. [The cross of Jesus compels us because it empowers us to offer our lives unto God.](#)

**Q? What response is your life demonstrating to Jesus' cross?**

## II. Offering your life to God means living as a steward.

*"...to present your bodies a living sacrifice..."*

Paul's exhortation means to 'offer up for the sake of the one receiving'. A sacrifice is something given for the sake of the one receiving it. But a unique distinction is made in this exhortation; the sacrifice is living. And, sacrifices do not typically live. The point of a sacrifice is that they die for the cause. But our death provides nothing and only proves that God is sovereign. Through the gospel, God brings a death FOR. By faith, Jesus' death becomes our death so that His life might become our life. Paul explains this in Romans 6:4-11.

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

By faith in Jesus we are alive unto God, to live by offering our lives unto Him. Christian stewardship is not about giving something up, but "offering up" your life. [Christian stewardship "offers up" all of life to bring honor and glory to God.](#)

**Paul is addressing how we live our lives in this physical world.** "Your body" means the realm in which we live in this physical world, and includes the whole person. We steward our lives in order to point to our source of life, Jesus Christ.

**Three realms of life help us consider faithful stewardship.** The first realm is **time**. Time is the great equalizer for every person, the realm where we spend 'so much' trying to get 'more of'. The world has always sold a lot of "magic potions" to increase our realm of time, from the "fountain of youth" so many generations ago, to the promise of productivity apps today.

One of the best ways to think about time in your life is not so much strictly by the passing of time, but by the level of energy in your life. Each hour may be equal in time, but not every hour is equal in value. You may give an hour, but if you are exhausted then it is likely the most useless hour. Living as a faithful steward isn't about finding and squeezing every possible second out of your life, so you can give some to God. Living as a faithful steward is about living so that every hour honors God. [Honoring God with your time is about giving Him your first and your best in time and energy.](#)

**ILLUS** I read resources at this time of the year to try and increase my personal productivity. And during the middle of my fourth or fifth resource I hit a wall. I felt myself growing tense inside while I thought, "How have I ever survived not practicing all this productivity? If I'm going to honor God, I must squeeze every ounce, inch, and drop out." But the longer I read the more I began to sense a disconnect from the author's message. (I don't think this was about the author or his message, necessarily.) God's creational commands hold inherent within them that we are to be productive. But the incessant demand placed upon us to "squeeze more out of less" from modern "productivity philosophies", I believe, so often does more to misconstrue God's command than to enable our fulfillment of it.

**ILLUS** A few weeks ago during the worship service the bulb in the projector exploded and the projector burned up. That's really the only way to know, "yep, we've squeezed every ounce out of that bulb and projector." And while it seems to be so common these days, I don't care to 'explode, burn out or up' in my life.

### **Another resource provided a clarifying principle for how Christians live as stewards to present our lives to God.**

"The idea that we can have it all and do it all is not new. This myth has been peddled for so long, I believe virtually everyone alive today is infected with it. It is sold in advertising. It is championed in corporations. It is embedded in job descriptions that provide huge lists of required skills and experience as standard. It is embedded in university applications that require dozens of extracurricular activities.

What is new is how especially damaging this myth is today, in a time when choice and expectations have increased exponentially. It results in stressed people trying to cram yet more activities into their already overscheduled lives. It creates corporate environments that talk about work/life balance but still expect their employees to be on their smart phones 24/7/365. It leads to staff meetings where as many as ten "top priorities" are discussed with no sense of irony at all.

The word priority came into the English language in the 1400s. It was singular. It meant the very first or prior thing. It stayed singular for the next five hundred years. Only in the 1900s did we pluralize the term and start talking about priorities. Illogically, we reasoned that by changing the word we could bend reality. Somehow we would now be able to have multiple "first" things. People and companies routinely try to do just that. One leader told me of his experience in a company that talked of "Pri-1, Pri-2, Pri-3, Pri-4, and Pri-5." This gave the impression of many things being the priority but actually meant nothing was.

But when we try to do it all and have it all, we find ourselves making trade-offs at the margins that we would never take on as our intentional strategy. When we don't purposefully and deliberately choose where to focus our energies and time, other people—our bosses, our colleagues, our clients, and even our families—will choose for us, and before long we'll have lost sight of everything that is meaningful and important. We can either make our choices deliberately or allow other people's agendas to control our lives."<sup>1</sup>

**I want to be productive. But most, I want to be found faithful.** You can't offer your body as a living sacrifice when you live like a walking zombie. You can't present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice when there is no margin of time or energy. Rest is as essential for faithful stewardship as work. We must trust God in our "doing", and in our "NOT doing". Christians, only you can stop the world from pressing you to squeeze out "every last bit". [Presenting your body as a living sacrifice begins by ordering your time and energy under one priority, the Lordship of Jesus Christ.](#)

The second realm of a faithful steward is **treasure**. This realm addresses how we resource our life, the whole of our life's treasure. The Bible says much about money, specifically its affect upon us. Forty percent of Jesus' teaching addressed money. That alone makes this a significant issue for every Christian. Jesus wanted us to understand that few things hold as much allure to master us. So He reminds us, "*No one will serve two masters.*" (Matt 25:24) Treasure reveals where your heart, your affections, hope and trust, rests. (Matt 6:21) These verses give perspective on what it means for Jesus to be Lord over our treasure.

*Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked.* **Psalm 37:16**

*Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil.* **Prov 15.16**

*Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse.* **Prov 28.6**

These verses do not tell us that money is bad or wrong. They do warn us that money is not as glorious or as good as Jesus' righteousness. [When our treasure is not fully submitted to Jesus' Lordship neither will our heart be. Our lives can only be presented to God as a living sacrifice when first our treasure is fully submitted to Jesus' Lordship.](#)

The third realm of our lives is **talent**. Talent encompasses how you express your life in your body, including natural gifts and talents, strengths, and abilities. Nowhere else in life is the whole more dependent on each individual part than the local church. We are dependent upon the work of God in each other's expression of life talent to grow and mature as Christians.

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<sup>1</sup>Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, (New York: Crown Business, April 2014), p15 (Kindle, Loc 197 of 3221).

We've been trained to depend professional service in so many arenas of life, that we, often by default, leave the heavy-lifting of serving and growth to the "professionals" in the church. Nothing thwarts your spiritual growth and maturity faster, nor the church's growth and maturity, than each individual Christian failing to express your talent among, for the purpose of the mission of, the church body. You will never know God's full purpose or will for your life without faithfully serving among His people for His Kingdom mission. [Jesus' Lordship means the way He's made you and all that He's given you are designed and redeemed for you to steward for His Kingdom purpose.](#)

**"Presenting" your life to God means applying one principle to all realms, Jesus as Lord is my one priority.** Making Jesus THE priority means he receives my first, my best, and a portion that represents the whole of my life. When anything competes with Jesus as our one priority, we have a civil war erupting, an assault on our Master, a revolution of life, a "*coup d'état*" on the heart. When Jesus is our priority, obedience is our path, the Word and Holy Spirit are our resource, and the Church body is our strategy. [Present your life unto God by holding one priority for every realm of life, the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, means living as a faithful steward.](#)

### III. [Faithful stewardship aligns all of life as an act of worship that honors God.](#)

*"holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*

**Stewardship means living so that all of life honors and glorifies God.** Everything you do in life is an act of worship, because we were created to be worshipers. It's just a matter of "who" or "what" is the object. And when you offer something to God as worship, only that which is holy and righteous is actually pleasing and acceptable to Him. When you live as a faithful steward, you present your life to God as a living sacrifice because the way you live demonstrates the Lordship of Jesus. [Jesus is the ONLY reason we have anything that is holy and acceptable and can be offered to God.](#)

**We are not acceptable to God.** There is nothing about us, our nature, being or accomplishments, that beckons upon God to accept us. No one gains a standing in God's presence because of who they are or what they've done. We only stand before God because we believe in what Jesus Christ has done FOR us. Holy and acceptable is only possible because God inhabits us by Holy Spirit. Holy and acceptable is not something we produce for God, but someone that "He puts on us" (clothed in Christ's righteousness) and whose Spirit He puts "IN us". [Our lives are holy and acceptable unto God ONLY WHEN we live by faith in Jesus Christ through obedience.](#)

**Romans 6:12-14 makes an immediate application of our transformation from death to life.** Paul urges,

*"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

*Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."*

The difference between you living in righteousness and unrighteousness is determined by one, single decision, "who will you present your life to?" The ONLY reason sin rules in you, as a Christian, is because you offer your body to it as an instrument for its use. The moment, and every moment, you offer your body to God as a living sacrifice, He will use you as an instrument of His righteousness. [The one who rules you will be the one you place over you.](#)

**Paul explains what it means to be alive unto God.** He's not talking about HOW we get salvation, but what happens when it gets us. This is not what we do for God, but what it means to live IN what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. The old sin-ruled self is dead, and we put it away. The new self is now alive with Christ, and we put on Jesus each day. We live in true righteousness and holiness when we walk by faith in obedience to His commands. Walking by faith in obedience means we understand that it's not our actions that save us, but our actions flow from Jesus' righteousness put on us in salvation. When we walk by faith in Jesus's righteousness, our life becomes holy and acceptable to God, an act of worship that brings honor and glory to Him. [Faithful stewardship makes everything sacred, or refuses to allow anything that cannot honor God to be part of life.](#)

## **CLOSE**

Two questions bring us back to our original consideration. **Is the motivation to offer our lives as a living sacrifice sufficient to live as faithful stewards? Is the reward for living as faithful stewards worth the cost?**

Offering your life as a living sacrifice to live as a faithful steward will challenge you at every level of life because it strikes at the heart of our sinful nature that denies Jesus' Lordship wants to enthrone self as god. **The more you believe that stewardship is just about giving something of yours to God, and that God just wants something from you, the more you will believe God should be satisfied by just giving him something. The more you fill your life with Jesus through the Gospel, the more you will live to offer your life to God as a faithful steward.**

When Jesus commissions His people to live on mission, He sends us as His Ambassadors, to live as stewards of His Kingdom and of His Lordship. Christians look to the cross to see the sacrifice that bought our life, believe in the Savior who died for us, and live distinctively under the Lordship of King Jesus because we've experienced His saving love. I urge you today, look at the cross, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live by offering your life as a living sacrifice to Jesus.

**Q?** Have you looked at Jesus on the cross and believed in Him to receive eternal life?

**Q?** Christian, are you daily remembering the gospel to know that 'Jesus' sacrifice is worth my complete stewardship'?

**Q?** Christian, are you offering your life as a living sacrifice to God?