

Called to Sacrifice

The difference between Memorial Day and Veteran's Day is that in May we recognize those who have paid the ultimate price for their country. They died as a direct result of defending the noble causes of freedom. Today, Veteran's Day, we recognize those who are serving or have served but are still living. The contrast between the living and the dead is stark but there is also a strong commonality between the two- they were or are both willing, by voluntarily committing to serving in one of the armed forces, to die for the principles and causes of freedom. It is that willingness to serve and sacrifice that puts them often in harms way. Some pay the ultimate price. Others make it home. These who have made it home or are currently serving deserve our respect and honor. It is reasonable. We should also offer our prayers and thanks for those who now serve or have served.

If you are a veteran or currently serving in one of the branches of our US military, please stand. If you have an immediate family member, son, daughter, spouse, parent, currently serving, please stand. **(PRAY)**

I began to wonder, after examining the scripture in Acts 12 last week, why God allowed James to be killed by Herod Agrippa but miraculously delivered Peter from the same fate. I'm sure they were both equally faithful and willing, but James was killed while Peter went on for years to preach the gospel.

No doubt all of those early soldiers of the gospel put their lives on the line time and time again. Most of them died in the prime of their lives and ministry. While others, like the apostle John, lived to be almost a hundred years old.

I personally don't think it is nearly as important for us to know the whys of someone's untimely death, especially someone who serves the Lord so diligently, as it is to know, understand, appreciate and be inspired by their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause of Christ.

Of course we know that as followers of Christ we are all commanded.....

1 Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.¹ **Romans 12:1 (HCSB)**

Every follower of Christ is called to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Some may be called on to die, but for most of us are to live our daily lives out in a spirit and attitude of sacrifice. This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said.....

23 “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. **24** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it. **Luke 9:23b-24 (HCSB)**

So how exactly should this life of daily sacrifice come into practical application? How can I start living a Christ-like life of true sacrifice?

Life of (Christ-like) Sacrifice

Purity (self-denial)

Sin is a very me centered activity. At its very core is the very selfish thinking- “I want, I get, I take, I deserve, I own, me, me,

me, my, my, my Purity, moral and spiritual, is the sacrifice of ones selfish, sinful desire for the sake of the kingdom of God and His glory. You will not likely ever find a selfish, sinful person who is also making any sincere sacrifices for the kingdom of God.

We talk a lot about freedom in Christ and we should. Christ has set us free from the bondage and eternal consequences of sin. The shackles have been removed. He whom the Son sets free is free indeed..... But we really need to understand that Christ did not set us free to do as we please. He set us free because, when we do what we please, we usually end up sinning, hurting ourselves, hurting others and bringing dishonor to God. He set us free to sacrificially love and serve each other.

13 For you are called to freedom, brothers; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** Gal 5:13-14 (HCSB)

We will never even understand much less appreciate and engage in the value and kingdom quality of personal sacrifice until we first understand the powerfully destructive forces of sin and repent of them. We cannot pick and choose, without serious consequences, which of God's commands we are going to obey. We must obey God in allthings, in all places, in all situations, and at alltimes. Purity, righteousness, complete obedience to God's commands, creates fertile ground for the roots of sacrifice to begin to spread.

The reason we don't see a lot of sacrificial service the church, not just here but throughout America, is we like our sin too

much. We don't want to give it up. We're not free. We're living in bondage.

Purpose (take up his cross)

One of the profoundly positive benefits, here and now, of being a Christian is that I have a clear and concise purpose for my life, to take up my cross daily. I can't remember having ever awakened in the morning asking myself, "Why am I here?" "What is the meaning of life?" I know why I'm here, to make and teach disciples. And that is not just my purpose as pastor of New Hope Baptist Fellowship. It is not just the purpose of this church and all churches. It is my personal life purpose, and, I might add, your purpose, if you are a true follower of Christ. The only question that may come up occasionally is "How specifically am I to carry out my purpose, God's purpose for my life?"

Thankfully, we have clear instruction as to how we are to discover the details of God's purposes for our individual lives and it relates strongly to that first condition for godly sacrifice, that of purity.

² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. **R**omans 12:1-2 (HCSB)

You and I each have a cross to bear, a God designed life purpose. Though it doesn't on the surface sound all that pleasant, I would remind you that it will never be more than you can bear. And even if it does get tough at times, Jesus always gives us strength to bear it and if necessary will carry it for us.

My guess is that many Christians, even mature Christians, never live a life of sacrifice resulting in maximum living in Christ because they have struggled with their own purity and righteousness all their life. And then of those who do achieve a reasonably substantial level of victory over their selfish, sinful ways get stuck finding God's purposes for their life, taking up their cross daily, and carrying them out. The crowd gets progressively thinner. The cross is unappealing or appears too heavy. They forget or ignore that Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

This leads us to the final phase of achieving a true and complete spirit of sacrifice which leads to maximum living and world impact.

Passion (follow Christ)

A lot of people who identify themselves as followers of Christ can be compared spectators at a sporting event. And many of those are even like spouses of sports fans. They are there, spectating, but they could really care less. They were dragged there against their wishes. They would just as soon be at the concession stand getting a hot dog or better yet at home. The problem is there is no love for the game.

There is problem with this whole symbolic scenario. There should be none of Christ's true followers in the stands at all. We should all be on the field in the game. The more accurate analogy of a true Christian is that we are the home team fighting against an opponent that is not of this world as we know it. And the lost are the ones who have filled up the stands watching how we "play." And to follow Christ is to play as He plays, move as

He moves, when He moves, and how He move. We copy Him and we do it passionately.

We falsely assume that the preachers and missionaries are on the field and if we occasionally offer up a prayer, send them a little money, and occasionally cheer them, we've done our part and everything will be all right.

But the Lord says through Paul that we're to get in the game and work at it passionately, with all our heart....

Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like one who runs aimlessly, or box like one who beats the air. ²⁷ Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified. **1** Cor 9:24-27 (HCSB)

Where are you in the stages of sacrifice? Struggling with sin? Wondering about your life purpose? Doing more observing than participating? Or, are you even in the game?

INVITATION

Jesus has called each of us to a life of sacrifice. It is not a suggestion. He requires it.

23 Then He said to [them] all, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it. **L**uke 9:23-24 (HCSB)

Will you obey Him? Will you follow Him?

Jesus not only taught of this call to sacrifice. He demonstrated it. He committed the ultimate sacrifice. He sacrificed His own life and He did it for the sins of all mankind even though a majority of people then and throughout the ages have rejected Him.

Jesus established the Lord's Supper hours before His great sacrifice to serve as a solemn reminder of His sacrifice for us in hope that it would inspire us to live our own lives in this same spirit of sacrifice.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: on the night when He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, ²⁴ gave thanks, broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." **1**Cor 11:23-24 (HCSB)

²⁵ In the same way [He] also [took] the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. **1**Cor 11:25-26 (HCSB)