

4th Quarter 2020
October–November–December
INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT STUDYING THE BIBLE?

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

The Bible was written by God in an ancient time through people of different languages and cultures than our own, whose immediate audiences were different from us in many ways. It's also a book written by God about God and the work he's doing in the world. A work by such a divine Author, on such an immense topic, *should* be difficult to fully comprehend. So we'll need to study and wrestle with God's words—but it's worth it, and here are five reasons why:

- 1. Bible study illuminates our daily reading.** (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*)
- 2. Bible study protects us from twisting the truth.** (*2 Peter 3:15b-16*)
- 3. Bible study amplifies our service.** (*Acts 18:25-26*)
- 4. Bible study opens our understanding.** (*Luke 24:27*)
- 5. Bible study deepens our devotion to Christ.** (*Acts 17:11*)

Since in-depth study should occur often, it will take self-discipline. Bible study also focuses on fewer verses or more refined topics, which may seem more palatable. But Bible study has its challenges. The interaction with the text is more intense, making times of study seem more daunting than daily reading. Bible study is for *everyone*; we just need a plan.

A simple way to get started on your own is to purchase a study Bible that has sections before each book explaining the historical context, theme, author, audience, and other details. These Bibles also have commentary alongside the verses that note relations to other books of the Bible and explanations of confusing or difficult concepts. However, one of the best ways to study the Bible is to sit under solid preaching and teaching and get involved in a group through your local church. Jesus meant for us to encourage each other in spiritual growth, and the study of his Word is one of the greatest ways we can grow to love Him together.

<https://unlockingthebible.org/2017/08/whats-so-important-about-studying-the-bible/>

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LESSON 1 ~ IS MY SACRIFICE “LIVING”?

OCTOBER 4, 2020

Background Scripture: Genesis 22; Romans 12

Lesson Passage: Genesis 22:1-3, 9-12; Romans 12:1, 2 (NIV)

Introduction: In Romans 12:1, Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service.” Paul’s admonition to the believers in Rome was to sacrifice themselves to God, not as a sacrifice on the altar, as the Mosaic Law required the sacrifice of animals, but as a living sacrifice. The dictionary defines sacrifice as “anything consecrated and offered to God.” As believers, how do we consecrate and offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice?

Scripture Reference: Genesis 22:1-3, 9-10; Romans 12:1, 2 (NIV)

Genesis 22:1-3, 9-10 (NIV)

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. 2 Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 9 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. 12 “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Romans 12:11, 2 (NIV)

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 2 Do not conform 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. (Romans 12:1, 2).

Topic Explored: “Is My Sacrifice ‘Living’” ~ Under the Old Covenant, God accepted the sacrifices of animals. But these were just a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Because of His ultimate, once-for-all-time sacrifice on the cross, the Old Testament sacrifices became obsolete and are no longer of any effect (Hebrews 9:11-12). For those who are in Christ by virtue of saving faith, the only acceptable worship is to offer ourselves completely to the Lord. Under God’s control, the believer’s yet-unredeemed body can and must be yielded to Him as an instrument of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13; 8:11-13). In view of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus for us, this is only “reasonable”. It is of no value to God to give Him your life for death. He wants you to be a “living sacrifice”—to let Him have all your strengths that have been saved and sanctified through Jesus (Romans 12:1). This is what is acceptable to God.

Memory Verse: *12 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 (Romans 12:1). NIV*

Lesson Focus: Genesis 12:1-3; 9-12 (NIV)

Verses 1-3 ~ The sacrifice of Isaac is one of the Bible’s most dramatic stories. God tells Abraham to go to the land of Moriah and offer his beloved son Isaac for a burnt offering. Then they came to the place: Apparently, even on Mount Moriah there was a specific place God told Abraham to stop,

because this was the place to do this. Abraham does not question his God, with whom he has sealed a covenant. He has been promised that he will “multiply exceedingly,” and become a father of many nations. He binds his son Isaac and lays him upon the wood on the altar he has built, but when raising his knife, the angel calls upon him not to slay his son. He has passed God’s test of devotion, and a ram is offered in place of Isaac.

Verses 9, 10 ~ Abraham offers God a “living sacrifice” in Isaac. This event is a picture of the mistake we make in thinking that the ultimate God wants of us is the sacrifice of death. What God wants is the sacrifice *through* death which enables us to do what Jesus did, that is, sacrifice our lives. We seem to think that God wants us to give up things! God purified Abraham from this error, and the same process is at work in our lives. God never tells us to give up things just for the sake of giving them up, but He tells us to give them up for the sake of the only thing worth having, namely, life with Himself. It is a matter of loosening the bands that hold back our lives. Those bands are loosened immediately by identification with the death of Jesus. Then we enter into a relationship with God whereby we may sacrifice our lives to Him.

At this time, Abraham was more than 100 years old and Isaac would have been able to escape his coming death had he chosen to. Yet he submitted to his father perfectly. In remembering Abraham’s faith, we should never forget Isaac’s faith. As an obedient son, Isaac laid down on the wood, ready to be sacrificed.

Verses 11, 12 ~ Abraham displayed his heart towards God in that he was willing to give his only son. When God asked Abraham for the ultimate demonstration of love and commitment, He asked for Abraham’s son. When the Father wanted to show us the ultimate demonstration of His love and commitment to us, He gave us His Son. We can say to the LORD, “Now I know that You love me, seeing You have not withheld Your Son, Your only Son from me.” All the while, God still required a sacrifice. God didn’t call off the sacrifice. Instead, He required that there be a substitute provided by God Himself. The naming of the place is significant. Abraham called it, Jehovah Jireh, The Lord will provide.

Lesson Focus: Romans 12:1, 2

Verses 1, 2 ~ In Romans 12:1, 2, we read about being a living sacrifice in this pressing advice from the Apostle Paul: “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.” What did Paul mean by a living sacrifice? Is Paul suggesting we voluntarily lay down our lives, to be sacrificed on some holy altar somewhere? In a way, yes, He is saying just that.

Jesus willingly gave up His life so that our relationship with God could be restored; we are also called to sacrifice. Jesus’ sacrifice is the only one that can save us, and no further sacrifice is required for salvation. But we are called to make our own sacrifices in response, and like Jesus’ sacrifices, it may require our whole lives. The sacrifice God wants from us is a living sacrifice. Instead of dying for God, He usually calls us to live for Him with every aspect of ourselves. Here in Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul mentions that we should give everything we have. First, he writes about our bodies, which includes the actions that we perform (the things we do with our bodies). They should be given to God, just like Jesus gave His body to serve God. We ought to use ours to obey God and do His will, including serving others. Obeying God with our bodies is the sign of our spiritual worship. We cannot serve God with our bodies unless our spirits are also directed toward serving God.

Finally, we serve God with our minds, with which we can know God’s will, just like Jesus knew God’s will was for His sacrifice. This may mean giving up our own plans and desires to do what God wants

instead. Paul also tells us that our minds must be renewed and transformed. Our own thoughts and opinions may need to be sacrificed in order to follow God's thoughts, but God promises that His will is perfect and good. His plans for us are better than our own!

God wants visible, lived-out, bodily evidence that our lives are built on his mercy. Just as worshipers in the Old Testament denied themselves some earthly treasure (a sheep, a goat, a bull), and carried their sacrifices to the altar of blood and fire, so we deny ourselves some earthly treasure or ease or comfort, and carry ourselves — our bodies — for Christ's sake to the places and the relationships and the crises in this world where mercy is needed.

Let every act of your body in living be an act of worship. That is, let every act of your living body be a demonstration that God is your treasure. Let every act of your living body show that Christ is more precious to you than anything else. Let every act of your living body be a death to all that dishonors Christ. "Present a living holy body to God" means give your members — your eyes, your tongue, your hands and feet — give your body to do righteousness, not sin. That's what would make a body holy. A body is holy not because of what it looks like, or what shape it's in, but because of what it does. If the sacrifice of our bodily life is holy, then it is acceptable to God. So what do these words add? They add God. They make God explicit. They remind us that the reason holiness matters is because of God. They remind us that all of these words are describing an act of worship — "which is your spiritual worship" — and God is the center of worship. So it's fitting that we end where we began and stress that before Romans 12 is a call to live a merciful life, it is a call to live a worshipful life. Or better: In calling us to live a *merciful* life (built on the mercy of God in Christ), the aim is that it be a *worshipful* life. The aim of showing mercy is showing God. The aim of having bodies is to make the glory of God more visible. And he does not shine through our muscles and curves, but through our merciful behavior. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (I Corinthians 6:19-20). In other words, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your *spiritual worship*." Show the worth of Christ by the way you use your body.

Let's talk about it. . .

1. How can believers NOT be conformed to the world? By being "transformed by the renewing of our minds." We do this primarily through the power of God's Word to transform us. The Word of God, ministered in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is the only power on earth that can transform us from worldliness to true spirituality. In fact, it is all we need to be made "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV). The result is that we will be "able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2b). It is the will of God for every believer to be a living sacrifice for Jesus Christ.
2. When Paul urges us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, he asks us to see ourselves as God's instruments in reaching others for Heaven's sake. Most of our difficulties in life are the result of selfishness. When we offer our lives to God, we tell Him we are willing to endure whatever He calls us to for His sake. We are placing God's eternal plan and purpose above our own temporary wants. What choice will you make?
3. With unreasonable confidence Abraham trusted God. What if we lived with those high expectations of God? What might we be ready to see through or cast out in favor of a new consciousness?
4. So, how do we truly present ourselves to God as a living

Making it personal:

- God calls us to give everything we have to God -- and we must obey.
- When we trust Him, God will provide for every need we have. He is "The Lord Who Provides."
- God's love for us is immeasurably great, that He would sacrifice His only Son for our sins.

Closing Prayer: *Thank You, Father, for Your graciousness to us in giving us Your Only Son, Jesus, as the Sacrifice for our sins. Help us to trust You as did Your servant Abraham, with the things most precious to us. We thank You for Your blessing of grace, unearned and undeserved. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.*

Notes
