

40 Days of the Bible
Pre-Message #2

What are You Willing to Offer to God?

(Romans 12:1-2)

September 25, 2005

This is now the last week before we formally begin our Forty Days of the Bible emphasis. By now, I hope that you're plugged into a small group study. The Sunday messages alone won't do it. You need to be in a group. I can't emphasize that too much. You need to get with a group of people who are seeking to take Biblical truth and make it a part of their lives. You need to be in a group who are looking at the role of the Bible in their daily lives. The study today that small groups are doing is really, really relevant and extremely practical.

This is also the week that you should have begun reading through the New Testament in 40 days, on Wednesday. Actually, we have that spread over 47 days—40 days with a day off each week—or a day for catching up. It's not too late to jump in and get going. Copies are available in the entryway.

And remember October 23. That's the date for our Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament seminar. That's the only item in the 40 days that we have to charge for, and it's \$17 per person. That's a great deal for the materials and instruction you get. You should sign up today.

But—really, all these things cost you something. A few dollars, a few hours, an investment in time and effort, to focus on the Word of God very intentionally this fall. The reality is that anything of value is going to cost you something.

You may collect license plates. That's going to cost you something. You may take classes at night to get ahead in your profession. That's going to cost you something.

Now you're here this morning probably because you think of yourself as a follower of Jesus, or because you really want to be a follower of Jesus. (I like to use the term "Jesus follower" rather than "Christian" because in our culture, the term "Christian" has been so watered down, it means just about whatever people want it to mean.) OK, so your goal is to be a faithful follower of Jesus. The question is, what will enable us to fulfill that goal? There are certain core activities that will help us achieve that goal. Activities like prayer, worship, serving, sharing Jesus with others, and faithful giving. But at the top of that list is what Donald Whitney calls "Bible intake." (You'll hear more about him later in the message.) By "Bible intake", Whitney means *hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, meditating on* and *applying* God's word.

Right now, you're hearing God's word (or will in just a minute). That's good, but it's hardly enough. We need to be *readers* of God's word—that's why we're challenging you to read the whole New Testament in just 40 days. (That's about 7 chapters a day. After that intensive, 2-3 chapters a day will seem easy!) That's also why we want you to be in a study group—to address your need, as a Jesus-follower, to study, meditate on and apply God's word.

All that's going to take time, no doubt about it. It's going to take effort. It's going to require acquiring some new disciplines.

But it will help you achieve that goal of being a faithful Jesus-follower. That's the idea. It's

like if you decided to be a pro golfer. If that's your goal, it's going to take time to study golf, take lessons, and play the games just about every day. It will mean investing in really good clubs and reading everything you can get hands on about golf. (I know some of you guys think I'm describing heaven!)

If that's your goal, great, but it means that you probably will never be a linebacker, a stockbroker or a silversmith. To make a choice *for* one thing is to make a choice *against* many other things. You make choices and sacrifices to meet your goal. That's the power of a disciplined life.

So make no mistake, when I ask you to rev up your Bible intake so as to be a more faithful disciple of Jesus, there will be a tangible, measurable cost. It may mean getting up earlier, or less time cruising the net or watching reruns of the Simpsons. But it will help you achieve that goal. And that will all be worth it when you stand before the Lord. The payoff now in terms of living a "blessed" life and forever are totally worth it.

I want to direct your attention to a passage of Scripture that's relevant as we think about that sacrificial trade-off. In Romans 12:1-2, we have the words of the apostle Paul about making our lives a living sacrifice to God.

1Therefore, 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. 2Do 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)

Now this passage is about how to find God's will. How do we get to that place where we know just what God wants? We get there by a two-part transformation—when we offer God our *body* as a living sacrifice, and when we offer God our *mind* for renewal.

That two-part offering is even clearer in a translation like the CEV, the Contemporary English Version:

First, there's part one (vs. 1)—the living sacrifice:

Dear friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God.

Then there's part two (vs. 2)—the renewed mind:

Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him. (Contemporary English Version)

Now let's look at this carefully—especially to see the role of the word of God in both the offering of our bodies and the renewing of our minds.

The Living Sacrifice (Romans 12:1)

Look at verse one again:

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.

The concept of sacrifice or offering is universal in world religions. It was part of Judaism and

the rituals of the Temple. So it's no surprise when Paul says, "Yes, make an offering!" The surprise is what he says to offer: "Make an offering of flesh and blood. But not an animal—offer you! Your body! And not your DEAD body—your living body—offer a *living* sacrifice!"

We don't make an offering like in the Old Testament—offering a bull or a goat or a lamb—because that blood sacrifice is now covered by the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Now, God is no longer interested in *dead* sacrifices. He wants *living* sacrifices.

This, says Paul, is a spiritual/reasonable/rational act of worship. The Greek word the NIV translates as "spiritual" is actually a very unusual word. It's *logikos*. We get the word "logical" from it. It's a word that includes the full use of our minds for spiritual purposes. It's *reasonable* in view of God's many "mercies" (it's plural in the Greek) that Paul has been describing all throughout Romans. It only makes sense to serve God *this way* (fully, completely, totally) in view of God's mercy in His sacrifice on the cross of Jesus that sets us free.

He wants our *living selves*, not our *dead bodies*. He wants our *full mind*, not our *empty skulls*. He doesn't want **dead dummies**; He wants **living thinkers**.

This is not a cloudy, up-in-the-sky kind of concept. This is not an abstract, theoretical, kind of devotion to God. It's very real and practical. That's why he says, "Offer your **bodies** as a living sacrifice."

What will you do *with your body* as a living sacrifice to God? I can think of three basic things: He wants us to *serve Him fully*, *worship Him without reserve*, and to *give Him*

the time He deserves as the delight of our hearts.

Let's think of those one at a time:

#1: When we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, it mean to serve Him fully

"Offer your bodies," Paul says. Just as in the days of the Temple, come and bring your offering. An offering is something you hand over to the control of another. You give it up. You recognize that it's not yours anymore.

So is my body mine anymore? In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul reminds us,

19Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

These words were written in the context of urging the believers at Corinth to cut out their rampant sexual immorality. Corinth was notorious as a city of sexual immorality, and these believers weren't immune.

So can Christians say, "It's my life, I'll do anything with it I want! It's my body! It's mine to control!"? No, we're bought people. That's why it's reasonable to climb up on God's altar. He holds the title deed to our lives, our bodies, a deed written in the blood of Jesus.

#2 To offer our bodies a living sacrifices means to worship Him without reserve

When I was a new believer, I was so reserved it took me months to even sing in church. Then came the Jesus movement and I was going to places where people clapped their hands and held them up high. And that took

months to get used to as well. By nature, I just didn't like it. By nature, I am a reserved person.

But finally one day it hit me: to offer my body as a living sacrifice meant giving Him my **real body**! That means a *tongue* to sing with, *hands* to clap and raise in holy surrender, *knees* to kneel, the whole shooting match.

I worry about—and ask God to give me the grace not to judge—people who keep their mouths closed and their arms folded during worship. I worry that it's a holding out on the command to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

#3 To offer our bodies as living sacrifices means to give Him the time He deserves as the delight of our heart

In some older wedding ceremonies, one interesting line of the marriage vow is "with my body I thee worship." It's a promise of sexual and intimate exclusivity that we're giving our spouse. It's a promise of exclusive attachment.

God also wants us to be able to say to Him, "With my body I thee worship." Just as marriage requires an exclusive, single-minded focus, so do our lives with the Lord.

God deserves that in a concrete, measurable way. He deserves your **PDT**: personal devotion time. If I could write out a prescription for all of us today, it would read

PDT, apply daily for a minimum of 15 minutes, until you die or Jesus returns. Infinite number of refills available.

At the heart of PDT is time spent reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on the

words of the Bible. That brings us to verse 2, which is all about...

The transformed mind (Romans 12:2)

2Do 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)

The world has one way of thinking, but God has another way for you to think. The world says everything's in shades of gray; the Bible says that some things are right and some are wrong. The world says, decide for yourself. The Bible says, God has spoken. The world says life came from matter plus time plus chance. The Bible says that life is God's creation. The world says, human beings are clever mammals. The Bible says that human beings are uniquely created in God's image. The world says that Jesus was a great teacher. The Bible says that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and God's answer to the problem of sin.

The world is trying to "evangelize" you all the time—to squish your mind like playdough into a mold that ignores God. And it's pretty good at time, since it has an ally living inside us—our sinful inclination the Bible calls our "flesh."

How do we fight off the overwhelming pressure to conform to the world's way of thinking? We need a constant renewal of our minds through close attention to the word of God. Without that, we're headed for disaster.

I mentioned Donald Whitney before. He tells about doing a mission project in East Africa with a tiny mud and sticks church way out in the boonies. He had expected strange food, harsh conditions and poverty, but what he

didn't expect was the fact that the members of the church, including the pastor and deacon, were all liars, thieves, and immoral as ally cats.

It didn't take long to figure out why: no one there, not a single person, had a Bible. The Sunday messages consisted of poorly remembered Bible stories. The pastor knew about six such stories and then he would start over again.

Without the Word of God, playing church was more like spiritual Russian roulette. The team from Whitney's church in Illinois went back home, raised the money to put a Bible in each household in the church and sent them back.

Three years later, the church was transformed. The lying, stealing and sleeping around had just about stopped. The pastor was preaching through the Bible. And people were being won to Christ—they needed a new shipment of Bibles for all the new believers.

This book has power to change lives and nations because it's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It can be relied on for matters of faith and history and yes, science.

It's doubly powerful because a living God stands behind these words. One of my heroes in history is Abraham Lincoln. If I had a letter from Lincoln, it would be one of my prize possessions. Why? Because of the man the letter represents. It would be an expression of his heart, his soul, his intellect and his compassion.

We have in our possession something of infinitely greater value: a letter from the Almighty Creator of the universe, a letter from the God of holy love, a letter from the one who shed His blood on the cross. But increasing

this valued letter from God is the greatest admired unread book. And it's because we can't give the time to open it and to take in its incredible truths that transform.

You have a decision to make today about the role of the Bible in your life. Are you willing to scoot around your schedule, move around the elements of your life, to make time for the word of God—in your personal reading and in group study?

Before you answer that though, I want to urge you to keep your eyes on the prize. What's the pay off?

Life, that's what. That's what Jesus said to somebody who wants you to ignore the Bible, say nice things about the Bible, but not to actually read it or study it. That guy's the devil. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says,

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Do we live on bread alone? On food and drink? Well, you can keep your body alive, but you'll starve your spirit. According to Jesus, we live "...on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Come to the table. It's set. There's a daily banquet ready for you, and it's all ready. Stop starving your soul. Offer to God your body; offer Him your mind for transformation. Feed on the word of God. He'll fill you with His word, plump and rich.

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PRAYER