

We just sang, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.” Do you feel like a hypocrite when you sing that? Do you think we should get rid of music that expresses deep devotion to God, because we don’t live up to it? Maybe we should say, “Take my life and let it be consecrated to you for an hour or so every other Thursday, if I’m not tied up?” I should say not! Songs of devotion belong in Christian worship. Here’s why.

The language of deep devotion to God is like the language of devotion to your family or your work or your country. It expresses our deepest feelings about what we aspire to be as human beings. We always need something big to live up to. A wicked thing happens if we mock our aspirations to be better than we are. Something more wicked happens if we abandon those aspirations.

We don’t always live up to them. We do forget our bold promises to be devoted to Christ. We sometimes contradict those promises. We may wish we had never made those promises. But then, in moments of grace, we remember why we made them, and they call us back to something higher and better that we aspire to reach. That’s why Pastor Sam peppers our worship with these songs of aspiration.

The sermon series that starts today will feed those aspirations. The series is also a summons from God through me to this entire congregation. Here is how the apostle expressed the summons in Romans 12:1: **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 worship.**

As one who leads the way, I say to you, “Offer your body to God as a living sacrifice. Reaffirm the offer of your body to God as a living sacrifice. Don’t be afraid of failure or hypocrisy. Be afraid only of being so mired in the mundane that you no longer lift up your eyes to the horizon and aspire to be what God calls you to be.”

If enough of us take this summons to heart, we can build a church that is prepared to face the challenges that await us between now and 2020.

Q and A

Offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices. The apostle wrote that to ordinary people, many of whom were illiterate. The summons to offer your body to God is not for super saints; it is for all the elect. We are the elect.

Last summer, we reflected on the mystery and majesty of election. We saw that God elected a community of faith that began with Abraham and now includes the Christian Church. God chose us to carry forward His purpose in the world. His purpose is to extend His mercy to every nation on earth. Romans 12-15 tightens our grip on what kind of people God wants His elect to be. We are to live in a way that is worthy of our God. I am summoning all of us to such a life. We are all in this together. It is the solidarity of the elect.

Offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices. Is this possible? Is it hypocritical to try? Will I fail? It is possible if you don’t try to do it all at once. It is not hypocritical if you don’t forget how weak you can be. You will fail, as you do at everything hard you try. But we will get stronger and fail less, because the Holy Spirit is at work in us.

Offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices. Is this sermon just another motivational speech on self-improvement? It might sound like that. “Aspirations to something better,” “worthy of the purpose God calls us to!” It sounds like a minor league

version of a pep talk on the importance of realizing your potential.

Romans 12:1 takes my sermon out of the minor leagues of self-improvement and puts it in a league by itself. **Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual worship. Spiritual worship and anything holy and pleasing to God** are not about psychological self-interest. They are about God and our devotion to God. Self-improvement has about as much relevance there as a shower nozzle at the base of Niagara Falls.

But isn't this kind of devotion for mature Christians only? No, it is for all Christians, beginners and more experienced. If you have never done it, and you feel the desire to offer your body to God, just take the plunge. **Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.**

Of course, you will want to know what are you getting yourself into? The sermon series that starts today is called "Apps for the Elect." Many specific applications will show you what are you getting yourself into. But the secret of devotion is not knowing what are you getting yourself into. It is the love in your heart for Christ.

That love takes us back to the mercy of God. Verse 1: **I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy. The letter to the Romans tells the story of God's mercy to man. God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8. When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son. – Romans 5:10. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? – Romans 8:32.** That is the gospel, and the gospel is God's way of extending mercy to ever-widening circles of humanity.

If you have any sense that the mercy of God is meant for you; if you have any hunger to say thank you to Him in some deep way; if any stirring of devotion, any desire to please Him, then **offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices.**

Here Where Our Souls Are Fed

Now, we come to the table where our souls are fed as we commune with Jesus Christ, whom we have not seen and yet we love. We commune with Him, as we hold in our hands the tokens of His eternal pity. As you receive the bread and wine, remember His mercy and open your heart to His summons through me **to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God – this is your spiritual worship.** This fall could be a watershed moment in our life together at Brandywine Valley Baptist Church.