

Where is God When I'm Called to Surrender?

Rich Nathan

August 21-22, 2004

Where is God When Life is Hard? Series

Romans 12:1-2

One of the things that I'm always interested in is following the trends of modern marketing. Because the marketers know where people are. The marketers know what people want. The marketers know how people think. And I am endlessly fascinated by people, I love people, I care about people, so I pay attention to marketing.

It is interesting to see the way slogans for joining the Army have changed over the last century. Here are some of the recruitment posters from World War I:

- "My Country: I Am At Your Service"

It was then they came up with the Uncle Sam poster:

- "I Want You!"

The Marines had a poster:

- "First to Fight"

During WWII here are some of the recruiting posters:

- Americans Will Always Fight For Liberty
- Sub Spotted: Let 'Em Have It! Lend A Hand, Join the Navy!

Here's an Army Air Corps recruitment poster:

- Fly For Her Liberty And Yours: The Greatest Team in the World
- Wake Up America! Civilization Calls Every Man, Woman and Child!

Here's another one for the Navy:

- America Calls! Join the Navy

Now, you have, of course, noticed that the marketing of the Army has changed. The ad is no longer: My country, I am at your service; or Uncle Sam Wants You! In 1980 the Army changed its recruiting slogan to:

- Be All You Can Be. (Just in time for the "me generation.") "The Army, a place for realizing your potential."

In 2001, the Army came up with a new slogan. It is not "Fight for her liberty and yours: The greatest team in the world, The Army!" The most recent recruiting poster says:

- An Army of One!

The purpose? To sell people on how the Army is focused on them as individuals. It's not that the recruit is part of something bigger than himself or herself – fighting for country, for family. The call is not to patriotism, to heroism, to sacrifice. The Army

exists to assist you to meet your goals and your expectations. Here is an actual Army ad. You see this soldier jogging through the emptiness of the National Training Center. He starts as a distant dot among the waves of heat and progressively closes in on the camera, as the camera shows his jiggling dog tags, flashes of a HumVee and a Blackhawk helicopter coming down, dust flying, soldiers being dispersed, the soldier looks at the audience and says: “Even though there are 1,045,690 soldiers just like me, I am my own force. With technology, with training, with support, who I am has become better than who I was. And I’ll be the first to tell you the might of the US Army doesn’t lie in numbers, it lies in me. I am an Army of One and you can see my strength.”

Everything about modern marketing is focused upon enhancing the self, glorifying the self, worshipping the self. Listen to this advertisement for a woman’s razor. Some of you ladies might actually buy this product! “Introducing Venus Divine. Discover smoothness that makes every woman feel divine – divinely comfortable because every inch of a goddess is divine. Reveal the goddess in you.” This razor won’t only cut hair off your legs; this razor will reveal that you are a divine being.

Or how about this ad: Tresemé presents trestyle: stylist secrets to star quality hair. The perfect little black dress, the lipstick that looks as though it were made for you, and the healthiest, shiniest hair in a style that looks beautiful yet effortless. It’s easy for you to get star quality professional results at home.

Of course, everything has to be easy. Not only do we build up the self, we worship the self, it’s all about me, but also it has to be easy! Like the American Express ad: “Pay over time. No annual fee. People will think you live in a loft downtown. It’s easy.”

Here are some headlines from recent magazines:

- Short Cuts to Romance
- Housework Made Easy
- Shrimp Made Easy
- Monday Diet: Fresh Start Fast Results
- Legs You Long For – Easy Ways to Fix Those Flaws
- Easy No Cost Upgrades to Your Entire House
- Be Naturally Slim and Never Diet Again
- Fast Easy Painless Four Week Body Turn Around
- Feel Sexier in Seconds
- In Just Two Minutes Retexturize, Reilluminate, Rejuvenate Your Skin

Here’s the last one...

- SLIDE OF PHOTO – The birth of a new you. Artists performing daily. It’s all inside. JC Penny. Raising the salon experience to a form of art. For services that are extravagantly affordable, call...for a salon near you.

Everything in life centers on you. That’s what modern marketing communicates.

There is a wonderful cartoon in The New Yorker many years ago in which you see a smiling woman jabbering away nonstop to this unhappy looking friend. The smiling woman finally says: Well, that's enough about me. Now let's talk about you. What do you think about me?

Today, I want to talk about a subject that is absolutely the antithesis of contemporary American culture, against the view now that all of life should revolve around you and me – our preferences, our wants, our tastes, our demands. I'm going to talk to you out of the Bible where we find a very different view of life, a view of life that centers on Christ and calls each one of us to surrender our entire lives to Christ. I've called today's talk "Where Is God When I'm Called To Surrender?" Let's pray.

When we discuss the subject of surrendering our lives to God, it is such a big subject that what I'd like to do is to discuss it by answering three basic questions. First of all, how much of God do you want? Second, how much of you does God want? And third, what is the Christian life all about?

Let's take these in turn. How much of God do you want? Most people don't want very much of God. Wilbur Rees, with more than a touch of sarcasm, once wrote: "I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please? Not enough to explode my soul, or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk, or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant farm worker. What I really want is a happy experience, not transformation. I would like the warmth of being in a comfortable room, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. So, I would like \$3.00 worth of God, please."

The first question that any of us has to answer is how much of God do you want? Now, almost none of us would be so crass as to say: Well, I'd like \$3.00 worth of God, please. But doesn't that get at it? We don't want to dump God entirely; we don't want to get rid of God. But what we'd like is to keep God at a comfortable distance so that he really doesn't start messing up our lives, making us do something really radical like give away one of our cars, or sell our boat, or use up our entire vacation time to go on a short-term missions trip, or give up a pet sin, for goodness sake. We'd like \$3.00 worth of God, or to update Wilbur Rees' statement, we'd like \$30.00 worth of God.

I remember talking with someone who was living something of a double life regarding God. They were holding themselves out as a follower of Christ, but there were major glaring inconsistencies in their life. But they were talking about how much they appreciated knowing that when they got in a tough jam, they could always turn to God. And how terrible it would be to be a non-Christian and to not be able to turn to God when you went to the hospital, or when you were facing the loss of a loved one.

So I listened to them going on and on about having God in difficult times. I said to them: Forgive me for being blunt here, but it sounds to me like you've turned God into another form of Valium. When life is hard, you pop a few God pills. It calms you down. God is there to soften the shock of life. Life is hard. There are lots of bumps. And God has

become for you a cosmic shock absorber, something to make going through life a little easier. He's a form of Valium, not your Lord, not the passion of your heart.

Be honest, now. Do you sometimes treat God as a cosmic shock absorber, as a divine substitute for Valium or Prozac? Is he someone who just takes the hard edge off of life? Is he someone who rounds off the sharp corners, makes life a little easier? I want \$3.00 worth of God, please.

Listen, by way of contrast, to the prayers of people in the Bible. Psalm 27:4

SLIDE

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

Or listen to this prayer of the Old Testament King, David found in Ps. 63,

SLIDE

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the riches of food; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

I long for you. I seek you. I thirst for you. Experiencing your love is better for me than life itself. You're my satisfaction. You're better than the best of foods. I think about you in the middle of the night. I cling to you. This is not a man who would have said: Give me \$3.00 worth of God, please.

How much of God do you want?

I heard someone once say that you can have as much of God as you want. When he said it, his words were like a spear thrust through my chest. I thought: is that really true? Is it really the case that the amount of God's presence in a person's life is not an accident? It is not just a gigantic mystery. It is not some predetermined fate. We really can open ourselves up to more and more of God so that people feel God's presence through our lives. We could hear God's voice through our words. We could sense God's love through our activities. Do we really have a role to play in that, a choice?

How much of God do you want?

Well, that leads to the second question. If you say: I want as much of God as I can have, the second question is how much of you does God want? Listen to Jesus' answer to the question: how much of you does God want? Jesus answers: Everything.

When Jesus talks about the cost of the kingdom of God, he says in Matt. 13:44,

SLIDE

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Jesus' demands are absolute. How much does Christ want of you? He wants everything. In Mark 10:21, Jesus is talking to a rich young ruler, who asks the question: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus speaks to him about the commandments. The man responds: I've kept these commands from my youth. We read in Mark 10,

SLIDE

Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack, he said, go sell everything and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.

What does Jesus say in the Golden Rule in Matt. 7:12,

SLIDE

So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you. For this sums up the law and the prophets.

Do you think about that? In everything, in every area of your life – at work, in your class, in your carpool, at the grocery store in line, when you are driving – in everything do to others what you would have them do to you.

Who is commended by Jesus? It is the person who gives everything. In Mark 12, Jesus is observing what people put in the offering plate in the temple. Jesus still watches what we put in the offering plate today. Who gets commended? Who gets Jesus' well done? Mark 12:41,

SLIDE

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in everything. All she had to live on.

We are told in the scriptures in Luke 5:11,

SLIDE

The disciples pulled their boats up on shore and left everything and followed him.

Concerning the cost of following Jesus, Jesus puts it very plainly in Luke 14:33,

SLIDE

In the same way any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

How much of you does God want? Everything. Everything. Everything. There are dozens of verses that tell us that the price of following Jesus is everything you have and everything you are. Now, this is such a radical idea that I need to unpack it.

CS Lewis, the Oxford University English Professor, and almost certainly the most influential Christian writer of the last century, in his most influential book titled *Mere Christianity*, which by the way, if you have not ever read *Mere Christianity*, I want to strongly encourage you to go to our bookstore and pick up a copy of it. It is a hugely important Christian book. CS Lewis asks the question: How much of myself must I give to God?

He answers this way: “The ordinary idea, which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as the starting point our ordinary self, with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else, call it ‘morality’ or ‘decent behavior’ or ‘the good of society’ have claims on itself. Claims which interfere with the self’s own desire. What we mean by being good is giving in to some of those claims. Some of the things the ordinary self wanted to do turned out to be what we call ‘wrong.’ Well, we must give them up. Other things turn out to be what we call ‘right.’ Well, we should have to do them.

But we are hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life to do what it likes. In fact, we are very much like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there will be enough left over for him to live on because we are still taking out natural self as the starting point. As long as we are thinking that way, one or the other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For make no mistake: If you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, you will not have enough to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier. In the end you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who as they say lives for others, but always does it in a discontented grumbling way, always wondering why others do not notice it more and more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you become that, you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish.

The Christian way is different: harder and easier. Christ says, ‘Give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money, and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good here. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to

have the whole tree down. Surrender over the whole natural self, all the desires, which you think innocent, as well as the ones you think wicked, the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself wherein my own will shall become yours.”

Christ says: “Give me all. I haven’t come to torture your natural self; I’ve come to kill you.”

Friend, what I’ve discovered over thirty years of being a Christian is that there is no one more miserable than the unsundered follower of Christ. You can’t be happy in the world doing what everyone else is doing because you know the demands of God. You know that God doesn’t want certain things for you. You know that God is displeased with your behavior. But you also aren’t happy in God’s kingdom because you have all of these unsatisfied desires and all of these unmet goals, all of these things that you secretly want that God doesn’t want for you. You feel like a caged animal. The unsundered Christian, the person who has not completely turned over their desires, their plans, their relationships, everything to Christ, is the most miserable person in the world. They aren’t happy anywhere. You settle for so much less of God than you could have.

Let me make this even plainer. I heard Chuck Swindoll, the famous radio preacher and pastor, once kind of imaginatively describe the parable of the pearl of great price. I don’t remember the particulars, but Swindoll’s reconstruction went something like this:

How much does the pearl cost?
The seller says: Well, it is very expensive?
How much? Tell me, how much is it? It is beautiful.
Well, sir, it costs a very large amount.
Do you think I could buy it?
Yes, anyone can buy it, but it is very expensive.
Well, how much is it?
Well, it will cost you everything you have.
OK. I’ll buy it.
What do you have?

So we think through what we have...

Well, I have \$10,000 in the bank.
OK. Write me a check for the \$10,000. What else do you have?
Well, that’s it. That’s all I have.
You don’t have anything else?
Well, I’ve got a few dollars in my pocket.
How many dollars?
Let’s see, I’ve got \$5, 6, 7...that’s 10...20...\$30.00.
OK, I’ll take that. What else do you have?
Nothing. That’s all. That’s all I’ve got.

Well, where do you live?

Well, I live in a house.

A house?

Yes.

Well, sign me over the title of your house.

You mean, I've got to live in my camper?

Camper? Well, sign your camper over too.

Where am I going to sleep? In my car?

You've got a car?

Well, I've got two cars.

Sign those over. What else?

Well, you have my money, my house, my camper, and my cars – what more do you want?

Are you alone in the world?

No, I'm married. I have two kids.

I want your mate. I want your kids. What else do you have?

Nothing. I have nothing else. I'm all alone in the world.

Oh, I forgot. I want you. I want everything. I want your spouse. I want your children. I want your money. I want your house. I want your cars. And I want you.

Is this your understanding of Christian conversion? Is this your understanding of what you did when you became a follower of Christ? Have you ever done this, friend? Have you ever come to a place of complete surrender? Have you ever come to a place where you've said: Lord, I'm tired of trying to be a good person and also meet my desires. I'm tired of living a divided life. I'm tired of having one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world.

Does that describe any of you? I'm trying to serve you and what you want and also serve myself and what I want. Have you ever said: Lord, I surrender all. Have you ever gone through your possessions and said: God, I give you my car. I give you my home. I give you my apartment. I give you my bank account. I give you my furniture. Go through it piece by piece. I give you my camping equipment. I turn over the title to everything I own to you, Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? It means Lord Jesus, if you want my house to host a small group, if you want my guest room to be used to house a single mom, if you want my rug to have a coke spilled on it by some teenager, if you want my car to be scratched up because I lent it out to someone in need, Lord it's your stuff.

Do you understand, friend, as I said last week, there is no verse in the Bible that says so long as you tithe, the other 90% belongs to you, as you desire to use it? All of it, everything to Jesus Christ. That's what Christian conversion means.

I received a lovely note this past week from a woman in our congregation. She said:

"Back in March, I lost my mother. [Her mom apparently received Christ here at this church.] I am executor of her estate and I have been amazed at all her stuff. I have been involved in many sibling fights regarding my Mom's money and stuff. My Mom left for heaven and left all her stuff behind. I wondered to myself: Lord do I need or want all this stuff in order to be happy?

We have 2 cars & just purchased a 2004 Lexus and live in a condo. We have been planning on moving into a house that we want to build. This is just not a little house; it is 3300 sq ft home. It is just for the 2 of us, me and my husband.

When you said last week that our money is God's money, this hit home with me and the Lord spoke to me. My husband I had a discussion and we decided not to build this house. We decided that we were going to use our money that we were going to build the house with for God's work."

Can you image that? Somebody in America choosing to not build a house, choosing to be content with what they had, so that they could give their money away for God's work? That's positively un-American and unbelievably Christian. I believe the Lord says to this woman: Well done.

And all of this leads to a third question: What is the Christian life all about anyway? The Christian life is all about you surrendering your life to Christ. That's what it is about. This whole business of surrender is simply the imitation of our Lord Jesus when he surrendered himself entirely to God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane. Do you remember the story? Here is Jesus. He's the last Adam. And he says what the first Adam, in a different Garden, refused to say. The first Adam in the first garden, the Garden of Eden, said to God: "Lord, not your will, but mine be done."

But here in the second Garden, the Garden of Gethsemane we find the last Adam, the one who is the ultimate expression of God's intention for mankind, Jesus Christ, we find Jesus wrestling with God in prayer. His blood-like sweat is dripping to the ground. And so we read in Luke 22:39ff

SLIDE

Jesus went out as usual to the Mt. of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Over and over he prays: "Father, take this cup from me." Let this cup pass. Father, is there any other way? Can people be redeemed by any other means? Father, must I go to the cross? Must I be separated from you? Father, must I not only have nails pounded into my hands, but Father must I be forsaken by you? Must I lose you in the bargain in order to redeem the world?

Luke says that Christ was in anguish as he prayed. What we find in the prayer of Christ, and in his example, is what the Christian life is all about. It is all about the surrender of your will to God. “Not my will, but yours be done.” That’s the Christian life.

John Calvin, the great Protestant Reformer in the 16th century, wrote in his famous work, *The Institutes*, that self-denial and the laying down of our wills is the sum of the Christian life. See, there is a battle, friends, going on inside of each of us all the time in big areas and little areas, whether we are talking about the choice to forgive someone who has abused us, a big thing, or the choice to forgive someone who has scratched our car, a little thing. The choice about big things like major purchases, or little things like forbearing someone who is irritating, or being patient while we are standing in line. There is a constant struggle going on inside of us between my will be done and Father, your will be done.

The Christian life is not about getting you to be more moral, my friend. The Pharisees were the most moral people who ever lived. Being more moral is not at the heart of the Christian life. The Christian life is not about getting you to be more religious. The Pharisees were more religious than anyone who ever lived. The Christian life is not simply about making you more charitable, or getting you to practice spiritual disciplines more – to get you to pray and fast. The Pharisees were as charitable as anyone. And they prayed and fasted more than you ever will.

When the apostle Paul came from a background in Pharisaism to faith in Jesus Christ, he was already moral. He was already religious. He already practiced spiritual disciplines. He already gave alms. He read scripture. He resisted temptation. But what was different was that for the first time in his life, he surrendered his will to Christ. Listen to Paul’s description of Christian conversion. It is perhaps the best summary of Christian conversion in the entire scriptures. We read in 2 Cor. 5:15,

SLIDE

And he died for all, [that is Christ died for all] that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Christian conversion means not just that you become more moral, more religious, practice more spiritual disciplines – that absolutely ought to happen, but the heart of Christian conversion is that you have an entirely different orientation in life. You have an entirely new focus, an entirely new center. You are no longer living for yourself, to serve yourself, to please yourself, to glorify yourself. You are no longer an Army of One – being all you can be. In the center of your life is Christ. So that henceforth, Paul says, we no longer live for ourselves, but for him, who died for us and rose again. All for Christ. Surrender everything to Christ.

Let me bring this down for you. How does a person cross the line from not being a Christian to becoming a Christian? I’m thinking about it from the human side. For a moment, let’s put aside, if we can, the miracle that has to happen in a person’s life, the

miracle that can only be worked by God – the miracle of regeneration, God sending his Spirit into your heart and making you born again.

For a moment, let's just look at the human side. What does a human being have to do to cross the line from not being a Christian to becoming a Christian? Most people think that what you have to do is get the correct answers on a true/false test. My wife, Marlene, was raised in a Presbyterian Church. She said that she always believed that she was a Christian because she answered true to various questions posed to her about God, about Jesus, and about the cross.

So to the statement: God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, my wife Marlene marked "true." God is a Trinity.

And to the statement: Jesus died for our sins. Again, Marlene marked "true." Jesus died for our sins.

And to the statement: Jesus rose from the dead. True or false? Marlene marked "true." Jesus rose from the dead.

She didn't realize, until she was in High School, that becoming a Christian was not a matter of answering a true/false test, but rather it was a matter of answering a yes/no test. You can answer a true/false test from now until ever and you will never become a Christian, unless you answer the yes/no test that God poses to you. The yes/no test involves one basic question: Will you surrender your entire life to Christ – yes or no? Will you say to God: In my life Lord, not my will, but your will be done? Marlene realized one day that she had been answering true or false to questions all her life, but she had never answered yes to Jesus.

It doesn't matter how you say yes to surrendering your entire life to Christ. You can at the end of today's message decide to stand and say, "Yes, I surrender my life to Christ." You can say: I give up. It can be as simple as saying in your heart to Jesus: Yes, yes. I want you to be my Lord.

But you have to say "yes" to Christ, not just true you raised from the dead; you died for my sins; you are the Son of God; but, yes. Otherwise, you are not yet a Christian.

And you see, the reason the church in America is so weak and millions of so-called born again people display virtually no change in their lives. Millions of born again people are not more honest in business than other people. Millions of so-called born again people are not kinder to others than other people; they aren't less racist. Their racial attitudes haven't changed. They are not necessarily more forgiving or more patient. It is because millions of people believe Christianity consists of getting the right answers to a true/false test opposed to saying "yes" to a yes/no test.

So let me ask you a question. Have you said "yes" to Christ? Yes, unconditionally, yes. Let me ask you a further question. Is there any area of your life right now where you

are saying “no” to him? It is impossible to say that Jesus is Lord when you know that you are saying “no” to him in some area of life. You are willing to give up control. He doesn’t want to be your Lord theoretically. He wants to be your Lord in reality. Saying “yes” to God, surrendering your life to Christ, this is the key to the Christian life. This is the key to overcoming addictions. The historian of Alcoholics Anonymous titled his work, “Not God” because he said that stands as the most important hurdle that an addicted person must surmount. To acknowledge deep in the soul not being God. No mastery of manipulation and control at which alcoholics excel can overcome the root problem. Rather, the alcoholic must recognize individual helplessness, and fall back into the arms of the Higher Power.

First of all, the founder of AA said, we had to quit playing God. And second, we had to allow God to play God in our lives, which involves daily, even moment-by-moment, surrender. What’s the Christian life all about? It is all about moment-by-moment surrender to God and his will for your life.

What does God want you to surrender? We talked about everything before. Let me break this down to three simple areas. First of all, God wants us to surrender our bodies. Romans 12:1,

SLIDE

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual act of worship.

Literally, the apostle Paul writes: I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s *mercies* – not God’s mercy, but plural, in view of God’s mercies. Through eleven chapters the apostle Paul has talked about the mercies of God, the various manifestations of mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ. And mercy is particularly a key word in chapters 9 through 11. So we read in ch. 9:16,

SLIDE

It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

And regarding God’s purpose in the world, Paul writes in v. 18,

SLIDE

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy...

And referring to the end of human kind, Paul writes in Romans 11:32,

SLIDE

For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

We Christians live our lives in response to an experience of God’s mercy to us. That’s why it is a common statement that Christian religion is simply God’s grace, and the

Christian life is our response of gratitude for God's grace. So out of a grateful heart, in light of our experience of the mercies of God, out of a thankful heart, we surrender our lives to Christ.

What is it exactly that we surrender? We surrender our bodies. V. 1

SLIDE

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...

Christianity is so bodily, it is so concrete. It is so non-mystical. It is so non-religious. It is bodily. God came to earth in a body. Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the dead. We will spend eternity not as disembodied souls floating around on a cloud playing a harp. We will spend eternity in concrete resurrected bodies on a new concrete earth. The Christian hope is the hope of a resurrected body. And contrary to contemporary calls in which we ask, "Have you surrendered your heart to Christ," Paul asks, "Have you surrendered your body to Christ?"

Paul is letting us in on a major secret for successful Christian living. He is dealing with one of the major issues that trips us up over and over again as we seek to follow Jesus – our bodies. See, the issue is who or what rules you. Who or what is in control of your life? And for most people, including most Christians, it is not God, it is our bodies. We're determined and controlled by our bodies' demands. Our body demands food. Our body aches. Our body demands sex. Our body is tired. So we immediately try to fulfill our body's demands. Our body calls the shots. Our body determines our moods. Our body determines our behaviors.

Paul says here is the major secret for successful Christian living: Give your out of control body to God. Offer your body the way the Old Testament priests used to offer an animal sacrifice. They would put the animal on the altar. They slit its throat. And they burnt it up for God.

Well, we're not to commit suicide to give ourselves to God. Instead of a dead animal sacrifice, Paul calls for a living human sacrifice – our lives, our bodies as we live. We are to be a continual offering to God.

Notice that Paul turns 21st America on its head in Romans 12:1. In 21st century America, most Americans have turned away from God. We live in an anti-God society. And when people turn away from God, what they almost always turn to is the worship of their bodies. That's why an advertiser can seriously sell a razor called Venus Divine, in which they say discovers smoothness that makes every woman feel divine – divinely comfortable, because each inch of a goddess is divine. Reveal the goddess in you. In an anti-God culture, people stop worshipping God and they start worshipping their bodies.

We live in a culture obsessed with youth. We live in a culture that hates the aging effects of the body; especially what aging does to the way the body looks. We are not a God-centered culture, we are a body-centered culture. People feel great shame, in fact many, many people experience extreme self-loathing and depression because of their bodies' weight, or their bodies' age, or what a part of their body looks like.

We live in a culture that derives all of its thrills from the body. Our anti-God culture sells hundreds of manuals and products to give your body new and ever more powerful sexual thrills. We live in a culture obsessed with diets and abs, and cosmetic surgery and botox and collagen injections and spas and aromas and eating disorders. Paul says to 21st century Americans, you got it all backwards. You aren't supposed to worship your bodies; you're supposed to use your body as a way to worship God.

Let me ask you a question, friend, how much freedom would you experience if you simply stopped worshipping and serving your body, but instead used your body to worship and serve God? How much freedom would you experience if you literally surrendered every part of your body to Christ? Do you think you would experience freedom if you confessed that to some degree you have made an idol of your body? That's why some of you hate your body and you are body-obsessed. That's why some of you starve your bodies, and some of you pamper your bodies. Do you think you would experience any liberty if you confessed to the idolatry of your body and your attention of it by surrendering your body to Christ?

How do you do this? Paul tells us in Romans 6 that you take your body part by part and surrender it to God – your hands, your mouth, your eyes, your tongue, your loins, your posture, the things that constantly move you in a direction away from God – and part by part you surrender them to Christ.

Dallas Willard, a great spiritual writer, suggests a spiritual discipline for the surrender of your body to God. If you say: You know, I feel like my body, my body's appetites, my body's demands are totally out of control. Dallas Willard suggests in his powerful book called *The Renovation of the Heart*, that as a spiritual discipline, you lie down on the floor, face down or face up, and explicitly and formally surrender your body to God. He says to take time to go over the main parts of your body. And with each part of your body that you name, ask God to take charge of your body, to fill it with his Holy Spirit. And to use that part of your body for his purposes. Accentuate the positive. Don't just think about not sinning with your body. Lord, may I be caught up in your purpose for my body. How can I become a living sacrifice?

He reminds us to not rush through this process. When you get up, give thanks, praise the Lord. And as you praise the Lord, put your body into it. Raise your hands. Use your mouth. Read the Psalms, especially the last few Psalms – 145-150. Jump, dance. Use your body for Christ. And renew this discipline once a week, once a day, once a month. Surrender your body to Christ.

And surrender your mind to Christ. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:2,

SLIDE

Do 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.

What do we surrender to Christ? We surrender to him our bodies. We surrender our minds. Don't be conformed, but be transformed. The paraphrase of the Bible by JD Philips has often been mentioned as a really apt paraphrase of Paul's words. JD Philips writes this:

SLIDE

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold. But let God remold your minds from within.

Again, Paul is offering us a major secret to successful Christian living. Don't let the world's value system control your thoughts. The principle of garbage in, garbage out applies not only to computers and accounting statements. It also applies to your mind. Surrender your mind to God. Let God reshape your thoughts. Let God reshape your value system. Living differently starts with thinking differently. A life that is going to be dominated by God's will, begins with a mind that is shaped by God's Word.

So don't let your thoughts just drift passively down stream like a canoe caught in a current. It's an awesome discovery when you find out that you can choose what to let your mind dwell on. I talk with folks all the time who say: Well, I just really struggle with anxiety. I talk with people who say: This particular thing makes me anxious. What people don't see is that there is a connection between being anxious and what you think about all the time. It is an awesome discovery when you concentrate on what you're thinking about and you decide to change your thinking. Instead of riding the train for 10-20 minutes, until you have worked up a full-blown anxiety attack, you decide to get off the train at the beginning, or not even get on. I'm not going to allow myself to be squeezed into the world's mold. Instead, I'm going to let myself be shaped by God's Word. I'm going to surrender my mind to Christ.

How do I do that? Well, one simple spiritual discipline friend is to memorize God's Word in areas you regularly struggle with. So, if your struggle is with anxiety, then it might be good for you to memorize passages like Matt. 6:34,

SLIDE

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

When I was in college following my conversion to Christ and I would struggle with looking at all the pretty girls, I memorized Job 31:1,

SLIDE

I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.

I memorized Psalm 119:9,

SLIDE

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word.

Surrender your mind to Christ.

Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you memorized even one verse of scripture? Why not begin to hide God's Word in your heart? Get a little card and write out a Bible verse, write out a passage on the card. Stick that card in your wallet. Put it in your purse. Put it by the sink where you do the dishes. Put it on your bathroom mirror. And repeat it.

Surrender your body to Christ. Surrender your mind to Christ. And surrender your calling to Christ.

You know, it is wonderful that in the last 30 or so years, the church across America paid more and more attention to the biblical teaching about spiritual gifts. I think it is wonderful what has happened in the church across America. People are discovering places where they can make a unique contribution. I love when people go through our class, Discovering Your Ministry, and for the first time they realize that God has given them something unique to add to the church. You mean, God has given me a gift that I could contribute to the church? WOW! I love people finding out that God loves them too and that when spiritual gifts were given out, you weren't left out.

But unfortunately, in an age of self-centeredness, gifts teaching gets distorted and ministry becomes another way for ourselves to find fulfillment. So the way that we distort gifts teaching is to say God would never want me to serve in such-and-such a ministry. He would never call me to do something that was counter to my gifts, counter to my preferences, counter to my desires. God would never want to inconvenience me.

Gift discovery is an important truth. But its not the only truth. Ministry literally means service. The Greek word translated "minister" in the Bible could just as easily be translated "servant." This is what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 4.

SLIDE

So then men ought to regard us as servants of Christ.

We Americans say: I'll do ministry as long as it is something I enjoy. I'll do ministry as long as it is low cost. As long as I'm not inconvenienced. As long as it comes easily to me because that's just the way I'm wired. I'll do ministry that I'm particularly gifted for – maybe more gifted than anyone else. But God would never put me in a situation that cuts absolutely across the grain of my personality, would he? God would never call me to serve in a ministry that I'm not gifted for.

Really? Have you ever heard of a man named Moses? Moses thought that God must have made a mistake when God called Moses to be his chief spokesman to Pharaoh and the deliverer of the Jews from Egypt. Not me, Moses said, no way! I'm not gifted. This goes counter to my wiring. In Exodus 4:10, listen to Moses.

SLIDE

Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord. Now go. I will help speak and will teach you what to say."

The issue of calling is not do you believe yourself to be gifted or not. The issue is rather, is God calling you to do this? That's what the surrendered life is all about. Lord, what do you want, not where do I see myself. I'm not gifted for this. I'm an extrovert, an activist. Surely, God wouldn't want to stick me in a back room somewhere licking envelopes. I need to be out front. I need to be in the limelight. I need to be teaching. I need to be leading. I need to be sharing my faith.

God wouldn't set me aside for a few years to labor in some obscure place, unnoticed and uncelebrated. Really? Have you ever heard of the apostle Paul? Paul spent two years rotting in a Caesarean jail because he wouldn't bribe his way out. Paul the activist, Paul the preacher, spent two years in jail rotting.

Might God ask you, Ms. Extrovert, Mr. Activist, High Relationship, High Touch Person, might God call you to a place where you don't get to exercise your gifts in the limelight?

I love this poem by Ruth Harms Calkin titled "I Wonder." Here is what she says:

*You know Lord how I serve you
With great emotional fervor
In the limelight.
You know how eagerly I speak for you
At a woman's club.
You know how I effervesce when I promote
A fellowship group.
You know my genuine enthusiasm
At a Bible study.
But how would I react I wonder
If you pointed to a basin of water
And asked me to wash the calloused feet
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman
Day after day
Month after month
In a room where nobody saw*

And nobody knew.

Nobody saw and nobody knew. Let those words sink into you when you think about calling. Could God call you to a place where you are laboring and nobody saw and nobody knew other than Jesus? That's what the surrendered life is all about, friend. Could we apply this before we end today? Might God call you, an introverted, shy person to lead a group, to be up front and to speak, to help lead worship?

Have you ever heard of St. Augustine? When Augustine first became a Christian, his ambition was to become a quiet monk and live out his days in prayer and contemplation. He was tired of fast living. He was ready for the meditative quiet life. He just wanted to study. He just wanted to be left alone to be with God. The church authorities noticed him and through them God called Augustine to become a Bishop, which led to a very public life, a life of continual activity, preaching.

I've watched God do this for 29 years. My wife, Marlene, at least historically scored very high on the introverted scale on temperament tests. Apart from God, she would be really happy staying at home, raising babies, working on projects alone, building stuff. She is our home repair person. I have to ask permission to use her toolbox – her drill or screwdriver. She asks me when I want to use a tool: what do you want it for? Marlene by way of temperament could be very happy cooking, sewing, painting, and playing the piano.

So what does God regularly do with Marlene? He said: I want you to lead a conference in England for 1000 women. I want you to teach a bunch of prisoners in a women's prison. I want you to speak in front of 6000 people. Every time she does, he does a little bit more inside and gives more of herself to God in surrender.

Shy one, introverted one, could God be saying to you: I want you to step up to the plate? I want you to teach in children's ministry. I want you to teach at kinship or in a women's group, or to lead worship.

Who said you get to choose the path for your life? I say this with all affection, but how dare you or me set the ground rules for our service for God? I'll do this, but not that. I'm not great with kids. I'm not going to work with kids. Listen, when God called me as a senior pastor here to work with teens every week for four years, I thought to myself: You know, I'm not really a teen kind of guy. I know nothing about teen music. I'm not really interested in it. I really don't like teen movies. I don't really connect with teen dress. I'm so old fashioned I still can't imagine as a guy getting my ear pierced, much less some other part of my anatomy.

But God called me. He spoke to me. And he told me to build into the lives of teenagers for four years.

The surrendered life says: God what do you want for my ministry? Where are you calling me? Not my will, but yours be done. Stop telling the Lord what he may or may

not call you to. The issue again is not how you see yourself. There really is only one relevant question: what is Jesus Christ saying to you?

And I implore you, if you are a follower of Jesus, to say: Jesus, what do you want? Would Jesus tell you to lead a women's group even though you are black and all the women in the group are white? He might be saying that precisely to you, even though you are uncomfortable with it. Would Jesus call you to work in children's ministry even though you are a single man or a single woman and you haven't been around kids for 30 years? He might exactly say that to you. Would Jesus want you to go on a short-term mission trip to serve for two weeks, six months, or two years as a teacher or nurse, as an accountant even though you love the United States and you love your family, and you hate bugs, and you hate dirt?

Over the years I've heard so many people say, "Well, I draw the line when it comes to world missions." They get the idea that missionaries are people who like dirt. They like having their electricity go out for seven hours a day and having their refrigerator defrost every third day. Missionaries are people who like bugs. The bigger the better. And they like having showers that have no water pressure. And they especially like standing in line for days hassling with government bureaucrats over their visas. And missionary women, in particular, like being disrespected by third world men.

Friend, missionaries are not people who love dirt, or bugs, or inconvenience more than you. What they are are simply people who have surrendered their wills to God. They've surrendered their callings to God. And they've said simply: Father, you have the right to call the shots in my life. I will not prescribe for you any longer what you are allowed to say to me. I will not tell you what you are allowed to do with my future. I will not limit you by my perception of my gifts, or my preferences. Lord Jesus, speak. Your servant hears. I am surrendered to you."

Let's pray.

I'd like us to stand together and read these words. They come from one of the most influential Christian books in Christian history – Thomas a Kempis' book called *The Imitation of Christ*. Thomas suggests this prayer

SLIDE

Lord, all that is contained in the heavens and on earth is yours. I desire, Lord, to give myself to you as a voluntary offering and to be yours eternally. With a sincere heart I give myself to you this day as your servant forever wishing to serve you in obedience. Lord, on your altar of sacrifice, I place before you all of my sins and offenses which I have committed in your sight and in that of your holy angels from the day when I was first able to sin up to this very hour. Set them all on fire by the flame of your love and fully consume them. Wash out the stains of my sins and cleanse my conscience of all guilt. Restore me to your grace lost by my wrongdoing. Grant me full pardon and graciously receive me back into your friendship with a kiss of peace. Pardon me, O my God, pardon my sins for the sake of your holy name. I hand myself over to your mercy and confidently place myself in your hands. Deal with me according to your goodness

and not as my sins and wickedness deserve. I also offer you all of my good deeds, though they be few in number and far from perfect. I surrender you all the desires of my heart, all of my needs, all the needs of my family, my parents, my friends, my brothers and sisters.

Where is God When I'm Called to Surrender?

Rich Nathan

August 21-22, 2004

Where is God When Life is Hard? Series

Romans 12:1-2

I. Three Crucial Questions About Surrender

A. How Much Of God Do You Want? (Ps. 27:4; 63:1-6)

B. How Much Of You Does God Want? (Mt. 13:44-46; Mk. 10:21; Mt. 7:12; Mk. 12:42-44)

C. What Is The Christian Life All About? (2 Cor. 5:15)

II. Three Crucial Areas Of Surrender

A. Our Bodies (Rom. 12:1)

B. Our Minds (Rom. 12:2)

C. Our Callings (Ex. 4:10-12)