



Sacrifice

THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER IS ONE OF SACRIFICE AND COMMUNITY.

Scripture Passage: Romans 12:1-13 Memory Verse: Romans 12:1-2

I learned the value of sacrifice and community through sports. In our town, football provided a sense of community pride as we gathered on Friday nights. Conversations on the streets during the week focused on last week's game. What most people did not see was the sacrifice that went into game preparation. In the summer, we lifted weights and ran. In the fall, we practiced, lifted weights, watched film, and prepared for our Friday night battles. In the spring, we had spring training during the final period at school. Football in our town was a 365-day experience.

The sacrifices of football players primarily focused on the players themselves. But those sacrifices also had a positive impact on others. Paul spoke of the life of a believer as one of sacrifice and community. What we sacrifice for the Lord blesses us, but it also benefits others around us. As you dig into this session from Romans 12, reflect on how God may be calling you to serve as a living sacrifice for His glory. Ask Him to help you be willing to make those sacrifices and to use you to make a difference in the lives of others. Seek ways to set an example for the adults in your Bible study this week.



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What's in it for me? It's a question we've all heard—and one we've probably asked ourselves. When we give our time, money, or abilities, we feel entitled to know what benefit we'll receive in return. But when we shift from being consumers to being participants, a different question emerges: *What can I do to help?* (PSG, p. 91)

Which question—'What's in it for me?' or 'How can I help?'—tends to shape your thinking most, and why?



Understand the Context (Romans 12:1-21)

In Romans 1–8, Paul carefully explained the content of the gospel. He reminded the Romans that everyone (apart from Jesus) was a sinner who needed a Savior (Rom. 1–3). He also demonstrated that only through faith in Christ could a person be made right with God and have peace with Him (Rom. 4–5).

The first command of the book can be found in Romans 6:11 in the context of the ongoing spiritual battle with our sin (Rom. 6–7). We cannot win that battle on our own. We need the Spirit's help to escape the rut that sin creates in our lives.

In Romans 8, Paul summarized the victory we have in Christ. While we cannot overcome sin in our own power, the Spirit works to make us more like Christ. We can be confident that He is in control and working for our good and His glory.

The church in Rome was a mix of Jews and Gentiles, people who loved one another, but lived in a tension that marked the culture in which they lived. Moving into Romans 9–11, Paul explained that God did not play favorites. He desired the salvation of both Jews and Greeks, but both could only find redemption on His terms—faith in Jesus Christ. God did not create a Jewish plan and a Gentile plan. Jesus was (and is) God's only answer to our sin problem.

In chapter 12, Paul made a sharp turn from a logical presentation of the theology of the gospel to the practical outworking of the gospel in the lives of believers. Here, he encouraged the Roman

Christians to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), hearkening back to the Jewish sacrificial system. In the Old Testament, sinners could not approach God unless an animal was offered. Leviticus 1 speaks of a burnt offering, where a bull or lamb was sacrificed to make atonement. Leviticus 3 describes a fellowship offering, where an animal was offered to express thanksgiving for fellowship with God. Leviticus 4–5 describes the sin and guilt offerings, where animals were offered as substitutes for the sins of the people. Unless an animal died, the offering could not be accepted.

In the New Testament, Jesus became the Passover Lamb, offered for our sins (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 John 2:2). Peter said that Christ died to bring us back to God (1 Pet. 3:18). Christ sacrificed His life, dying to save us. However, in Romans 12, Paul called upon Christians to sacrifice themselves.

Unlike the Old Testament sacrifices and Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, this sacrifice was a living sacrifice. Christians pour themselves out in service to God and others. Fulfilling the law of Jesus, they love God and their neighbors (Matt. 22:37–40). This kind of sacrifice benefits both the church and the world that needs Jesus.

Read Romans 12:1–13 in your Bible and underline each command. How would you summarize Paul's main point in this section of his letter? (PSG, p. 92)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Romans) and **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Key Verse: Romans 12:1). Write the following words on the board or a large sheet of paper: *money, time, recognition, fame, promotion, profit, and pride.*

READ:

Direct attention to the opening paragraph on page 91 of the PSG. Highlight the two questions, “What’s in it for me?” and “What can I do to help?”

ASK:

Which question—‘What’s in it for me?’ or ‘How can I help?’—tends to shape your thinking most, and why? (PSG, p. 91)

ACTIVITY:

Group the adults into small teams. Direct the teams to consider the words on the board and to discuss how they might affect the way individuals approach the questions. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their responses.

SHARE:

Point out “Exhortations about the Christian Life” on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Romans). Note that Romans 12 presents a shift in the book of Romans:

With [a] theological foundation in place, Paul turned his attention in the final chapters of Romans—including chapter 12—to the practical implications of salvation. Having laid the theological groundwork, he now urged his readers to live out their faith in daily life. In doing so, they would display the gospel to the world around them. (PSG, p. 92).

TRANSITION:

In Romans 12, Paul focused on a practical application of the foundational doctrines he described in Romans 1–11. This session is a good reminder that He wants believers to live out their salvation, not just rely on head knowledge.



Group Activity Option

Music

Encourage adults to review the lyrics to “Take My Life,” (*Baptist Hymnal*, 2008, No. 589). Discuss what it means for God to take our lives and to use them for His glory. Let adults know that today’s session comes from Romans 12, where Paul highlighted the way believers should live out their faith in everyday life. As an alternative, play a recording of the kids’ song, “Be Transformed/Romans 12:2 Prayer Song.” Highlight how the lyrics compare to Romans 12:1-2.

Living Sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2)

1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. **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.

(v. 1) Considering the gospel Paul described in previous chapters, he gave two commands as he moved the Romans' attention from doctrine to application. **Therefore** provides a pivot point for his teaching. He also shared these commands **in view of the mercies of God**. The word *mercies* refers to a trait of God's character that leads individuals to care about others. God's mercy prompted Him to save people from their sin. This set the foundation for Paul's commands.

The apostle wasn't issuing stern, disciplined commands. Rather, he appealed to the Romans to fulfill these commands. Literally, the word *urge* meant to call to one's side or even to beg. For Paul, these principles were urgent.

First, he encouraged them to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice**. The word *present* pointed to the sacrifices made in the Old Testament. However, unlike the Old Testament, this sacrifice would not result in death. Paul called for a *living sacrifice*. Peter had used similar language, referring to living stones and a priesthood that offers spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5). The new covenant enables believers to give themselves wholly to God's service willingly.

Paul described the sacrifices as **holy**. Moses had called Israel to be a *holy* nation (Ex. 19:6). He encouraged them to be holy because their Lord was holy. Holiness is not something believers can achieve on their own.

Believers can only be holy by the work of Jesus. Paul had established the principle already when he told the Romans to not let sin control their lives (Rom. 6:12). Believers presented themselves as living sacrifices when they renounced the sins of the old life and surrendered themselves to God.

Believers' sacrifices are **pleasing to God**. This also was sacrificial language. Living sacrifices must be presented in a way that acknowledges who God is and what He desires. This is an act of **true worship**. As

Samuel noted, God does not desire sacrifice as much as obedience to His words and His ways (1 Sam. 15:22).

(v. 2) After the positive command telling the Romans what to do (be living sacrifices), Paul issued a negative command that identified what to avoid. He encouraged his readers against being **conformed to this age**. He wanted them to break from the mindset of the flesh (Rom. 8:7). The Greek wording used is similar to the English word "schematic." It refers to a pattern or a mold. Paul did not want Romans to be squeezed into a worldview that was hostile to God.

Romans worshiped many gods, and their morals often conflicted with Christianity. If the Roman believers embraced the world, they would be pressed into an unholy mold. Instead, Paul encouraged them to **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. This is a necessary part of becoming a living sacrifice and rejecting the influence of the culture. Rather than conforming to the world, we embrace God's way of thinking.

This transformation would take place by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:6; 8:27). The Greek word for *transformed* shares a root with our English word "metamorphosis." It also appears in the account of Jesus's transfiguration. In other writings, Paul encouraged believers to pursue a similar approach to their thought life (see 2 Cor. 10:5; Eph. 4:23; Phil. 4:8). He recognized the mind as a spiritual battlefield.

If the Romans allowed their minds to be transformed by the Spirit, they would identify the **good, pleasing, and perfect will of God**. Discerning the *will of God* is the focus of Paul's commands. Knowing God's plans and following His purposes does not come naturally for humans. Rather, His will is revealed through the daily process of renewing our minds and aligning them with the mind of God. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and worship as tools in renewing our minds so we can identify and obey His will.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: As believers, our lives are to be shaped by God, not by worldly influences.

Invite a volunteer to read Romans 12:1-2 as the group listens for what Paul described as “true worship.”

ASK:

How often do you use instruction manuals or “how-to guides” when working on things? Why?

CONTEXT:

Discuss responses. Affirm that some folks rely solely on instruction manuals, while others are more “do it yourself” people. Share that in Romans 12, Paul moved to the “how-to” part of his letter.

SAY:

After laying some solid theological groundwork about salvation, he began teaching the Romans how to live out their faith in a real way each day.

SHARE:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Key Verse: Romans 12:1) and read the verse together as a group. Highlight what Paul meant by becoming a living sacrifice:

Gentiles and Jews alike who lived in Rome would have known about sacrifices. In the temple in Jerusalem as well as the pagan temples in Rome, worshipers sacrificed animals on altars. Unlike the animal sacrifice that had no choice in the matter, believers choose to become living sacrifices. This is our true worship. Worship is not an event that happens only on Sunday morning, nor is it a place to go on Sundays. Worship is the active and willing choice to live in submission to God. (PSG, p. 93)

**EXPLAIN:**

Use the content from Romans 12:2 on page 112 of the Leader Guide to explain being conformed and being transformed.

ASK:

What obstacles might prevent us from offering our lives to God as “living sacrifices”? (PSG, p. 94)

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Memorize Romans 12:1-2 in your preferred translation. Paraphrase the verse to meditate on the meaning. Evaluate ways that you are offering yourself as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Also evaluate ways the world is trying to conform you to its image. List ways your mind can be renewed to the will of God.

In the Church (Rom. 12:3-8)

3 For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. **4** Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, **5** in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. **6** According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; **7** if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; **8** if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

(v. 3) *The grace given to me* referred to Paul's calling as an apostle (Rom. 1:5; 15:15). God had gifted him to serve as an apostle. As he prepared to call others to serve in their gifting, he reminded his readers that he spoke from his own calling.

But such service requires humility. No believer should *think of himself more highly* than appropriate. This is not self-loathing or denigration, but a proper estimate of oneself from God's perspective. To think *sensibly* was to have sober judgment about oneself and others. This could only be done because of the *faith* God has given His people. God distributes gifts to His children (1 Cor. 12:11), and His gift of grace is the basis for any other gift believers might receive (Eph. 4:7). So, we have no room to boast.

(vv. 4-5) Believers are diverse, but they also are part of a unified body. The church consists of *many parts in one body*. The early church began with diversity, including people from across the known world (Acts 2:8-12). From there, the gospel spread quickly—and without uniformity. In addition, God gave these diverse people a diversity of spiritual gifts. And like a human body, *all the parts do not have the same function*. Every part is essential to the body, even though each part is different (1 Cor. 12:14-24).

Christ followers are *members of one another*. Churches are gifted communities bound together by Christ, where people serve the Lord and each other through God's gifts.

(v. 6) Paul's list of gifts here certainly was not exhaustive (see 1 Cor. 12:8-30; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:11). The first gift he mentioned was *prophecy*. The early church held this gift in high esteem (1 Cor. 12:28; 14:1; Eph. 2:20; 4:11). Prophecy seemed to involve a spontaneous revelation shared with the congregation (Acts 21:10-11). Paul emphasized that it had to operate in *the*

proportion of one's faith. Prophets could abuse prophecy to manipulate, but Paul exhorted them to prophesy based on faith.

(v. 7) Paul also mentioned *service* and *teaching*. *Service* is related to the Greek word for “deacon,” but God also has gifted others with the ability to serve others (Acts 6:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:4). *Teaching* involves instruction in various settings (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; 14:26; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 5:12; Jas. 3:1). It clarifies God's words revealed in Scripture.

(v. 8) Paul's list culminated with *exhortation*, *giving*, *leading*, and *mercy*. *Exhortation*, like teaching, emphasizes the application of the gospel to daily life. It challenges practical faith. *Giving* was a gift defined by *generosity*. Giving is required of all, but some have the God-given heart for giving that demonstrates a higher motivation to contribute to the cause of Christ.

Leading required *diligence*. Some are gifted to guide others, but it must be with a sincerity and concern. Believers with the gift of *mercy* assist those who are suffering. This is not a duty or obligation but a task done with *cheerfulness*.

Key Doctrine

The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. (See Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:7.)



APPLICATION POINT: Believers are to serve alongside each other, exercising their God-given gifts.

PHYSICAL:

Go through the hand movements of “here is the church; here is the steeple.” (Note: You can find out how to do the motions by searching for a video online.) Highlight the people inside.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Romans 12:3-8, encouraging the group to identify the specific spiritual gifts in the verses. State that the church is made up of diverse people who are called to serve Christ by sharing their spiritual gifts.

SHARE:

Note that any understanding of spiritual gifts has to begin with a focus on humility.

Central to his message is the necessity for every believer to cultivate humility as we labor together in service to the Lord. As spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ, we remain susceptible to pride—becoming conceited or arrogant when we perceive ourselves as more gifted than others. Such attitudes can foster the harmful habit of viewing ourselves as more significant than fellow members of the body. Paul’s emphasis on humility protects us from falling into selfish pride. Rather than yielding to arrogance, we exercise wisdom when we think with sober judgment. (PSG, p. 94)

DISCUSS:

Place the group into teams of two or three. Encourage each team to review the content for Romans 12:6-8 in the PSG (p. 95) and note key elements of each gift mentioned. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their discussions. Use content from page 114 in the Leader Guide to supplement the discussion.

DISCUSS:

Why is it important for each believer to serve within the church? What results can we expect if believers fail to use their gifts in the church? (PSG, p. 96)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Toolbox

Gather a toolbox and several everyday tools such as a hammer, screwdriver, and wrench. Explain how Romans 12:3-8 reveals the need for all types of tools (gifts) to build up the church. Say: *Each tool in the box is needed for a specific application, just as each God-given spiritual gift supports the body.* Note that all the gifts are needed at different times and in different situations. Discuss why it is important to have all the tools in the box to be prepared for any circumstance.

In Relationships (Rom. 12:9-13)

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. **10** Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. **11** Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. **12** Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. **13** Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.

(v. 9) Paul followed up a call for living sacrifices and a list of spiritual gifts with a string of intercultural exhortations. Renewed minds lead to a new way of living. In all, Paul listed thirteen exhortations, starting with **love . . . without hypocrisy**. People can be kind toward others, and yet still not love them. Christians must love each other sincerely.

Paul next told believers to **detest evil** and **cling to what is good**. In this, Paul used one of the strongest words for hatred in the Greek language. A renewed mind never dwells on or entertains evil. A renewed mind hates evil, but it also will **cling** to good. The Greek wording literally means to glue or join together.

(v. 10) Continuing his exhortations about love, Paul encouraged his readers to love other believers **deeply as brothers and sisters**. The tenderness and warmth of family served as a model for the church. Many who converted to Christianity did not have family or lost their family when they became Christ followers. However, they had the opportunity to experience familial love from their *brothers and sisters* in Christ.

As physical siblings often compete, Paul urged the Romans to **take the lead in honoring one another**. The Greek wording used here meant to esteem others more highly than themselves. The context was to see who could surpass the other in showing respect and appreciation. Paul expressed this same idea in other New Testament letters (Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3). Showing deference toward other believers is a sign that sincere love exists.

(v. 11) The three exhortations in this verse focus on **zeal**. Paul had just used this word in Romans 12:8 to describe the diligence required for the gift of leadership. It involved eagerness and commitment to one's duty.

Christians who love others are diligent in their relationship with the Lord. Loving God and loving people fulfills the whole law (Matt. 22:37-40).

Paul affirmed that this diligence is God-ordained, as he challenged the Romans to be **fervent in the Spirit**. This was the exact description of Apollos in Acts 18:25. Christ followers need the Spirit in their lives as they **serve the Lord**. They should not serve God coldly or with indifference.

(v. 12) The exhortations in this verse deal with difficult situations. Paul had previously covered this subject in detail (Rom. 5:3-5), and it served as a warning against believers aligning too closely with the comforts of the world. **Hope** is what allows Christians to **rejoice** in their suffering. *Hope* arises from the gospel that Paul proclaimed in the first eleven chapters of Romans. Jesus justified them, was sanctifying them in their trials, and would one day glorify them for eternity.

Paul certainly was no stranger to **affliction**, but God upheld him by hope. The call to be **persistent in prayer** also sustained him during difficult times. Devotion to prayer is a characteristic of sincere believers (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2). As long as believers remain fervent in the Spirit and devoted to prayer, they can rejoice in any circumstances.

(v. 13) Paul offered two more practical marks of Christian love. First, he encouraged Christians to **share with the saints in their needs**. This familiar Greek word, *koinonia*, means to share something together, especially to meet financial and material need (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Rom. 15:26-27; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 1:5; 4:15; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:16). Even in trials, the church remembered to help one another.

A second mark Paul mentioned was to **pursue hospitality**. The Greek compound word rendered *hospitality* was composed of the word for "love" and the word for "strangers." It literally dealt with a love for people not known personally. People in the first century showed hospitality to strangers as they traveled because inns were scarce and poverty was high. Showing concern for strangers demonstrated the love of Christ to others.

EXPLORE Romans 12:9-13



APPLICATION POINT: As believers practice sacrificial love in their relationships, their lives give evidence of God's grace.

READ:

Read aloud Romans 12:9-13 as the group listens for Paul's imperatives related to sacrificial love.

GUIDE:

Give each adult an index card and pen. Direct them to make a list of the imperatives in Romans 12:9-13. Using **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Key Verse: Romans 12:1) and the lists made by each adult, lead the group to compare how Romans 12:1 relates to Romans 12:9-13.



SHARE:

Summarize this content from page 96 of the PSG to emphasize that the Christian life should be walked out in a practical way each day:

“As we exercise our faith through the use of our spiritual gifts, it is important to remember that we do not labor alone. We serve alongside fellow believers within the church. For this reason, Scripture provides us with a series of imperatives that guide our collaboration. These foundational directives, when taken seriously, strengthen our relationships as we serve Him together.”

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to review again the lists of practical imperatives Paul shared in these verses. Lead a brief discussion on what each activity means and how believers can live them out today. Use information from page 116 of the Leader Guide to supplement the discussion.

ASK:

How can you be more diligent and intentional in your service to the Lord and His people? (PSG, p. 98)

SAY:

Sacrificial love for others calls for our lives to give evidence of the grace God has given us. We can't just talk about our faith. We have to demonstrate it in a way that the world can see it is real and meaningful. In this way we are not conformed to the way of the world but transformed to be more like Christ.

PRAY:

Encourage adults to spend a few minutes in silent prayer, asking God to reveal areas where they are not living out their faith as effectively as they should. Also, direct them to ask God for the wisdom they need to show their faith to others, pursuing transformation instead of settling for conformation.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 99 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *As believers, our lives are to be shaped by God, not by worldly influences.*
- *Believers are to serve alongside each other, exercising their God-given gifts.*
- *As believers practice sacrificial love in their relationships, their lives give evidence of God's grace.*

TESTIMONY:

Encourage adults to read and reflect on the first set of questions on page 99 of the PSG. Allow one or two volunteers to share their approaches to presenting themselves as living sacrifices to God. Direct them to describe the difference between worshiping God, which is true worship, and worshiping worship itself.

DISCUSS:

Write the following words on the board: *Transformation*, *Spiritual Gifts*, and *Practical Faith*. Remind adults these are the key ways Paul talked about the Christian life in Romans 12:1-13. Encourage adults to review the second set of questions on page 99 of the PSG. Challenge them to respond to these items in prayer during the week.

PRAY:

Share the following quote by Oswald Chambers: "Beware of harking back to what you once were when God wants you to be something you have never been."¹ Close in prayer, asking God to help each adult move forward with Him this week.

1. <https://utmost.org/classic/what-next-classic/>

AFTER THE SESSION

Send each member on the group an individual text or email during the week. Remind them of the session's memory verses, Romans 12:1-2. Suggest they use the verses as a reflection throughout the week and continue working to memorize them. Challenge them to consider where they are in terms of spiritual transformation and practical application of faith.

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