



BelPres Church

The Joy of Sacrifice

2 Samuel 24:18-25

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Well, hello, it is great to see you here. Thank you for being here. Those of you in this room, and those of you who are joining us online, great to have you here. The scripture today comes from 2 Samuel chapter 24. On that day, Gad, who was a prophet, went to David, who was the king, and said to him, Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Aranah the Jebusite. So David went up.

When Aranah saw the king, he said, Why has my Lord the king come to his servant? To buy your threshing floor, David answered. So I can build an altar to the Lord. Aranah said to David, Let my Lord the king take whatever he wishes. Aranah gives all of this to the king. So that's a good deal, right? He doesn't have to buy it. It's going to be a gift. You take that deal, right?

But the king replied to Aranah, No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God, burnt offerings that cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor. This story has always sort of caught my attention. David, he's offered a gift. He's offered it for free, but he says, No, I want to pay something for it. I want this to be some kind of a sacrifice. I don't want it to cost me nothing.

And this is a pattern we see throughout the Bible. People in the Bible actually want to make sacrifices for God. They want to live sacrificially, not out of guilt, not out of legalism, but because it brings them joy, which I think is a little different than our kind of US culture, or at least in how I sometimes do sacrifice,

which is sacrifice is great, except for the sacrifice part. That's the only part of sacrifice I don't like. Everything else is fantastic.

But what we see in the Bible, and I have to say in my own experience as well, is that when we live sacrificially for Jesus, he becomes more real to us, and our lives have more meaning, purpose, and joy. It's when we stop playing around. It's when we stop viewing Jesus as our personal assistant, whose job it is to get us what we want, make us happy, keep bad things from happening to us. He does some of those things. But when we move from seeing him as that, to making sacrifices to follow him, changing our life because of following him, because of him, that's when Jesus starts to become real.

That's when we start to experience more of his power and more of his presence. And he goes from theological idea to the risen Lord who is transforming my life when we live sacrificially.

If you've been here the last two weeks, we've been talking about eight projects our elders have discerned that God is calling us to do as a church. And if you weren't here, please watch the last two sermons online. Also, there will be a question and answer session immediately following this service over there in the sanctuary if you want to come and ask questions.

But let me briefly review the projects for those of you who maybe haven't heard them yet. There are three about discipleship. Word and Spirit, which will include deeper Bible teaching, discovery of our spiritual gifts, expanded prayer team. Anchor and Flame, where we will train people who are mature in the faith to mentor and coach others who want to grow in their faith. And then one roof gatherings, which will happen outside of Sunday morning worship, where all of our communities, African, Chinese, modern, sanctuary, will all come together, share a meal together, worship together, and have deeper Bible teaching.

Then there are two projects related to our campus. The first is to expand the lobby, do some upgrades to this room, build a permanent prayer room. And I talked about this one a lot last week, and why we're doing it, and some of the biblical background for that. So you can hear more about that one from last week's sermon. And then the second one for our campus is Christ-centered, affordable childcare and preschool, which will be a game changer for low-income families on the east side, of which there are many. And they need childcare, but it is crushingly expensive. And this will be a huge game changer for them to help them get ahead and introduce people to Jesus, because it will be Christ-centered.

Then there are three projects for our region and our world. To create affordable housing for refugees and asylum seekers, some of whom are part of our church in our New Hope East African Fellowship. This will include buying homes, buying apartments, that sort of thing for long-term solutions. Second is to put teams of people around each refugee family to support them and advocate for them. And then third, participate in a once-in-a-generation movement of God with Muslim refugees in Europe who are becoming Christians by the thousands. And then some of them going back to places like Iran, Afghanistan to tell people about Jesus there at the risk of prison or death, even death by their own families.

But as a result, Christianity is exploding in the Middle East. And it is possible the Middle East will be majority Christian by the end of the century. We aim to aid and abet that with humanitarian aid as well as equipping, training and support. And to get all of this done, the invitation is, if you're not tithing, which is the biblical practice of giving 10% of our time, money and influence to the church we're part of for God's purposes, if you're not doing that, the invitation is to start to tithe or get as close as you possibly can. And then if you are tithing, the invitation is to increase the percentage you're giving to this church to above 10% and or give some five, six or seven figure gifts to help get all of this stuff done.

And what all of this is ultimately about is not just the projects, they matter because they will change people's lives, but what this is all about ultimately is us becoming more like Jesus. The word for that is discipleship. The process by which we become more like Jesus. And these projects will require sacrifices from all of us of time, money and influence, and that's the best thing about them. That's what I love about these the most, honestly, is that it requires sacrifice because it's when we start living sacrificially that Jesus goes from a thing I believe in my head to a person I know who's transforming my life. And we experience more of his power and more of his presence and more meaning, purpose and joy in our lives.

That's why the promise Jesus makes more than any other promise, his most frequent promise is whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. Sacrificial living is not deprivation. It's letting go of something, often good things, so that we can experience God's better things. And it is a way of imitating Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Jesus sacrificed for us, he died on a cross to pay the price for our sins, to reconcile us to God, and then was raised from the dead. And when we sacrifice, we are imitating him in gratitude for the sacrifices that he has made for us. And it makes us more like him.

Sacrificial living makes us more like Jesus in lots of ways. I'm just going to talk about one today. One way that sacrificial living makes us more like Jesus is that sacrificial living unleashes me from the tyranny of me. Do you feel the tyranny of me? Not me, me, your me, or maybe me, I don't know, but your me, I'm talking about your me. We can talk about my me later, but your me. Sacrificial living unleashes us from the bondage of self. Is Scott, how's Scott today? Is Scott happy today? Oh, Scott's not so happy today? Oh, poor Scott. Oh, who cares about Scott? Enough about Scott.

Sacrificial living expands my life out of the narrow confines of me and mine into the biggest things that God is doing in our world. I was reminded this week of a story I told years and years ago about a man who lived way down over across Bellevue Way. And one morning he came into our office really angry, furious, yelling even, and he said, last night I stood on a stool in my bathroom and I could see a light on in one of your offices and it's just driving me nuts. You need to fix that. And he was really mad. And I'm thinking, well, just don't stand on a stool in your bathroom. Problem solved. That's a weird thing to do anyway. You shouldn't be doing that. I didn't say that. I just thought it because I'm sinful. And to me, well, I am sinful. To me, so are you. To me, it's not in my notes.

And to me, his concern seems so overblown. Like, wow, you really worked up about this. But you know what? I've done similar things, just about other issues. For instance, I have had to, on several occasions, go back and apologize to airline personnel because I got super snarky over a delayed flight or a canceled flight. So I had to go back and I'm sorry, and I'm a pastor, I shouldn't have done that, right? Because I shouldn't have. But I also have to say, over the years, I've gotten way better at that. I do that far less now. And part of that is, I think, because I have learned that I need to give some stuff up to break my addiction to me.

It turns out it is not good for us to have everything we want. That is actually one of the worst things that can happen to us. These projects are an invitation to be unleashed from the tyranny of me by giving some of our time, money and influence. And I know some of you are asking questions like, do we really need to take this many vacations a year? We can give some of that money and some of that time and some of that influence. How many activities do our kids need to cram into one week because it's taken too much time from family and community? Some of you are praying about selling off assets, stuff like that.

My wife and I have been praying about what God is calling us to give to these projects financially and a couple of weeks ago, she kind of proposed a dollar amount and I said, nah, it needs to hurt more than that. And so then a few days

later, she came back with a higher number and I was like, whoa, that's a lot of hurt. So I took that to God in prayer and I heard a number that was even higher than her higher number. So Commitment Sunday needs to get here real fast or we're gonna go bankrupt. And we are gonna make the largest financial commitment we've ever made outside of our house. And I know some of you are praying about that too, some big gifts and stuff like that.

Others of you can't. So for you, maybe your gift in money is gonna be like 10 bucks a month and then maybe some time and some influence. All of that is great. We need it all. We need to get all this done. We'll need big gifts. We'll need medium gifts, small gifts, all of it. It's not about equal gifts. It's about equal engagement. And it's not just about money at all. These projects will take time and influence, which for some folks is harder to give up than money. Time? Are you kidding me? Hmm, right?

But when we sacrifice time to be a spiritual coach or be coached, we'll make deep friendships, which are the things that bring lasting joy anyway. Long before I was a pastor, long before I was a pastor, I carved out time in my schedule to mentor younger people. And I do it still. And my life is richer because of it. I've got these deep friendships that are both fun and enjoyable and also deep and meaningful. And I learn so much from them, even though I'm supposedly, quote, the mentor.

When we sacrifice our influence, put our reputations on the line, maybe to advocate for refugees when they encounter roadblocks that are unjust and unfair that make it difficult for them to thrive, and we advocate for them. Or maybe we use our influence to give a first-time, to give an asylum seeker a first-time job so they can get started in a new life. When we do that, it connects us to other people. It helps us see the world through someone else's eyes. And that starts to reorder our loves and our hearts and what we love to be closer to the things that Jesus loves.

When we set aside time to be part of those one-roof gatherings, to be that community, the Bible says that heaven is going to be. Heaven is going to be every tribe, every tongue, every nation, and no, they will not be in separate rooms. And so we better start practicing being together now, or heaven is going to be really uncomfortable for some of us. When we do that, we make these connections and we learn about Jesus through different cultural lenses which expands our experience of him. And to do that, that will take some cutting things out of our schedules to have time for that kind of community. But when we do, we'll be less lonely, we'll feel more supported, and in a world where increasingly we only relate to people as digital pixels on a screen, which is not

how we were designed, we'll get back to being human beings together. And that can only be a good thing.

And all of these things get me out of me into something bigger, which makes my worries seem smaller and gives me joy. And yes, I know there's sort of a contradiction here, right? I'm aware of it as I'm preaching it. These sacrifices get me out of me, which makes me happier. Still about me. Sort of, kind of. And there is a reward. Except now it's not just me having joy, it's how Jesus' healing and joy flows through me to others. It turns out the best way to bring joy to me is to think less about me. Or as Jesus puts it, if you lose your life, you'll find it. But what do I know? I'm just a bastard.

So like I did last week, I want you to hear about this from someone like you, who sits out there, someone from the congregation. So I'm going to invite Tom Boyson to come up. He is living sacrificially with time, money, and influence, all three together.

Thank you, Scott. Good morning. In January of 24, I was working as a senior project manager for a top general contractor, highly compensated, leading their most challenging and complex projects, and leashed to the grind. Due to a company reorganization, though, I found myself reporting to the one person out of 600 that I couldn't work with. I felt that that was a sign from God that it was time for me to move on. I was starting to plan to leave the company at the end of the year, and while driving to work across the I-90 bridge, I suddenly heard a voice say, What about May 31st? What?

Following the shove, I resigned with an idea to semi-retire, volunteer more, and do some work as a small general contractor and handyman. I needed to make about half what I was making at the big job to make the retirement math work out okay. As I planned the new company, I wanted to find a part-time helper. What if that person, wouldn't it be cool if I could find someone that wanted to learn a trade and could maybe develop their own business eventually? What if it was someone that didn't normally get that chance? Where would I find such a person? It occurred to me that the people I had met in New Hope were eager to find an opportunity.

So I met with Pastor Alexis and he said, I've got just the guy. Louis is a refugee from East Congo, the area where there's armed conflict and ethnic violence. He has a wife and six children living as refugees in Kenya. He speaks five languages, but English is at the bottom of that list. He was making less than minimum wage. I hired him in January of this year at 50% over minimum wage. When he started, he had zero construction skills. He couldn't read a tape measure or operate a

drill. Today, Louis has many basic skills and he is a productive worker. His English has improved because he's using it every day.

In May, I was introduced to a man named Juan Carlos. He's 20 years out of Honduras, he has a wife and four children and he has a deep faith in Jesus. Juan Carlos has many construction skills and wants to open his own construction company. I offered to share my lessons learned. As we talked, though, it became clear that he needed to develop his business skills. I told him that the fastest way for him to do that was to work with me if he was working with me full time. Logically, it was too early for me to add a second person. But again, I followed the nudge. He joined our team in June, getting paid at 50% over the union wage. Now he's learning the skills he will need to open and operate his own business.

You might guess that it's hard to start a construction company from scratch. You would be right. It's even more challenging to work in a multicultural team. We're trying to blend American, Honduran, and Congo language and culture. The language barriers could create frustration, but our shared Christian faith keeps us centered on the real goal of building each other up. While the challenges are real, there have been so many blessings. We pray together regularly.

Both of them are making twice as much money as they ever have, improving their English and learning valuable construction and business skills. I have reliable and motivated workers. That's hard to find these days. I am gaining patience. Let's just say that's been a development area for me. I'm also learning to trust God's guidance and provision. Educated as an engineer and working as a large project construction manager, I learned to solve the problem myself and make my solution become reality. Now I'm learning to let go of control and let God's will unfold.

One example, in the last six months, there have been five times where we didn't have any work next week or even tomorrow. So far, new work has continued to arrive just in time to keep them working full time. Amazing. I followed the nudges and had the courage to leave my successful career, trusting God that something better was ahead. My plan was to volunteer more. God's plan was much bigger. I was just looking for a part-time helper. God sent me a full-time apprentice and a skilled foreman.

There are so many problems today, globally and nationally, that could make me sad, worried, and angry. And I can do very little to solve those problems. But I can do this. If my only goal was to make money, I would make different decisions. Paying workers well above the market rate and working through the

language and cultural barriers are all added difficulties. And individually, we couldn't reach our fullest potential. But together and with God, we are living a much bigger life and bringing the kingdom of heaven closer. Thank you.

Thank you, Tom. The way Tom is running his business, it takes more time. He's got to work through the cultural and language barriers. It takes more money, because he's paying them over the market rate, and he's using his influence as an employer to hire people who need a first-time job to start getting ahead in life or to learn how to do their own business. He is living sacrificially with his time, his money, and his influence, except he wouldn't call it a sacrifice. He would call it a blessing, because there's so much joy. He gets to be part of bringing God's kingdom. He now has these two guys that are friends. They pray together. It's just bigger, it's just deeper, because that's the thing about sacrificial living.

We often ask, what will I miss out on if I sacrifice time, money, and influence? But we so seldom ask the question, what will I miss out on if I don't?

So, action steps are the same as the last two weeks, but I'll give you a little more information. Go on a faith journey that spells the word peace. Pray. Pray that we all experience God moving through this, these next couple of weeks. Engage with God. Ask him, how do you want me to be part of this, with my time, money, influence? If you have kids, talk it over with them. Do it as a family. Obviously, if you're married, talk it over with your spouse, right? And you may not be on the same page. That happens. That's okay. That's a chance to go deeper in prayer, discern together, right? The point here is not to stress out your marriage, but it's a chance to go on a faith journey together.

Next, A, attend the next two sermons. Even if you don't end up giving a thing, I think the faith journey will be worth it. And then catch up online on sermons that you missed, starting with November 9th. And then C, commit what you feel God is calling you to commit. Not now, go on this journey, but on December 7th. And there's in the Unleashed Guide that we've sent out, that we gave you all, and there's some available after the service. There's a commitment card. And you can get one if you don't have one out there.

Let me just talk about it briefly, because it's a little bit complicated. At the top, there's a box that you can check if you'd like to talk to someone about how to steward your finances. Because this isn't a fundraiser, this is about discipleship. So if you'd like to talk with someone about how to discern what God's calling you to and all of that, check that box, and our director of stewardship will have a pastoral conversation with you. Or you can talk to one of the pastors, just

don't tell us what you're given, because we don't want to know that information. Then there are two boxes that say if you'd like to talk to someone about how to steward your time or your influence.

We're not going to just give you all a long list of things to volunteer for with your time and influence, because that's transactional. And this is about discipleship, which is relational. So if you check those boxes, someone will follow up with you immediately about next steps. And then in January, because we got Christmas to celebrate, but in January, someone from our team will have some conversations with you about how to use your time and your influence for God's kingdom.

And then there's a section there about financial commitment. It says for 2026, that's just for accounting purposes. But the intention here is that this is ongoing. So next year, we'll all get to fill out another card. Write down the number you think God is asking you, even if it doesn't make sense. And if you want to give a five, six, or even seven figure gift to help get some of this started, make a note of that, write that down. If you want to do that over one or two or three years, make a note of that and contact our Contributions Team. And then turn it in on December 7th. And be here for that day, because I think it's going to be a great service. So record games, whatever you have to do, be here because I think it's going to be a really cool service.

And then afterwards, we're going to have a celebration for our 70th birthday party, our 70th anniversary as a church. We got some really cool desserts. I'm super excited about the desserts, by the way. And there'll be activities for kids and all of that. And then lastly, E, everyone is needed. So, everyone, please fill out that card. Not just for the projects. They're important. They will change lives. But honestly, for you. Honestly. I know when pastors do this sort of thing, there can be suspicions and like all of that.

Honestly, honestly from my heart, as your pastor, I want this for all of us. I want Jesus to unleash us from the things we cling to so tightly. Jesus is trying to set us free. You heard some of that in Tom's story. And sacrificial living unleashes us from idols of time, money, influence, and then the tyranny of self.

In the story of David that I just read, the plot of land that he buys becomes the plot of land that his son Solomon builds the temple on, which was the place where God and humans connected. In other words, when we live sacrificially, heaven comes to earth. And we experience God's presence in a bigger way.

And in the future, when we hear stories of families who were given a hand up because of affordable childcare and met Jesus in the process, or hear inspiring stories of how Jesus is changing lives in the Middle East, when we see refugees, some from our own church, affordably housed so they can thrive, we'll realize how together we are pushing back on the relentless anger and fear everywhere in our culture together, we are not part of the problem, together, we are part of the solution, and that just feels good, because that's the thing about sacrifice.

You go in thinking it's going to be a loss, and then you go, oh, wait, my experience of Jesus just got deeper. My joy just went higher, because now I'm part of bringing Jesus' healing and joy to others. It's not loss, it's gain, it's not less, it's more. Because when we lose our lives, that's when we find them. Jesus set us free. You are the chain breaker. So Lord asked that you would break whatever chains are on us, our fears, our idols, the things we hang on to other than you, that hang on to us in return, unleash us, set us free, Jesus. Unleash us as individuals, and unleash us as a church to bring your kingdom even more than we're doing it. Change even more lives than we're changing. Be even more your disciples following you so that the world knows who you really are and what you're really about. And Jesus, we will give you all the glory in your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or community group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Araunah generously offered to give David the threshing floor and the necessary animals and wood for the sacrifice for free. David refused, insisting, "I will not offer to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (24:24). What does this statement teach us about the nature of true worship and sacrificial giving?
- How can we apply David's principle of "costly worship" to our own lives and service to God today?
- The threshing floor of Araunah later became the site of Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). What is the significance of this location as a place of atonement and worship for Israel's future generations?

NOTE: The first part of 2 Samuel 24 presents some tricky theological questions such as why does it say that God incited David to take the census, why was it wrong after he did it and why the punishment for the whole nation for David's sin? The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21 is less tricky. There the text says that Satan incites the census, not God. There a couple of things to keep in mind to guide us through these questions:

- The Chronicles account says Satan incited the census, 2 Samuel said God did it. They are saying the same thing. God is sovereign over everything. That does not mean he causes everything, but he is sovereign over it. What 2 Samuel is getting at is God allowed Satan to incite David, but because it is happening by God allowing it, the author of Samuel wrote it as if God incited it. It's the difference between God's passive will and his active will. The 2 Samuel account is referring to God's passive will (what he allows) vs. his active will (what God causes).
- David sinned by taking the census because God commanded him to take a census of all Israel, but David just counted his fighting men. In other words, he was glorying in and relying on his own power rather than in God's. It's a subtle difference in the text, but important.
- Why did God send the plague when it was David who sinned? This is harder, but there is a reality that people suffer when rulers sin. And often the people suffer more than the ruler. In David's case, however, he owned up to his sin and asked God to visit the punishment on him. David recognized his sin and repented of it and so God stopped the plague.

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Nov 23, 2025

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.