

A Living Sacrifice

I [Paul] urge you . . . in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

Song: “Living Sacrifice”

C. T. Studd received salvation at age 16, but his love of worldly ways kept him from fully surrendering until six years later. Then, after listening to D. L. Moody, he more fully surrendered—believing that if Jesus died for him, then no sacrifice would be too great. Two years later, C. T. joined Hudson Taylor in China. At age 25, he received an inheritance of \$145,000 and gave away most of it for ministry to others. The remaining amount of money went to Priscilla, his betrothed, as a wedding gift, which she in turn gave to others. Amid health struggles and more, C. T. and Priscilla ministered in China, India, and Africa—sacrificially pouring out their lives for the gospel.

The Old Testament required animal sacrifices as a temporary covering of sin. But on the cross Jesus paid our penalty for sin, and animal sacrifices are no longer necessary. Instead, the New Testament calls for living sacrifices—whereby we live for God instead of ourselves. As we lay aside our own desires in order to follow, obey, and serve God, Jesus is our example. He laid down His life for us. What might we lay down today to become a living sacrifice ourselves?

Father, help me give my life daily as a living sacrifice for Your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

December 1–5. **T. Windahl** lives in Minnesota with her husband, Pete. As a four-time cancer survivor, she enjoys encouraging others through writing.

Following God's Plan

At that time the LORD said to [Moses], “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden ark” (Deuteronomy 10:1).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:1-11

Song: “Step by Step”

Peter is a born salesman. At 7 years old he was selling sifted dirt to neighbors for five cents a bag! As an adult, he sold incentive programs. But at 50 years old, Peter felt God call him to leave his established sales career and become a film producer. Amid questions and trepidation, Peter walked onto a new path and experienced God's leading and equipping along the way of that new work.

God had plans to deliver His people who were enslaved in Egypt. To accomplish this, God called Moses from being a shepherd to go lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. Moses accepted God's call and followed His instructions step-by-step on that path. God proved himself faithful by guiding and equipping Moses each step of the way, even with specific instructions about stone tablets for the Ten Commandments and for the ark to hold those tablets.

God guides us to accomplish His plans for us. We can know His plans by reading the Bible and through prayer. As we step onto His path for us, He equips us by His Spirit with strength for each step. Trust God and follow His good plans!

Father, help me to know Your plan for my life. I will walk by faith, not sight. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Way of Righteousness

“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-20

Song: “In Christ Alone”

Growing up, I learned the rules of my parents, teachers, and Santa Claus. Santa’s rules involved being good in order to get Christmas gifts from him. The song about Santa making a list of good kids prompted me to think of the ways I hadn’t been good!

The Pharisees thought they were good because they lived according to rules, some of which they made up. They taught these rules to the people as if they were part of God’s law and the way to gain merit with God. But it was just an artificial self-righteousness not built on the intent of the commandments in Scripture. True righteousness comes by faith in God. Evidence of that faith is seen in love for God and obedience to His instruction in Scripture.

Entrance into God’s kingdom is possible, but not by our efforts to gain righteousness. That’s an earthly mindset: doing something to get something else in return. Rather, turn your heart and mind toward Christ in faith. Live out the righteousness that comes through faith. Let your “doing” be obedience to the Scripture’s instruction regarding a life of prayer, worship, learning, and service to people in Christ’s name because of your love for God.

Father, thank You for Your instruction in Scripture that leads me to faith and righteousness as a citizen of Your eternal kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

We Are Free

“Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out” (Deuteronomy 27:26).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 27:14-26

Song: “I Am Free”

When my husband was in elementary school, his teacher announced that if students asked a question that had already been answered through teaching, they would have to wear large, handmade ears and sit in the corner. One day my husband broke that rule. The consequences were to come the next day. Thankfully, his mom learned of the situation and confronted the teacher, who then abandoned that rule. The consequences were never applied.

Prior to God’s people entering the promised land, He had spoken curses over them—curses for disobedience, which would bring consequences such as disease (Deuteronomy 28:21), drought (v. 22), and defeat (v. 25). But these people weren’t guilty of mere childish slipups. They tended to willfully ignore God’s commands. These curses were meant to warn and to encourage obedience so that those difficult consequences would be irrelevant.

Centuries later, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). In His mercy, God released believers in Jesus from the curses of disobedience. But, sadly, those without faith in Jesus are still under the curse of coming consequences. May today be the day of their salvation!

As believers, though no longer under the law’s curse with its difficult consequences, we are not free to live as we please. Rather, we are free to live for Jesus. May our actions daily testify that we are thankful and living for Him!

Father, thank You that in Jesus I am free! Help me daily to live for Him. Amen.

Obedience and Blessing

Blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 28:2).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:1-3; 10:12-13; 28:1-2

Song: “Obedience”

When my son Zach was young, I began teaching him manners. I wanted him to obey for his own good. But time and again when expressing thanks would be the polite response, he would not say “Thank you.” Frustrated, I started saying “You’re welcome” to Zach whenever gratitude was due but not expressed. My plan worked. Zach was soon obeying.

Before entering the promised land, God wanted His people to know the importance of obedience to His instruction. In Deuteronomy 28 we find a list of blessings that would result from their obedience, including blessing on them wherever they were (v. 3); blessing on their children, crops, and livestock (v. 4); victory over enemies (v. 7); and respect from all people (v. 10). God promised these specific blessings, plus additional ones, to His people if they obeyed His commands. Their obedience would be a choice and the fruit of loving Him.

As we choose to obey God, out of love for Him, let’s look for His sure blessings. Blessings that may be more than we imagined. Or, on the other hand, fewer and different than we expected—yet blessings still the same. And once we discover those blessings, regardless of the size or kind, may we remember to say thanks to God, the one from whom all blessings flow.

Father, thank You for revealing Your love for me through the blessings in my life. Help me show my love for You through obedience. In Jesus’ name, amen.