

leading you afresh beginning NOW with His still small voice. Let God put a new vision in your heart and help you move forward.

3. **Living Sacrifices** - Paul also says that you must PRESENT yourself as a living sacrifice. **You can begin doing this by consciously and willfully whispering prayers of commitment each day. In fact, you should do it many times a day.** If you want to flow in God's exciting plan for your life, then it stands to reason that you can't always do what "you" want to do. Sometimes you have to say "no" to your natural desires! God is calling you to sacrifice what "you" want in exchange for what "He" wants. And, as mentioned above, you may need to "sacrifice" what you had hoped for in the past for what God has for you now. The Holy Spirit will give you grace to "let go" and move forward.

God is a Rewarder!

Dear friend, if you could only catch a glimpse of the rewards and fruit of truly giving your life over to God, then you would WANT TO do it. What this world offers cannot compare to God's eternal plan! **Whenever God asks someone to give or make a sacrifice, you can be sure that He will always reward them for their obedience. God will not be out-given!** Hebrews 11:6 says, *"For he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is A REWARDER of them that diligently seek Him."* My pastor friend was rewarded with a restored family and church. Perhaps the greatest reward that he received was the knowledge that He had let God have His way. And, his decision had generational effects through his children and grandchildren. He told me that in the beginning, he simply did not have it within himself to forgive her and overcome the hurt. He said that it was one of those "impossible" situations that he was incapable of handling emotionally or mentally. **It was only when he made a faith-commitment that He sensed God's power to do it. His choice to live a "sacrificed life" opened the door for God's grace to flood in.** When God called Abram to leave his country, He promised to multiply Abram's seed like the stars of heaven (Gen 12:1 / 15:5,6). God always attaches blessings and rewards to our sacrifices. When you examine Hebrews chapter 11, you'll see that it is one account after another of men and women who stepped out in faith making

sacrifices – and ALL of them were rewarded for their obedience.

Here are several practical keys that will help you say with Christ, *"Not my will, but Thy will be done . . ."*

1. **CONSEQUENCES** - try to imagine the consequences of both choices -- disobeying or obeying God's plan. If you choose to go your own stubborn way, how would your decision negatively affect others? Who is depending on you to put the love of God first and obey God? Is it your children? Is there a village that needs to hear the message of Christ for the first time? Is it your employer who is at a critical phase and needs you to stay a while longer? Is it your spouse of many years? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you "see" both the negative and positive consequences of your choices.

2. **EMPOWERED** - realize that you don't have to live a sacrificed life on your own – in fact, you can't! **The Holy Spirit will empower you with His strength.** Philippians 2:13 says, *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."* My pastor friend admitted that he couldn't forgive his wife on his own, yet God helped him. Sometimes all that God is looking for is a heart that is *"willing to be made willing."* Maybe you made the wrong choices in the past, and you can't seem to forgive yourself or move on. God is merciful and ready to forgive. And, He will empower you for the future. Whisper a prayer that simply says, *"Lord, give me your strength to do what I seem powerless to do. I want your will for my future."*

3. **REWARDS** - receive by faith that God has rewards for your obedience that far outweigh what you could produce on your own. You are here "NOW" in your life's journey. The past is the past and you cannot return to it. You must move forward. God still has assignments for you! And, His assignments are much better than anything you could plan on your own. So, don't live in the past or let remorse drain away the remainder of your life. Look to what God has for your future beginning "NOW." Hebrews 11:27 says that Moses *"Forsook Egypt ... and endured as seeing him who is invisible."*

Dear friend, make a fresh commitment right now to the will of God! Whisper the same prayer as our Lord – *"Nevertheless, not my will but Thy will be done."* ■ -- **Jason Peebles**

Key Memory Verse:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."
Romans 1:1

Prayer to be a Living Sacrifice

"Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins. I accept His sacrifice and commit my life to Him. I want to follow in His footsteps and be a living sacrifice for Your plans and purposes. Work in me both to will and to do of your good pleasure, even when it goes against my flesh. Thank you for your great love. In Jesus Name – Amen."

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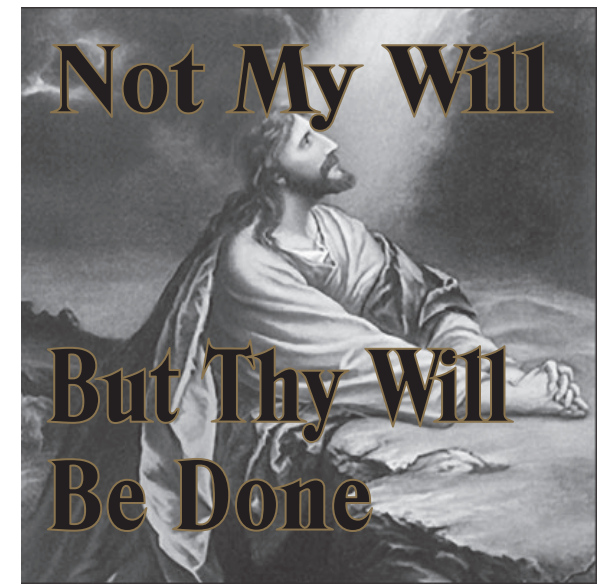
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P.O. Box B
Marietta, GA 30061
(designate for Home office)



by Jason Peebles

Perhaps no other verse in the Bible challenges us like Matthew 26:39 -- *"Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done."* And, perhaps no other verse guides us on how to step into the will of God like this one. Jesus prayed this in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his suffering and crucifixion.

Love that Sacrifices

Jesus knew the prophecies regarding his suffering and death from the Messianic passages in the Old Testament. Psalm 22:16 says, *"They pierced my hands and feet."* Isaiah 53:5 says, *"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."* Jesus had no more desire to experience pain and death than we do – but He was willing to sacrifice his will for the will of the Father. John 6:38 says, *"For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me."* Jesus fully understood that his actions were directly connected to the redemption of others. Dear friend, the Holy Spirit is calling you to walk in the same manner as your Lord and Savior. Philippians 3:5-8 says, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus -- who took the form of a servant,*

humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Jesus laid his life down because he loved the world and wanted to see it redeemed. True “agape” love (which is the God-kind of love) is willing to sacrifice “self” for the redemption and restoration of others.

Sacrificing for Others

Have you ever considered that your actions are absolutely necessary for the redemption of others? At first, you may respond that the redemption of mankind is solely dependent upon the work of Christ. I would agree regarding the “atonement” -- but not regarding the ministry of reconciliation that we have been called to. Ephesians 1:7 says, *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”* Jesus fully atoned for our sins, but that’s not the end of the redemption story. We have a part to play too! The redemption that Christ wrought for us must be demonstrated for the world to see. 2 Corinthians 6:18 summarizes it this way: *“And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.”* Telling others is one thing – but DEMONSTRATING God’s love is where the real challenge is.

Let me share a dramatic story to illustrate what I am hoping you will see in a greater measure. On one of my ministry trips years ago, the pastor of a large church personally told me his story. I was the guest speaker in his church for one of my seminars. My pastor friend was a great Bible teacher and preacher. As far as the “proclaiming” part he was excellent. He was also very good with organization and administration, thus he had a strong church. BUT HE WAS ABOUT TO DISCOVER THE SACRIFICES THAT WE MUST MAKE AT TIMES TO “DEMONSTRATE” GOD’S LOVE. IF WE DON’T, THEN LIVES CAN BE DESTROYED. THE PASTOR TOLD ME THAT ONE DAY HE DISCOVERED THAT HIS WIFE WAS INVOLVED IN AN AFFAIR. Obviously, my pastor friend was devastated. Everything that he had worked for all his life was suddenly in jeopardy – his home, his church, his future. As is always the case in these type situations, the congregation was split right down the middle on how to respond. There are always the “hardliners” who want to completely remove the family from ministry and publically punish the

offender in the name of “restoration.” And then there are those who want to respond in a kinder way with mercy and grace for restoration. Thus, the pastor had to make a decision. How would he respond to his wife? Which group would he allow to influence his decisions? Initially, he was consumed with anger, bitterness, hurt, confusion, and fear. How could his wife of many years do this to him? What would become of him and their children? **The more he knew about the ongoing affair the harder it became for him to consider forgiveness and reconciliation. He told me that his mind was tormented day and night with thoughts and images of what had taken place.** Maybe there were just too many lies and secrets for him to ever be healed.

Then one night during the process he had a dream. In his dream he saw a homeless woman living on the street. She was old, filthy, confused, and sickly. In his dream an angel told him that the woman was actually his wife’s future if he refused to wait for her, love her, and forgive. **The angel said that her failure in life would be counted to him as sin if he hardened his heart and divorced her.** Of course, the hardliners were telling him that it was his “right” to put her away. **The angel also said that all his rewards in heaven would be canceled out by the sin of unforgiveness if he chose that path.** Finally, the angel also told him that in the eyes of God, the sin of adultery was less grievous than the sin of unforgiveness which he was in danger of. At that point, the pastor told me that he awoke from his dream with a whole new perspective. He awoke and made a firm commitment in his heart to forgive his wife and love her no matter how much it “hurt” his own heart. He had a lot of mental and emotional hurdles to cross. He also had to take a stand against the hardliners. In the short-term, it may have been easier for him to divorce his fallen wife and go on without her. But in the long-term, that choice would have produced permanent damage for them, their children, and their future grandchildren. **My pastor friend was learning to identify with the sufferings of Christ in order to bring redemption and restoration to his wife.** Colossians 1:24 says, *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake.”* **Paul was not talking about suffering for the “atonement” but rather suffering for the “redemption” of others.** Paul sacrificed his life through shipwrecks, beatings, stonings, and

hardships to see others redeemed. **Nothing that we do can add to the atoning work of Christ. That is a settled fact. But we ARE called to participate in the sufferings of Christ to bring redemption to others.** In Philippians 3:10 Paul said, *“That I may know Him (Christ) in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.”* There is a depth of God’s agape love that takes us into the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.

Ask any parent and they can easily understand this type of sacrifice. Parents sacrifice dozens of times per day to raise children. Sure, it might be more fun to “do your own thing” in life. But in the long run, a self-centered life doesn’t build anything lasting. If you want to raise children and build a family then it will take sacrificial love. Likewise, God has called all Christians to present ourselves as “living sacrifices” to God and His purposes. What does this mean? **It means that at times we must identify with the sufferings of Christ – that is, allow Christ to be the Lord of our lives instead of “self.” It means that we must sacrifice our natural selfish tendencies and allow the love of God to manifest through us.** My pastor friend made the right choice. His dream shook him up in a good way. He decided to go the way of mercy and grace. He told me that it wasn’t too long until a group of the “hardliners” left his church and took a substantial part of the income with them. He told me this story himself some years after the events. Thank God he and his wife were happily restored. **The pastor told me that he came to realize that redemption involved much more than just his pulpit ministry. He found out that he had to sacrifice “self” in order to DEMONSTRATE the agape love of God.** Was it worth it? If you could talk to his wife she would say “YES!” Their children and grandchildren would say “YES!” And my pastor friend was saying “YES!” when he told me his story. I wonder how many good families could have been spared the permanent consequences of divorce if someone had made the same choice?

The Sacrificed Life

Regardless of what has happened in your past, you are “HERE” now. You can’t turn back the clock and undo past mistakes, nor can I. Maybe you didn’t respond in the right way like my pastor friend did – but here is what you CAN do now.

You CAN start from “TODAY” and begin yielding yourself to God’s will and plan. If you want to flow in the will of God from this point forward, then you must make a decision to live a sacrificed life. The lives of other people are hanging in the balance.

In John 5:19 Jesus said, *“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do.”* Jesus also said in verse 30, *“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge – because I seek not my own will but the will of the Father who has sent me.”* **Jesus lived and ministered in a state of yieldedness to the Father. He was living a “sacrificed life” long before he actually went to the cross.**

ROMANS 12:1-3 SAYS...

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And, be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

Look at the three points that I’ve underlined in these verses. Let’s start from the end of the passage –

1. **The will of God** - The apostle Paul makes it clear that you CAN walk in the will of God for your life. That’s great news! And, God’s will for you from this point forward is GOOD and EXCITING! Many people think that the will of God is somehow boring or nonproductive. Friend, nothing could be further from the truth! If you want an exciting and adventurous life, then get plugged into the will of God! Regardless of what has happened in your past, start TODAY! And Paul gives us two important keys on how to get started beginning right now . . .

2. **Renewing the mind** - Look at the verses again carefully. Paul says that in order to find the will of God you must start *renewing your mind*. Renewed to what? Renewed to the way that God thinks and operates. This comes by studying the Word of God and yielding to the Holy Spirit in your heart. As you learn God’s principles you’ll start acting different. Your decisions will be influenced by God’s Word and His principles. **You must also stop dwelling on the past. You cannot move forward if you constantly think about how things were in the past. Let the Holy Spirit start**