

A Living Sacrifice Defined



Amir's Story Concluded (from Dreams & Visions)

Last week we followed Amir's story from his conversion to the miraculous events that led him to risk his life by going to Mecca during the hajj, the month long holy pilgrimage of faithful Muslims to visit the holy sites of Mecca.

He went there knowing that if he was caught, as a non-Muslim, he would be executed immediately.

We watched him visit the various holy sites there in Mecca. We noted his encounter with Abu Badr, the famous chief executioner of Mecca who had severed hundreds of heads, along with hands and legs as he meted out the punishments specified in the Qur'an with great enthusiasm.

As he headed back to his hotel his last evening there, he noticed a man following him – matching him step for step about three paces back. Amir finally turned to confront the man. They eyed one another for several tense seconds before the man spoke.

"I am your friend," he said. "My name is Muhammad." With that, he turned and disappeared into the crowd.

Throughout the night Amir brooded over this encounter wondering just what kind of a "friend" Muhammad was. After a restless night, he checked out of the hotel, walked the few blocks to the bus station, bought a ticket back to Riyadh, and settled into a seat near the back door.

At the first stop, he looked up from reading a newspaper to see two secret police yelling at the driver and holding a picture in front of his face. The driver shook his head and was ordered to continue on.

The secret police started working their way back towards Amir carefully comparing every passport and passenger with the picture they had brought with them.

By the time they had reached the next stop, they were half way down the aisle. As they were stopping and the doors were opening, Amir jumped up from his seat, jumped out the back door, and rolled down the steps onto the pavement.

He was stunned by the hard fall and just as he was getting oriented he saw that the secret police had scrambled off the bus looking for him.

Preoccupied with his pursuers, Amir didn't hear the car pull up beside him, but a voice cut into his thoughts.

"Hey, friend, it's Muhammad. Do you need a ride?"

The door opened and Amir scrambled in and lay on floor in the backseat as it slipped past the bus.

“Is everything okay, brother?”

“Brother?” Amir said.

“Yes, brother. You are not alone here. When I came to Mecca on the hajj a few years ago, Jesus appeared to me.” He let the statement sink in for a moment. “I began to seek Him, and now I am a follower. I never thought I would come back to Mecca But He has called me – us. There are others. Many were led here, just like you. ‘Pray for them’ is all He told us.”

A Living Sacrifice Illustrated

In Amir’s story, we have an illustration of what it means to give yourself as a *Living Sacrifice* – choosing to follow Jesus regardless of the personal consequences; being willing to die for Him if necessary.

Today, we will explore a bit more what that means.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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. (Roman 12:1-2, NIV)

In most of the last chapters of Romans, it appears that Paul is just giving random advice on living as a follower of Jesus.

But, it is deeper than that. He is actually painting a word picture of what it means to offer yourself as a *Living Sacrifice*.

Loving Each Other

He begins with this:

Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. (Romans 12:3-5, NLT)

In Jesus, we are a part of the same body. We belong to Jesus, and we support each other.

The body suffers if any part is not functioning as it should. There is no part of a healthy body that attacks another part. Every part of the body is designed to contribute to health and activity. Paul puts this in practical terms:

Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other ... Rejoice

in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them ... Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. (Romans 12:9-17, NLT)

Our part is to love people, not to criticize or judge them. Loving them is described as action and should be shown even to people who hate us and make our lives miserable. This leaves no room for hate, indifference, or revenge. Paul is holding us to a high standard, the same standard Jesus applied when He said:

"Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35, NLT)

Respect the Government

Paul next turns his attention to our relationship with government.

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God ... You must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.

Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons ... Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority. (Romans 13:1-7, NLT)

Paul was living under a government that was as corrupt as they come. He was living in a society that honored evil. Convenience and power were more important than justice and mercy. But, he never suggested fighting it through protest, picketing evil places or people, or even working in the government to change the laws.

Why?

He realized that people are not saved through protest or government action, but are saved one-on-one as a result of personal contact. He wanted Jesus' followers to put their efforts where they would do the most good.

The Early Church were not known for all the things they were against, they were known for their love demonstrated through their actions. They would often move into a place where sickness and plague were breaking out, at great personal risk to themselves and their families, to help those who needed help – trusting God with potential consequences.

Interacting with Other Believers

Paul then references that love and refers back to Jesus' words about the greatest commandment (see **Matthew 22:32-40**; **Mark 12:28-34**; **Luke 10:25-37**):

Owe nothing to anyone – except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law ... These – and other such commandments – are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
(**Romans 13:8-10**, NLT)

Everything about our relationship with God comes down to loving others the way He has loved us. This is the underlying principle of the law. Paul continues:

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong ... Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? (**Romans 14:1-3**, NLT)

No one is ever changed by losing an argument about what is right or wrong. It's not our job to change people. They are not responsible to us, but to God. As Paul stated earlier, it is our job to love them (through our actions) in the same way we would take care of ourselves.

We don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (**Romans 14:7-8**, NLT)

The purpose of our life as a follower of Jesus is not to please ourselves. It's not to have a comfortable life, a nice home, a good car, and a month or two of supplies stored up in case of an emergency. Not that these are necessarily bad things – but they're not the things we should be focused on.

Nor should they be so important that they hold us back if God leads us to leave them.

This all sounds a lot like giving up our right to ourselves. It sounds more like being a soldier than being a civilian. Paul continues:

We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this ...
(**Romans 15:1-3**, NLT)

This refers back to issues about what is okay to eat and what is not; and about which day to worship on.

We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't live to please himself. (**Romans 15:1-3**, NLT)

Jesus is the standard we are measured against and we must adopt His attitude towards our life and serving God. Paul clarified this in his letter to the Philippians where he wrote:

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,

he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.
(**Philippians 2:5-8**, NLT)

Radical Faith

Paul is not talking about casual Christianity – in his eyes there was no such thing. He is talking about you and I living a life where our first priority is to serve Him and to follow in His footsteps.

This is actually rather simple – there's just one question to consider: "What does God want me to do?"

But, it is not easy. It goes against most everything we have learned about taking care of ourselves. It goes against what our culture keeps trying to feed us. And, it goes against our own sinful human nature.

But here is where Paul brings us back to the solution he has been talking about throughout the whole book of Romans:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (**Romans 15:5-6**, NIV)

The solution is found in God's gift of grace. You can't generate this kind of love and devotion. You can't consistently put others before yourselves. Living like God wants you to live is a gift of grace from God.

And it comes to us day by day as He continues to free us from the power of sin.

- It happens as we confess our sinfulness and accept His grace.
- It continues to happen as we stay with Him and day by day focusing our attention on Jesus by prayerfully studying Scripture.
- It keeps happening as we offer Him our lives as a living sacrifice and give Him permission to lead us wherever He wants to take us.

God made this promise to us through the prophet Jeremiah:

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." (**Jeremiah 31:33**, NIV)

Fatima's Story (from Dreams & Visions)

Fatima belonged to a renowned Bedouin tribe with centuries-old roots in Saudi Arabia. Her brother was a Muslim cleric.

As she explored the Internet in the evenings after work, she met several people on-line who claimed to have dreams about Jesus, most of them Muslim.

It seemed that every day she came across another person who found a powerful, gentle Jesus who overwhelmed him or her, not with unendurable shame as the Muslim leaders did, but with a pure love that reached deep inside. This astounded her.

After some time of on-line conversations and through studying the Bible, she found Jesus irresistible and one night gave herself to Him – to follow Him whatever the consequences might be.

She became part of an on-line group of 10 resolute Christians who flooded the Internet with e-mails and blogs declaring Christ to any Muslim who would pay attention.

Every night after work Fatima spent hours fielding questions from Muslims searching for the truth about God, and blog by blog, she became famous through her pen-name “Rania” for inspiring poetry about Jesus.

One day, when Fatima was at work, her brother found her journals, her Bible Study notes, and the poems about Jesus.

When she returned home, her brother announced to the family that she had devoted herself to the infidel faith, a faith for which she would now die. To confirm this stunning revelation, the raging cleric asked Fatima, “Are you a Jesus follower?”

Her answer was simple: “Yes. Yes I am.”

He locked her in her bedroom and took her cell phone so she could not call for help. For the four hours she awaited her execution, she sent out one last poem ...

*May the Lord Jesus guide you, O Muslims, and enlighten your hearts that you might love others.
We do not worship the cross, and we are not insane. We worship the Lord Jesus, the light of
world.*

*We left Muhammad, and we are no longer on His path. We follow Jesus the Messiah, the clear
truth ...*

*Your swords do not concern me, nor evil, nor disgrace. Your threats do not trouble me, and we
are not afraid.*

And by God, I am unto death a Christian ...

The poem was quite long, but she ended with these words:

As to my last words, I pray to the Lord of the worlds.

*Jesus is the Messiah, the Light of clear Guidance. That He changes notions, and sets the scales of
justice aright.*

And that He spread Love among you, Oh Muslims.

Moments after she clicked “send” her brother entered the room. He beat her cruelly, breaking bones and rupturing skin. Finally, he cut out her tongue and dragged her outside where he burned her alive.

The Death of Me

Sometimes offering ourselves as a *Living Sacrifice* can end up in death.

Many who read Paul’s letter suffered and died for their faith. Paul himself was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and finally executed for his faith.

When you offer yourself as a *Living Sacrifice* – which is the same as dying to yourself – you give God control of your life. You give up the right to yourself and choose to trust God, having faith that He has already provided you with salvation and will use your life to help connect with others, for their salvation.

The writer of Hebrews, after listing many people who gave their lives as a *Living Sacrifice* for God – and some who were killed in God’s service, concluded with this:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame ... Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up. (Hebrews 12:1-3, NLT)

We run the race with endurance by keeping our eyes on Jesus! As long as you keep focusing on Him, your life will be a *Living Sacrifice*.

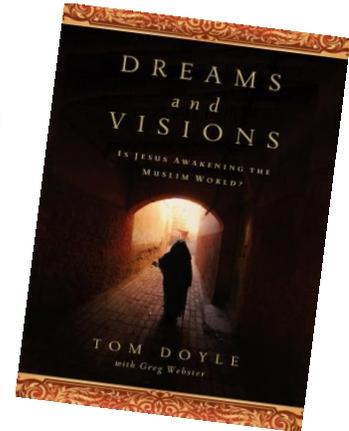
Don’t ever lose your focus!

Notes

Text you find in **this color** is a link to more information. It may take you to the Bible verse in context and/or in several different translations utilizing BibleGateway.com. In some cases, it may take you to a website where there is additional information. And, it may take you to a PDF copy of previous sermons in this series.

Dreams & Visions

Both Amir's and Fatima's stories, along with many others, can be found in the book *Dreams & Visions: Is God Awakening the Muslim World?*, written by Tom Doyle, © 2012, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. To purchase a copy, [click here](#). To purchase an e-book for iTunes, [click here](#); for Kindle, [click here](#); or for Nook Book, [click here](#).



Previous Sermons in this Series

- January 5, 2019: [Welcome to Rome \(Romans, Part 1\)](#)
- January 26, 2019: [The Big Problem, Part 1 \(Romans, Part 2a\)](#)
- February 2, 2019: [The Big Problem, Part 2 \(Romans, Part 2b\)](#)
- February 16, 2019: [The Incredible Solution, Part 1 \(Romans, Part 3a\)](#)
- March 2, 2019: [The Incredible Solution, Part 2 \(Romans, Part 3b\)](#)
- March 30, 2019: [The Wonderful Promise \(Romans, Part 4\)](#)
- April 6, 2019: [The Wonderful Promise, Part 2 \(Romans, Part 4b\)](#)
- May 4, 2019: [The Wonderful Promise, Part 3 \(Romans, Part 4c\)](#)
- June 15, 2019: [People of the Promise \(Romans, Part 5\)](#)
- June 23, 2019: [A Living Sacrifice \(Romans, Part 6\)](#)

Scripture References

Job 14:1-6 (NLT): *“How frail is humanity! How short is life, how full of trouble! ² We blossom like a flower and then wither. Like a passing shadow, we quickly disappear. ³ Must you keep an eye on such a frail creature and demand an accounting from me? ⁴ Who can bring purity out of an impure person? No one! ⁵ You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer. ⁶ So leave us alone and let us rest! We are like hired hands, so let us finish our work in peace.” (Job 14:1-6, NLT)*

Isaiah 30:19-22 (CSB): *For people will live on Zion in Jerusalem. You will never weep again; he will show favor to you at the sound of your outcry; as soon as he hears, he will answer you. ²⁰ The Lord will give you meager bread and water during oppression, but your Teacher will not hide any longer. Your eyes will see your Teacher, ²¹ and whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will*

hear this command behind you: “This is the way. Walk in it.”²² Then you will defile your silver-plated idols and your gold-plated images. You will throw them away like menstrual cloths, and call them filth. (Isaiah 30:19-22, CSB)

Isaiah 64:1-7 (NLT): Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence!² As fire causes wood to burn and water to boil, your coming would make the nations tremble. Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame!³ When you came down long ago, you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations. And oh, how the mountains quaked!

⁴ For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him!⁵ You welcome those who gladly do good, who follow godly ways.

But you have been very angry with us, for we are not godly. We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved?⁶ We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.

Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.⁷ Yet no one calls on your name or pleads with you for mercy. Therefore, you have turned away from us and turned us over to our sins. (Isaiah 64:1-7, NLT)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV): “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34, NIV)

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NLT): And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NLT)

Matthew 5:43-48 (NLT): “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy.⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48, NLT)

John 3:14-17 (NLT): *And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

¹⁶ *“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:14-17, NLT)*

John 13:34-35 (NLT): *So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35, NLT)*

Romans 12:1 – 15:13 (NLT): *And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

³ *Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. ⁴ Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, ⁵ so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*

⁶ *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. ⁷ If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. ⁸ If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.*

⁹ *Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!*

¹⁷ *Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*

¹⁹ *Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,*

“I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” (Deuteronomy 32:35) says the LORD.

²⁰ *Instead,*

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

(Proverbs 25:21-22)

²¹ *Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.*

Respect for Authority

13 *Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. ² So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. ³ For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. ⁴ The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. ⁵ So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.*

⁶ *Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority.*

Love Fulfills God’s Requirements

⁸ *Owe nothing to anyone – except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law. ⁹ For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” (Exodus 20:13-15) These – and other such commandments – are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.*

¹¹ *This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. ¹³ Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don’t participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don’t let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.*

The Danger of Criticism

14 Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. ² For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. ³ Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval.

⁵ In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable.

⁶ Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷ For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. ⁸ If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ Christ died and rose again for this very purpose – to be Lord both of the living and of the dead.

¹⁰ So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For the Scriptures say,

“As surely as I live,” says the LORD, “every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will declare allegiance to God.” (Isaiah 49:18)

¹² Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. ¹³ So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

¹⁴ I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. ¹⁵ And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good. ¹⁷ For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. ¹⁹ So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

²⁰ Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble. ²² You may believe there's nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who don't feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right. ²³ But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do

it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.

Living to Please Others

15 We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. ² We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. ³ For even Christ didn't live to please himself. As the Scriptures say, "The insults of those who insult you, O God, have fallen on me." ⁴ Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

⁸ Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. ⁹ He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote:

"For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name."
(Psalm 18:49)

¹⁰ And in another place it is written,

"Rejoice with his people, you Gentiles." (Deuteronomy 32:43)

¹¹ And yet again,

"Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles. Praise him, all you people of the earth."
(Psalm 117:1)

¹² And in another place Isaiah said,

"The heir to David's throne will come, and he will rule over the Gentiles. They will place their hope on him." (Isaiah 11:10)

¹³ I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 12:1 – 15:13, NLT)

Galatians 5:16-26 (NLT): So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. ¹⁸ But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another. (**Galatians 5:16-26**, NLT)

Ephesians 2:1-8 (NLT): Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil – the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (**Ephesians 2:1-8**, NLT)

Philippians 2:1-11 (NLT): Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ² Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (**Philippians 2:1-11**, NLT)

1 Timothy 1:15-17 (NLT): *This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” – and I am the worst of them all. ¹⁶ But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:15-17, NLT)*

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT): *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. ³ Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up. (Hebrews 12:1-3, NLT)*

E.G. White Resources

Steps to Christ, pages 77 – 83: *God is the source of life and light and joy to the universe. Like rays of light from the sun, like the streams of water bursting from a living spring, blessings flow out from Him to all His creatures. And wherever the life of God is in the hearts of men, it will flow out to others in love and blessing.*

Our Saviour's joy was in the uplifting and redemption of fallen men. For this He counted not His life dear unto Himself, but endured the cross, despising the shame. So angels are ever engaged in working for the happiness of others. This is their joy. That which selfish hearts would regard as humiliating service, ministering to those who are wretched and in every way inferior in character and rank, is the work of sinless angels. The spirit of Christ's self-sacrificing love is the spirit that pervades heaven and is the very essence of its bliss. This is the spirit that Christ's followers will possess, the work that they will do.

When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden. Its holy influence will be felt by all with whom we come in contact. The spirit of Christ in the heart is like a spring in the desert, flowing to refresh all and making those who are ready to perish, eager to drink of the water of life.

Love to Jesus will be manifested in a desire to work as He worked for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. It will lead to love, tenderness, and sympathy toward all the creatures of our heavenly Father's care.

The Saviour's life on earth was not a life of ease and devotion to Himself, but He toiled with persistent, earnest, untiring effort for the salvation of lost mankind. From the manger to Calvary He followed the path of self-denial and sought not to be released from arduous tasks, painful travels and exhausting care and labor. He said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28. This was the one great object of His life. Everything else was secondary and subservient. It was His meat and drink to do the will of God and to finish His work. Self and self-interest had no part in His labor. (78)

So those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted. No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell. Like Philip when he found the Saviour, we shall invite others into His presence. We shall seek to present to them the attractions of Christ and the unseen realities of the world to come. There will be an intensity of desire to follow in the path that Jesus trod. There will be an earnest longing that those around us may "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. (79)

And the effort to bless others will react in blessings upon ourselves. This was the purpose of God in giving us a part to act in the plan of redemption. He has granted men the privilege of becoming partakers of the divine nature and, in their turn, of diffusing blessings to their fellow men. This is the highest honor, the greatest joy, that it is possible for God to bestow upon men. Those who thus become participants in labors of love are brought nearest to their Creator.

God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry.

We are brought into sympathy with Christ through the fellowship of His sufferings. Every act of self-sacrifice for the good of others strengthens the spirit of beneficence in the giver's heart, allying him more closely to the Redeemer of the world, who "was rich, yet for your sakes ... became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9. And it is only as we thus fulfill the divine purpose in our creation that life can be a blessing to us. (80)

If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive

you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, and will develop a rich experience.

The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor. The aspirations are elevated. There is no room for sloth or selfishness. Those who thus exercise the Christian graces will grow and will become strong to work for God. They will have clear spiritual perceptions, a steady, growing faith, and an increased power in prayer. The Spirit of God, moving upon their spirit, calls forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. Those who thus devote themselves to unselfish effort for the good of others are most surely working out their own salvation.

The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us – to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them. Strength comes by exercise; activity is the very condition of life. Those who endeavor to maintain Christian life by passively accepting the blessings that come through the means of grace, and doing nothing for Christ, are simply trying to live by eating without working. And in the spiritual as in the natural world, this always results in degeneration and decay. A man who would refuse to exercise his limbs would soon lose all power to use them. Thus the Christian who will not exercise his God-given powers not only fails to grow up into Christ, but he loses the strength that he already had. (81)

The church of Christ is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. And the obligation rests upon all Christians. Everyone, to the extent of his talent and opportunity, is to fulfill the Saviour's commission. The love of Christ, revealed to us, makes us debtors to all who know Him not. God has given us light, not for ourselves alone, but to shed upon them.

If the followers of Christ were awake to duty, there would be thousands where there is one today proclaiming the gospel in heathen lands. And all who could not personally engage in the work, would yet sustain it with their means, their sympathy, and their prayers. And there would be far more earnest labor for souls in Christian countries.

We need not go to heathen lands, or even leave the narrow circle of the home, if it is there that our duty lies, in order to work for Christ. We can do this in the home circle, in the church, among those with whom we associate, and with whom we do business.

The greater part of our Saviour's life on earth was spent in patient toil in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Ministering angels attended the Lord of life as He walked side by side with peasants and laborers, unrecognized and unhonored. He was as faithfully fulfilling His mission while working at His humble trade as when He healed the sick or walked upon the storm-tossed waves of Galilee. So in the humblest duties and lowliest positions of life, we may walk and work with Jesus. (82)

The apostle says, "Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." 1 Corinthians 7:24. The businessman may conduct his business in a way that will glorify his Master because of his fidelity. If he is a true follower of Christ he will carry his religion into everything that is done and reveal to men the spirit of Christ. The mechanic may be a diligent and faithful representative of Him who toiled in the lowly walks of life among the hills of Galilee. Everyone who names the name of Christ should so work that others, by seeing his good works, may be led to glorify their Creator and Redeemer.

Many have excused themselves from rendering their gifts to the service of Christ because others were possessed of superior endowments and advantages. The opinion has prevailed that only those who are especially talented are required to consecrate their abilities to the service of God. It has come to be understood by many that talents are given to only a certain favored class to the exclusion of others who of course are not called upon to share in the toils or the rewards. But it is not so represented in the parable. When the master of the house called his servants, he gave to every man his work.

With a loving spirit we may perform life's humblest duties "as to the Lord." Colossians 3:23. If the love of God is in the heart, it will be manifested in the life. The sweet savor of Christ will surround us, and our influence will elevate and bless. (83)

You are not to wait for great occasions or to expect extraordinary abilities before you go to work for God. You need not have a thought of what the world will think of you. If your daily life is a testimony to the purity and sincerity of your faith, and others are convinced that you desire to benefit them, your efforts will not be wholly lost.

The humblest and poorest of the disciples of Jesus can be a blessing to others. They may not realize that they are doing any special good, but by their unconscious influence they may start waves of blessing that will widen and deepen, and the blessed results they may never know until the day of final reward. They do not feel or know that they are doing anything great. They are not required to weary themselves with anxiety about success. They have only to go forward quietly, doing faithfully the work that God's providence assigns, and their life will not be in vain. Their own souls will be growing more and more into the likeness of Christ; they are workers together with God in this life and are thus fitting for the higher work and the unshadowed joy of the life to come. (Steps to Christ, pages 77-83)