

## ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY

### 3. Everyone a Living Sacrifice — Everyone Gifted and Giving

This is our 3<sup>rd</sup> installment in a series titled ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY — we’re looking at two specific things: <sup>1.</sup> How community is ESSENTIAL to the Gospel and <sup>2.</sup> looking at those things that are ESSENTIAL to Community. The overarching point of this series is NOT to master the theological concept of the local church — THE point is for us to be mastered by the Biblical vision for community.

Listen to these words by a man named Leslie Newbigin (a missionary in India for 40 years and a theologian. He went to be with the Lord in 1998.

They are so incredibly relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century American church culture —

*The choice for the church in every age will always be, Will our identity be shaped by Scripture or by our culture—by the biblical story or the cultural story?”*

WHY is this question SO crucial? Listen to this quote from Newbigin —

*“How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? . . . The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it?”*

A community of believers is stunning when it lives in a way that expresses the heart and mind of Christ.

***Ephesians 3:20-21** Ephesians 3:20–21 (CSB) <sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us— <sup>21</sup>to him be glory **in the church** and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

***2 Corinthians 8:23** (CSB) <sup>23</sup>As for Titus, he is my partner and coworker for you; as for our brothers, they are the messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.*

I pray that when people walk into this gathering that they will not only see *what we do* when we're together — but that they will also see how powerful the Gospel is, see how real Jesus is — when they see *how we are* with each other when we're gathered. I pray that when we're scattered outside of these walls, and people see *how we are* with each other in everyday life — that they will find Biblical community to be truly stunning — to be truly compelling witness to how real Jesus is.

Let's turn in our Bibles to the **book of Romans, Chapter 12**

As we look at the first eight verses of that chapter we want remember that this is a letter written to the community of believers living in the very center of the pagan Roman empire in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century.

*Romans 1:7 NLT I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.*

**Romans 12:1–8 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. <sup>3</sup>For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. <sup>4</sup>Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup>According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

**Romans 12:1 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you (ESV -I **appeal** to you) you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

The great apostle — evangelist, church planter, pastor and author of Scripture says

*I URGE you — I APPEAL to you*

*NKJV — beseech you*

*F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase — I now make this plea*

By way of Paul — the Holy Spirit doesn't impose legal language — doesn't use an imperative. The Holy Spirit appeals to their will. He desires the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers (and 21<sup>st</sup> century believers) to **make a choice** about the way that we live for Him

**Romans 12:1** **THEREFORE** brothers and sisters I urge you / appeal to you,

We live in a church culture that is obsessed with talking about “**how** to do life successfully” — “**how** to live out Christian principles better in the home or at work.” Those things are presented as stand-alone truths. Here's the truth about Christian living: Christian living can't stand alone — it is always rooted in the truth about God and all that He has done to save us in the sending of His Son (=doctrine). **The Christian life is the Spirit empowered living expression of doctrine.**

**Romans 12:1** Therefore brothers and sisters I urge you / I appeal to you, **IN VIEW OF (ESV – BY) the mercies of God**

The Holy Spirit *urges* us — makes His appeal to us on the basis of **the mercies of God,**

*F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase — So then, my brothers, in view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, I now make this plea.*

Paul is telling this community of believers: *If you really understand the Gospel — you'll choose to live like this.*

Everything Paul has to say in **Romans 12** speaks to each of us as individuals. The Gospel is the power of God to save (Romans 1:18) the individual man or woman who believes. The saving power of the Gospel that saves us individually transforms us individually. But as we have seen time and again in this series — our salvation moves **from alone** — **to together**. We've been saved to *ekklesia*. Our lives individually are the expression of the power of the Gospel to save. But the community of believers is also the living expression of the saving power of the Gospel.

**DON'T MISS THIS** — Paul is appealing to **the community** of believers.

**F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase** — *So then, my brothers*

*brothers* = ἀδελφός *adelphós*; **a** (1), denoting unity, and **delphús** (n.f.), a womb. <sup>1</sup>

Spiritual siblings!

**Romans 12:1 NIV** *Therefore, I urge you (plural), brothers and sisters*

Paul appeals — pleads with them — as a community of spiritual siblings — to make a life choice. That choice is not merely some stand-alone life principle — it is a choice rooted in the mercies of God. **Here's the choice**

**Romans 12:1** *Therefore brothers and sisters I urge you / appeal to you, in view of the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice*

**F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase** — *So then, my brothers, in view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, I now make this plea. Present your bodies to God, present them as a sacrifice—a living one, not a lifeless one; a holy one (because it is offered to a holy God), and one in which He will take pleasure. For,*

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<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

*when you consider your indebtedness to God, the consecration of your lives to His service is your logical act of worship.*<sup>2</sup>

**sacrifice** = to sacrifice, slaughter, kill, celebrate; θυσία<sup>3</sup>

The phrase *living sacrifice* is literally: a living killing. In the sacrificial offerings of the Old Testament the animal was not a willing participant and the animal was slaughtered and offered to God. Done!

The Christian does not offer himself or herself to God like that. It's **not** a once and done thing! To be a *living sacrifice* means every day, every hour, every moment, I deliberately, consciously, willingly, offer myself to God. It's constant. It's never over. For me to present myself as a living sacrifice means *I'm putting to death the idea that I have a right to live as I choose — I'm putting to death the idea that life is all about "me"*. It feels like a death to do that — especially when we live in a culture steeped in individualism.

In the Old Testament the sacrifice never crawled off the altar — because it was dead. The problem with a *living sacrifice* is that it has the ability to crawl off the altar. To be a living sacrifice is counter intuitive to everything our flesh desires — everything fallen culture has taught us: self-preservation at all costs; we belong to ourselves; our way is better than God's way.

The Gospel is so powerful — the love of God is so transforming — that we are moved to put to death the desire to live for ourselves.

***2 Corinthians 5:14–15*** *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce, F. F. (2017). *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Ro 12:1–2). Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books.

<sup>3</sup> Thiele, F., & Brown, C. (1986). Sacrifice, First Fruits, Altar, Offering. L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard (Eds.), *New international dictionary of New Testament theology* (Vol. 3, p. 417). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Because of God's mercy it is actually the reasonable thing for us to say: *God, I'm not going to be the one who decides what's right or wrong for me. Here's what You say in your Word about who I am and how I should live. I choose You! I'm willing to do it.*

**DON'T MISS THIS** — God doesn't intend us to be a living sacrifice on a desert island. We can't fully know what it means to be a living sacrifice apart from being a community of believers. Remember that Eugene Peterson quote: *We're never fully ourselves by ourselves.* Being a part of a community of believers is always a matter of "Jesus above all" and "others before me" — and THAT is what it means to be a living sacrifice. Living out our faith in Jesus with our brothers and sisters in Jesus involves shared space (letting others into our lives) and shared resources (emotional, physical and material). Apart from the local church — apart from community — I really don't have a way to know if I really have presented myself as a living sacrifice. I can actually prop up a Christianized version of my old kingdom of one.

The local church should be the place where the reality and power of the Gospel is put on display for the world to see **because** the local church is a collection of men and women who understand in the deepest part of their being what God has done to save them — and they live along side each other as those whose hearts are so gripped by the love Jesus that they no longer want to live for self — they want to love and serve Jesus who died for them by loving and serving those who love Him.

Here's the tricky bit: Time has told the same story over and over. Men and women dedicate themselves to living like that and one day they find themselves empty-handed, alone and bitter — angry at God!

*I committed my whole life to you. I took my hands off my life. I gave my life to you, and I'm hurt and alone. How can you do this to me?"*

But here's why we end up like that: We were kidding ourselves. We're not miserable because we presented ourselves as a living sacrifice — we're miserable because we never really did that. We weren't really worshipping God in response

to the great debt He paid for us — we thought we were putting God in our debt by sharing our space and sharing our resources.

For us to be a community of believers that is stunningly like Jesus begins with each of us being so stunned by the grace and mercy of God that we present ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice. We live with our spiritual siblings as men and women gladly directed by the love of Jesus and the Word of God.

Again — Newbiggin

*All true witness to Christ is the overflowing of a reality (that) has its source in a life of adoration and intercession. . . .*

**If you want to give that first section a title: Everyone a Living Sacrifice**

**Let's jump down to verse 4**

**<sup>4</sup>Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup>According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.**

**If you want to give this second section a title: Everyone Gifted and Giving**

For the average church-goer, church is where you go to get. They approach church like consumers! Like people comparing Best Buy with Amazon. Whose got the best for me at the least cost to me. Church is where they go to be served.

The local church is not that. THAT is not how Jesus shines in a way that is stunning! Jesus shines in a way that is absolutely stunning when everyone in that community surrenders their idea of what church is and who it's for and instead sees the local church (and who they are within it) — as God sees it (living sacrifice). When we are living sacrifices, we will live as those who know that

1. We are deeply and intimately related to one another — **individually members one of another**
  2. We each have a function — (implied in the words they **do not all have the same function — v.4**)
- and <sup>3.</sup> We each **have different gifts according to the grace given to us — v.6**

Put another way: to live as a community that displays the Gospel means that we don't live as consumers — merely receiving from the gifts of others — instead we see ourselves as **gifted** and as **givers** for the glory of Jesus and the good of our brothers and sisters in Jesus.

**In Biblical community** there should be no unemployed Christians. There should be no passive Christians. There should be nobody who comes to church just to recharge their batteries in order to be able to walk out the door and live life the way they want.

**In Biblical community** men and women don't come just to *be* served but to serve because Jesus didn't come to *be* served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45.) YES — Biblical community involves *receiving* ministry — but *receiving* ministry is intended to grow us and move us to *giving* ministry.

**<sup>6</sup>According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.**

**I need you to hear me here** — ALL of us need to receive ministry because ALL of us are in the process of being made whole. ALL Of us are in the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus. Some of us have come out of draining — debilitating — even destructive situations. You need to know that it is SAFE for you to SIT and be restored. What I'm about to say is for those who are in a state of spiritual health — from new born believers to senior saints. You might have a few bumps and bruises — maybe you're walking with a slight limp — but you're still running the race. If you come and don't serve, you're resisting the will of the Holy Spirit for you because the Bible tells us that he gives His gifts to EACH of us.



His gifts, coupled with your life experiences, are crucial to the other believers God has placed in your life.

***Ephesians 4:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

***Ephesians 4:16 (NKJV)** <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

***Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)** <sup>16</sup>He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

If the mercy of God has moved you to present yourself as a living sacrifice **you will not** see the community of believers you belong to as existing to take care of you (and there are times when that needs to happen) — **instead** you will step out and say: “*Show me what I can do.*”

FOR TIME OF SILENCE BEFORE COMMUNION

COMMUNION = remembering the mercy of God that moves us to present our lives to Him as a living sacrifice

BIBLICAL COMMUNITY is an every-member ministry. Are you seeking yours?

Ask the Lord: What do you have for me? What do you really want to do with this life that I present to you as a living Sacrifice.

FOR AFTER COMMUNION

Remember: you are surrounded by brothers and sisters who are  
seeking the same Lord

children of the same Father

on the same mission

Pray for them (right now) that they will know what the Lord has for them as they present themselves to Him as a living sacrifice