



Session 1 - Christ Not Causes

## What Does a Surrendered Life Look Like?

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls  
to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds.<sup>1</sup>

—*Jesus of Nazareth*

Most Christians are very confused about the meaning of surrender in their relationship to God. They simply don't know how it works. They think it's something noble and virtuous that only a few people "far more spiritual than them" are ever able to achieve.

But totally committed Christians are just ordinary people who are now experiencing God's biggest and best blessings. Moreover, they're not totally committed because they are super virtuous or spiritual. Rather, they are totally committed because they are wise, logical, and understand how life really works. But the question remains, what exactly does it look like to be totally committed? What does surrender look like in our relationship with God, and how does it work?

### The Answer = Romans 12:1

Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of *God's mercy*, to offer your bodies as  
living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

—Romans 12:1 NIV

PAGE 1

I would like to make a couple of observations about this verse that I think will be very helpful. First, look at the structure of the passage. Notice that there is a command, a motivation, and a reason. The command is that you offer your body. The motivation is the mercy of God. And the reason is that it's the spiritual act of worship that God desires.

Second, I'd like you to understand the context of this passage. We're looking at Romans 12 and that means there are eleven chapters prior to this verse. In fact, I would highly encourage you to grab an iced tea or a cup of coffee and sit down sometime this week and quickly read the first eleven chapters of Romans in one sitting. It's one of the clearest explanations of all that God has done for us anywhere in the Bible. Below I've given you a brief outline of these first eleven chapters so that you can see that chapter 12 is in fact our response to the great things that God has done for you and me. The command to "offer your body" to God is not some way to gain His approval; it's our way of saying thank you to God in the light of all He has done for us.

ROMANS 1-11: GOD'S MESSAGE OF GRACE				
	CHAPTERS 1-3	CHAPTERS 4-5	CHAPTERS 6-8	CHAPTERS 9-11
TOPIC	Man's Problem	God's Solution	God's Provision	God's Faithfulness
THEOLOGY	Sin	Salvation	Sanctification	Sovereignty
STATE	Lost	Found	Empowered	Chosen
ACTION	Confession	Faith	Reckon	Praise

In this brief outline, chapters 1–3 identify the problem of all mankind—we have sinned and fallen short of -God's glory. Then, in chapters 4 and 5, we see -God's solution to our problem by sending Jesus, God the Son, to die on the cross in our place to pay for our sins. We received this free gift of salvation by faith. In chapters 6–8, the Apostle Paul then describes how this new supernatural lifestyle is lived out. The Christian life that He describes in this section is not difficult, it's impossible. Only the Spirit of God dwelling in us has the ability to manifest the presence and the

power of Christ in and through our mortal bodies. Finally, in chapters 9–11, we learn that God not only has a plan for our lives but has a future plan to fulfill all of His promises to the nation of Israel with regard to the throne of David and the land promised to Abraham.

What I want you to see, more than anything else, is that chapter 12 is looking back over the landscape of eleven chapters of God's great love and grace toward you. There's nothing that you or I can do to ever earn God's favor. But we are commanded to say thank you and to respond to God's grace in such a way that we get the very best from Him and He gets glory through us. That's the subject of Romans 12:1.

Now let's analyze Romans 12:1 together so we can understand what surrender or total commitment really looks like.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of -God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

—Romans 12:1 NIV

Check out what God commands in verse 1:

### ***The Command*** = “offer your bodies as living sacrifices”

The command here is in a tense of the verb in Greek that tells us this offering of our bodies takes place at a specific point in time. This passage is not addressing how a person enters into a saving relationship with God; but how, after already knowing Him personally, we give God what He wants the most as our spiritual act of worship.

In my case, I'd been a Christian about two and a half years before I offered my body (life) in an act of total commitment and surrender to Christ. I was desperately struggling in my Christian life. My words said one thing, but my lifestyle communicated something totally contrary to being an authentic follower of Christ. I knew the truth but was not living it!

It was at this point that I found myself at Penn State University, where a parachurch organization put on a conference to teach college students how to take “next steps” in their spiritual growth. I took a two-hour seminar on the life of Abraham, in which we learned how God develops us in His school of faith.

I sat in the back of the room, examining my spiritual journey through the lens of the life of Abraham. It was clear that God valued faith far more than religious performance or even dutiful morality in Abraham's life. As the centrality of faith emerged in that seminar, God captured my attention when we made it to Genesis 22. There I heard the story of Abraham taking his only son, Isaac, up onto the mountain to sacrifice him to God. This boy had become the most important thing in Abraham's life—this twelve-year-old boy held all the promises that God had made to Abraham. Isaac was the promised son God had finally given to Abraham and now God was asking Abraham to literally give him back.

Abraham gets up early in obedience and takes the boy to the mountain, prepares an altar made out of rock, arranges sticks and wood for the fire, places Isaac up on the altar, and raises the knife, preparing to plunge it into his son's chest, when he hears a voice from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:11–12, paraphrased).

Idols come in many forms. For Abraham, his son Isaac had become a point of affection that was en route to destroying his relationship with God. God demanded that Abraham surrender the most precious thing in his life—not to take it away from him, but to make sure he got the very best. As I sat in the back of that seminar, I realized that we all have Isaacs in our lives. For me, it was basketball and a beautiful girl I was dating at the time.

If God wanted to do anything in my life, it was fine with me as long as He didn't touch my two areas. Trusting Christ as my Savior and living out my faith in general was acceptable; but these two areas were "off-limits" to God's supervision or control. In reality, they were idols in my life that gave me my sense of identity and security.

In the back of that room I realized that I was at a crossroads in my life. Jesus was to be Lord "of all" or He was not Lord "at all." For the first time in my life I realized that far from withholding something good from me, surrender was God's channel through which His biggest and best blessings would flow into my life.

I finally realized that I needed to take "my Isaacs" up to the mountain and sacrifice them. It was a sober moment and not one that I took lightly. With empty palms in prayer in the back of that room I offered basketball, my future wife, my future career, and all that I was in a fresh, specific way as a living sacrifice to God. I knew the implications and I realized this offering of myself would need

to be renewed day by day (as it says, a living sacrifice). I was taking the step of Lordship, which meant a radical departure from the norm—a life of holiness.

That day, in that room, on the campus of Penn State University, was the most pivotal moment in my Christian life. Despite many fears and much uncertainty I offered “all of me” to Him. Future decisions concerning every area of my life have been dramatically impacted since that day. I predecided to do “whatever God directed,” trusting by faith He would always have my best in mind. Easy?! No way! Smart?! Yes! My journey from being a cultural Christian to an authentic follower of Jesus Christ began on that historic day in Pennsylvania.

It is this step that is sorely missing in the body of Christ today. When I’ve had the opportunity to teach this passage on the radio and TV to nearly a million listeners, hundreds of people have e-mailed their responses telling us that they never understood what it meant to wholly surrender to Christ. Then they shared incredible stories of how taking this step brought about a transformation in their life—second only to their salvation. Like the merchant who sold all that he had to buy that one great pearl, or John the engineer who sold all that he had to get the twenty-two golden coins, so God calls you and me in gratitude to Him to offer our lives as a living and holy sacrifice. The question I have for you is: Have you ever done that?

### ***The Motivation*** = “the mercy of God”

If you’re wondering, why should I surrender everything to God? Romans 12:1 says, “Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. You see, our motivation to surrender is not to earn anything. Our motivation is not to gain brownie points in heaven or stars on the great refrigerator in the sky; but it’s a response to His mercy. It’s grasping that our sins have been removed, that we are forgiven, loved, adopted, filled with the Spirit, and heaven-bound forever and ever. This is what motivates us to say thank you in the way that God requires. Saying thank you to God’s grace and mercy is saying, “I believe that You are so loving and good that I will give You what You ask for . . . and that’s me! All of me—holding nothing back.”

## ***The Reason*** = “our spiritual act of worship”

Why is it so important that I totally surrender to God? The last portion of this verse tells us. It is our spiritual act of worship. In other words, it’s what God really wants. It’s not your church attendance, your money, your rule keeping, your morality, or your religious activities: it’s you.

God wants a relationship with you. He wants your heart. He wants to love you and be loved by you. He’s not looking for little religious soldiers that will fulfill a cause for Him. He’s looking for sons and daughters who so trust in His goodness and His love that they would with reckless abandon say, “All that I am and all that I have belongs to You. I love You, Lord!”

This is not primarily an emotional decision, but a logical one. The word that is translated as “spiritual,” as in a spiritual act of worship, is an interesting one. The word *logizomai* literally means “that which is reasonable or logical.” However, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word came to be synonymous with offerings that priests made in the Temple—i.e., that which is a spiritual offering. As a result, translators are divided about how to capture the full meaning. The NIV translates the word as “spiritual” (to give weight to what God really wants), while the NASB translates it as “reasonable” (to give weight to the more literal meaning of the word—which is logical, smart, and well reasoned), i.e., surrender is logical and smart in light of what God has done for us in Christ.

The “Kingdom of God,” as Jesus puts it, is about grasping what real life is all about and learning that the only way to gain it is by giving yourself away. “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). This is the normal expectation of Jesus for every believer. This step of Lordship is what opens the door to actually experiencing the power and presence of Jesus in a supernatural, transformational manner.

In the words of G. K. Chesterton, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found and not tried.”

You see, so much of what we have heard and been taught in years past misses or omits this Romans 12:1 call to surrender. Sincere yet uninformed Christians have been led to believe that the Christian life is little more than praying a prayer and attending some religious services. Authentic

followers experience God's power and presence in supernatural, powerful ways because God has the freedom to do this only in those who are fully His.

## **IT'S YOUR MOVE—Become a Romans 12 Christian**

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to experience God's power in this way? Do you want to know how to pull the trigger on a decision like this? How to you turn your intellectual belief into a living reality? Stay with me for the next session.

**T**hink—What or who might be the “Isaac” in your life?

**R**eflect—What do you fear the most about releasing your “Isaac” (an idol) and allowing Christ to be Lord of your life? What might be the underlying issues? Security? Significance? Control?

**U**nderstand—What past experiences with family or other people make it hard for you to trust God? Could past abandonment, neglect, or divorce be unresolved issues making it hard to trust God?

**S**urrender—Why not take a moment right now to talk with God about what you are thinking, how you feel, and ask Him to direct your next steps.

**T**ake Action—Write on a piece of paper or in your journal the people or things that might be an “Isaac” in your life. There is something powerful and clarifying about seeing in print deep issues that are sometimes difficult or painful to process.

**M**otivation—Download the full-length audio message on *How to Give God What He Wants the Most* at **LivingontheEdge.org/r12**.

**E**ncourage Someone—Tell someone you care about to check out r12 online (LivingontheEdge.org/r12). Introduce them to God's dream for their life.