

Spiritual Discipline: Sacrifice

October 2016

The spiritual discipline of sacrifice is allowing ourselves to give up the security we build for ourselves so that we learn to rely on God for what we need. Most of us think of the spiritual discipline of sacrifice as giving something up, but we have to look inside ourselves to see why we are sacrificing something in the first place. There is a difference between sacrifice and frugality. When we give up gaining something we don't have, that's being frugal. We watch our money and our resources carefully when we're frugal. Sacrifice doesn't mean not getting something, it means giving up what we already have to please God. Sacrifice means taking ourselves outside our comfort zone and learning to rely on God for what we need.

In some cases, sacrifice is an act of obedience to God. Sometimes God asks us to sacrifice something important to us in order for us to learn that there is something greater beyond it (Luke 5:1-11). Other times we need to practice the spiritual discipline of sacrifice so that we learn to rely on God's provisions rather than the things we have built for ourselves (Mark 10:21). By not relying on our own resources, we learn to rely on God. It's part of submitting to God.

However, sacrifice doesn't always mean giving up everything we have. Sometimes it's just about keeping things simple. Throughout the history of Christendom, we have heard of individuals giving up their earthly possessions for God. Yet, for many of us sacrifice may mean giving up a relationship, a preference, an activity, or our time. By sacrificing we lose a sense of security in ourselves and develop a sense of security in God.

Just because we may want to develop a strong spiritual discipline of sacrifice doesn't mean we can just give up on our responsibilities. When we commit ourselves to certain things, whether they be projects or financial obligations, we need to fulfill our commitments. God does not ask us to sacrifice at the expense of others, nor is he pleased by irresponsibility. Using God as an excuse to get out of things is not pleasing to Him. Like everything God places in our hands, the spiritual discipline of sacrifice must be used responsibly.

There are certain things we can do to develop the spiritual discipline of sacrifice:

- **Clear up the "ownership" issue.** Psalm 100:3 and I Corinthians 6:19-20 make it very clear that God owns everything - including us. We begin by laying down our lives (1 John 3:16, Revelation 12:11). It is easier to sacrifice when we have the proper perspective on our possessions.
- **Examine what makes you secure.** What things are you holding onto as a safety blanket? Are you protective of your time or clinging to unfruitful friendships? If your security is found in some "thing," it may be something worth sacrificing.
- **Look beyond your "stuff."** Maybe you are not being called to sacrifice your possessions at all. Jesus also called followers to give up their expectations, their desires for success, and even their prejudices (against the poor, the Samaritans, children, and prostitutes, just to name a few). Is God calling you to sacrifice your worldview, your political ideologies, your desires, your idols, and your insecurities?
- **Remember the ultimate sacrifice.** When we question sacrificing our time, our things, our money or relationships, we need to remember that God made the ultimate sacrifice. (Phil. 2:3-8) When we exit our comfort zone and start to wonder if the sacrifice is worth it, reflecting on all that Jesus' sacrificed for us eases our discomfort.
- **Do your "home-work."** Sacrifice is one of the more difficult disciplines because it strikes at the very heart of our sin-struggle - selfishness. The best place to measure your success with this discipline is in your home. How are you doing at: Living simply? Serving your family? Sacrificing your TV or hobby time to create space for God to move in your life?

Throughout the month of October, live out the spiritual discipline of Sacrifice by working through the items below and discussing them with your 222 Group.

- In going through the list above, what is the area of sacrifice you need to work on the most? Share this with your 222 Group.
- Prayerfully read Matthew 16:21-24. Meditate on the cost and reward of sacrifice.
- As you begin practicing the discipline of sacrifice, be aware of specific times you find it difficult to sacrifice and those times when you successfully implemented this discipline. What difference did it make in your daily life? Share with your 222 Group some of these experiences.