

Spiritual Worship

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[0 : 0 0] Lord, we thank you so much that we can open up the Bible and that you speak to us through it. Lord, we pray for this time now that as we look at Romans 12, Lord, that our hearts would be softened, that your spirit would be working in this place, transforming us.

Lord, I pray that each of us would be encouraged, challenged, renewed, that we'd be different people as we leave this place because we've encountered the living God tonight. Amen.

Well, there were two girls in Year 12. Both girls were very bright. Both girls were doing exactly the same subjects at exactly the same school.

But one girl was happy and one girl was sad. The happy girl was happy because she'd gotten a scholarship to go to the school that she was at. She was so thrilled to be there because her parents couldn't have afforded to send her there otherwise.

She chose subjects that she loved to study and because of that she excelled in everything that she did. She was so grateful to be at that school. But the sad girl was sad because her parents had told her that she was going to go to that school for Year 12.

[1 : 1 6] And they'd taken her away from her friends that she'd been at school with since prep. And because she was a shy girl, she didn't have, I don't know, the ability, I suppose, to make friends really quickly.

Her parents also chose the subjects that she was going to do. They weren't subjects that she particularly liked. But they also told her that unless she gets an ENTER score of above 99, that they wouldn't pay for her uni tuition.

Both girls sat their final exams. They waited anxiously for their results. Finally, both results came in. Both girls got exactly the same score.

99.75. One girl jumped for joy because she couldn't believe what she'd achieved in Year 12. And the other girl broke down and cried because she was so relieved that she'd met her parents' expectations.

Two girls at the same school, both studying the same subjects, received the same results. But one was happy and one was sad. One was full of joy and the other was full of stress.

[2 : 2 9] One was driven by gratitude and the other was driven by fear. Well, tonight, friends, I want to call you to action. I want to call you to something that might appear even more daunting than sitting your final exams in Year 12.

I want to call you to spiritual worship. I want to call you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. I want to call you to give your all, to hold nothing back, to go hard or to go home.

We've been looking at different types of or aspects of worship over the past four weeks. You've had time to look at different parts of the Bible. You've had time to reflect on what Megan has said. Well, now it's time to make a decision.

Will you worship or won't you? Don't worry, team. I'm going to outline exactly what you're signing up for. I'm not going to make you make any rash decisions.

I'm not going to turn the lights down and call you down the front. I'm going to make it quite clear so that you can decide whether you're ready to worship. There are really two parts to spiritual worship.

[3 : 38] The first one can be found in verse 1. I encourage you to have your Bibles open at chapter 12 if you have not already done so. The first part is to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

There's a nice list. There's a nice list here of things about being a living sacrifice.

It's got a definition up here. Definition of sacrifice. The act of offering something to pay homage, especially the ritual slaughter of an animal or person. Well, Jesus has already been our sacrifice, so we've got that part covered.

Maybe this one. Giving over something of great value for the sake one considered to have greater value. Okay, that's the kind of idea we're looking for. This idea of a sacrifice is giving something up.

In this case, giving things over to God. Okay, being a living sacrifice can be exercised in the following way. Okay. Love your brothers and sisters even when they bash you up.

[4 : 41] Always do what your parents say when they say it. Never gossip with your classmates. Never talk back to your teacher. Don't put other people down. Don't wear clothes that are too revealing. Don't think bad thoughts about anyone. Don't be jealous of anyone.

Don't get drunk. When you're 18, don't drink at all. Don't take drugs. Treat people with respect. Don't randomly kiss guys and girls at parties. Don't sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Don't even think about sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Don't take revenge against anyone who hurts you.

Never get angry with anyone. Don't be obsessed with how you look. Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't cheat on your homework. Always do the best you can in everything. Don't be greedy. Spend an hour in the morning reading your Bible and praying. Spend an hour at night reading your Bible and praying. Give 20% of all your money to the church.

I can't keep going. I'll just see if I can summarise this. There's about 25 pages here and over a thousand things to do.

I think it basically means everything. I don't think there's any part of your life that is not included in this list. So there you go. This is spiritual worship being a living sacrifice.

[5 : 42] It's everything. Every single part of you. Everything you think. Everything you do. Everything you say. God wants everything. Well, that clears up the living sacrifice part of spiritual worship.

Now, the next part. Do not be conformed any longer to the world. Or be transformed. This is in verse 2. The use of the word world here probably refers to things that are opposed to God.

The ways of the world that are opposite to the ways of God. Don't give in to them. But rather, be transformed. Be changed. Don't go along with the crowd. Don't be the same as them.

Unless they're going the same way as you are, which is towards God. And that's okay. But if only it was that simple. If only it was as simple to do as it is to say.

But being human, I know what it's like to have a battle going on inside. One part of you knows what is right. And the other part just really couldn't care less.

[6 : 45] When it comes down to it, we don't always want to give our entire lives over to God. And we're happy keeping some things under our own control. We don't always want to be different to our friends.

That's hard work. Being the odd one out. Being the Christian of the group. Sometimes we just want to fit in. And even if we do want to live our lives for God.

And we do want to surrender every single part. We just can't. We've tried and tried to get it right. But we just keep stuffing up. The biggest problem with this tension.

With this war that's taking place inside of us. Is the guilt that comes along with us. See, if our friends. I know. Have a big fight with their parents. And are rude to them.

If they cheat on the exam. If they go to a party and get smashed. They don't really care that much. But if we do that. If we have a big fight with our parents.

[7 : 41] If we cheat on the exam. If we go to a party and get a little bit smashed. We have this wave of guilt that comes over us. Our guilty conscious. The Holy Spirit.

Initially it might just start like this. You shouldn't have done that. You're a Christian. But sometimes we get worse thoughts than this.

And these are not always from God. It's our mind getting a bit carried away. But sometimes we think things like. Don't you know that Jesus expects a lot more of you?

You're supposed to be a living sacrifice. Look at you. You never live up to the commitment that you made when you decided to follow Jesus. You are not worthy to be his follower.

How can you approach God now? You've slipped up once again. Didn't you just repent of that sin this morning? And already you've stuffed up. God can't possibly take you seriously.

[8 : 37] It's easy for us to read this passage and think. It's just another passage that's going to tell me what to do. It's another passage that tells me how to live my life.

And you might be tired. You might be tired of rules and commands. And you might be tired of feeling guilty. The problem with this is that these thoughts stop us from praying.

Because we're too ashamed to confess our sins. It stops us from reading the Bible in case we come across a passage that tells us that we've been doing something wrong. It stops us from engaging at church because we don't want to listen to what God has to say to us.

Sometimes it stops us from coming to church altogether. It stops us from having the joy that God wants to give us. But essentially, it stops us from worshipping.

It stops us from making God the object of our worship. And we decide to live our own way. This is exactly the place where Satan wants us to be. Too ashamed to approach the throne.

[9 : 45] Too tired to change our lives. However, the good thing about this passage is that although it calls you to the most radical commitment to worship, to give your entire life over to God, it gives you the most empowering reason to do so.

In verse 1, you'll see it. By the mercies of God. That's the reason. That's the motivation for giving your all. We read this verse often by itself.

It's a good part in Romans. You hit chapter 12 and it's like, woohoo. Sometimes we take it out of context. We forget that there have been 11 chapters beforehand outlining the mercies of God.

We forget that this worship is a response to what Paul has been building on for 11 chapters. He knows that we can't be living sacrifices without a good reason, without a good motivation.

In fact, if he'd only given us three or four chapters, it wouldn't be enough. He gave us 11 chapters explaining so that we would be motivated. One of the reasons why we find it so hard to be living sacrifices is because we forget the why.

[10 : 57] We forget the why. And when we forget the why or we don't understand the why, we start living for the wrong reasons. The why would drive your behaviour.

The why would drive you to worship. There were two girls in year 12. Both girls were very bright. Both girls were doing exactly the same subjects at school.

But one girl was happy and the other was sad. Two girls at the same school, doing the same subjects, received the same result. But one was happy and one was sad.

One full of joy, one full of stress. One driven by gratitude. And the other driven by fear. See, both girls appeared to get the same result. But one did it, overflowing from a heart of joy.

And the other one was just terrified. If you're a Christian and you forget or you don't understand the mercies of God, then you'll be driven by the wrong thing.

[12:01] You can still live like a Christian. You can still go to church on Sundays. You can still go to Bible study. You can even read your Bible every day and pray. You can still even obediently obey the Ten Commandments or whatever you're supposed to do as a Christian.

But unless you understand the mercies of God, you are doing all these things for the wrong reason. There's a song that I love. It's called Calvary.

And the chorus says, the words are, Lest we forget Jesus paid the price. Lest we forget his awesome sacrifice. I will remember Jesus nailed to the tree.

I will remember he was dying for me. I know that you guys know the story of the cross. I know you've heard it all before. I know that you know that Jesus died for you.

That he was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for you. But so often we don't know that reality in our daily lives. And this is why.

[13:00] When I was in year six, I probably did the naughtiest thing that I'd ever done to that point in my life. I ran away from school. Not deliberately or with any rebellious intent.

It was casual clothes day, you see. And my dad had dropped my sister and myself off. Not Kelly, my little sister, at school. And we were in school uniform. So to save ourselves the embarrassment and the ridicule that we would get from all, well, the entire school really, I decided that being the older sister, I'd take it upon myself to go home and pick up some clothes.

It was fine. It was only 20 to 9. And school didn't start for another 20 minutes. The only problem was, which I didn't realise at the time, was that home was about 25 minutes walk away and 25 minutes back.

Well, being the persuasive person that I am, I convinced one of my schoolmates to come with me on our adventure. And we got back to school just, well, just before recess really.

So it was quite late. Lucky for us, we didn't have our year six teacher for the rest of the day after recess. We had double history, then double art. All different teachers. So I'm just thinking, if we can make it to a recess, we'll be fine.

[14:13] Unfortunately, history was cancelled on that day. The only time it was cancelled the entire year. So we had a choice to make. Either we could stand in the locker rooms, like illegal immigrants trying to hide from the teachers, or we could go back into class.

But we chose the latter. But it was okay, because we had this great plan. I walked in first. And I said, the teacher says, Lisa, where have you been? And I said, the dentist.

In comes my friend. It was okay, because she was supposed to say the hairdresser. But she didn't. She started crying. And she told the truth. And I'm like, oh, that'd be right.

Anyway, you can imagine the punishment that followed. I got my house captaincy badge taken away from me for two weeks. But there was nothing compared to my dad. When he found out that I'd lied, as well as run away from school, he wasn't quite so lenient on me.

I won't go into details. But I had to expect this. Because this is the way the world works. If you do something wrong, you get punished. And if you do something right, you get rewarded.

- [15 : 19] It's normal. It's true. Sometimes there are exceptions to the rule. But if you work hard, you'll do well. And if you don't, you won't. Generally, that's pretty standard.
- But what this does is, it stops us from understanding the idea of getting something for free. We don't understand that. Because that's not the way the world works.
- And that's not what we've been taught since we were little kids. And this runs over into the way that we think about the cross. We recognise that Jesus died for our sins.
- And that we're forgiven. But we don't understand the grace that drives that. We don't understand that it's because of nothing that we have done.
- And therefore, we don't understand that no matter what we do, good or bad, it can never change our state before God.
- [16 : 15] Our forgiven state. Our perfect state. This is the mercy of God. It doesn't matter if you commit the same sin a thousand times.
- It doesn't matter if you commit the same sin every day until you die. It doesn't matter if you've had 15,000 quiet times this week or how many good works you've done for God.
- It does not change your state before him. It's the grace of God. It's a free gift by nothing you have done, but by everything he has done for you.
- Do you know tonight that if you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, that he is completely forgiving you for everything that you've done in the past and everything that you will do in the future?
- Do you know that? Do you know that there is nothing that you can do right now to make God love you more than he does or to make he love you less than he does?
- [17 : 18] Do you know that? Do you know that God knows that you can't live a perfect life? He knows that.
- Do you know that? That's why he sent Jesus. Do you know that once you've brought your sin before Jesus, that there's no need to feel guilty or ashamed anymore?
- Those feelings aren't from God because you are completely set free. Do you know that? Do you know that? Do you know that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases?
- His mercies never come to an end. They are new every single morning. Do you know that? Stop believing anything else.
- Stop believing that somehow you can earn God's forgiveness. Stop believing the lies that Satan tells you, the lies that you tell yourself, the lies that the world tells you.
- [18 : 28] Believe the truth. It's by God's grace alone that you are saved. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to understand the mercies of God.
- They are at the very heart of Christianity. They are what drives you to live for him. That they are so hard to grasp because there's nothing in this world that can even compare to how amazing they are.
- But it means when God looks at you, he sees you, his beautiful child, his child that he knit together within your mother's womb.
- A child that he loves so much that he was willing to die to set you free. A child that is covered in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. So why should we be living sacrifices?
- Why should we no longer conform to this world? Why should we choose to worship tonight and the rest of our lives? Because this is the only reasonable response to the immense mercies that God has shown you.
- [19 : 38] This word spiritual in verse 1 can also be translated as reasonable. It's the only response that makes sense. So you can take the list and you can throw it away.

Spiritual worship is not about a set of rules. It's not about obeying a list of things that you've written down. This is being bound by the law.

Spiritual worship is our entire lives living in response to what God has done for us. The end of this passage gives us some really practical advice how to make this a reality in our lives.

It says, Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what the will of God is what is good and acceptable and perfect. Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

This transformation is not just about education. Knowing more won't necessarily lead to change. It's not about what you know it's about how you think.

[20 : 50] So often we fix our eyes on our friends but they aren't necessarily always living for Jesus. Sometimes we fix our eyes on the TV actually a lot but there's not always things on there that are edifying.

Actually we fix our eyes on anything and everything else but they don't always point us to Jesus. But all these things shape the way that we think. All these things shape the way that we live.

My dad used to say and rightly so that you become like the people you hang around. So how many of you know that if you hang out with Agent PJ for just a little while you become like him in every way.

Well, little ways anyway. If you want to become like someone you have to fix your eyes on them. Hang around them. Transformation occurs by the Holy Spirit as you fix your eyes on Jesus.

If you want to become like Jesus put all your attention on him fix your eyes on him and never take your gaze away from him. See, reading the Bible is not just about ticking another thing off the list of things you have to do.

[22 : 05] It's about looking at Jesus. It's about being transformed. And praying isn't just another thing that you should do if you're a Christian. It's about looking at Jesus. It's about being transformed.

It's the same with all other spiritual disciplines. They're designed to bring you closer to Jesus. They're designed to bring your focus back on him and away from yourself and away from your friends and away from the TV and away from your pile of DVDs and away from the world.

Well, I want to call you to action tonight. I want to call you to something that may appear even more daunting than your Year 12 exams.

I want to call you to spiritual worship. I want to call you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God. I want to call you to give your all hold nothing back to go hard or to go home.

But I want to call you to do this because of God's mercy towards you. I want to call you to do this out of a heart of thankfulness for what Jesus has done.

[23 : 15] I want to call you to be like one of the Year 12 girls who recognised the opportunity she had as so special. I want to call you to fix your eyes on Jesus and be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Will you do it? Will you worship? Will you worship tonight? Will you worship forever because of what Jesus has done for you?

We're going to stand in a moment and sing our next song the song that Megan sang for us before. In this song there's a real chance for you to respond to Jesus and say I'm going to worship you.

I'm going to take up the call that you have upon my life. The pre-chorus and chorus say when you call I won't refuse each new day again I'll choose there is no one else for me none but Jesus crucified to set me free now I live to bring him praise.

If they're your words tonight if that's what you want to say to him please sing with us and don't sing if you don't mean that from your heart but please use this as a prayer. Amen. Thank you.