

## VIRTUE 13

# SACRIFICE

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

—Matthew 16:24-25

Common definitions of *sacrifice* will both underestimate and poorly define the concept, at least when the term is considered from a biblical perspective. Let’s start with a common definition from dictionaries. *Sacrifice* means “The offering of animal, plant, or human life or of some material possession to a deity, as in propitiation or homage.”<sup>32</sup> Defining sacrifice in the Christian sense of the word requires a more complicated description. Let’s take a look at the five principles of sacrifice provided by Ed Rickard.<sup>33</sup>

### PRINCIPLE 1: SOME SACRIFICE IS NO SACRIFICE

In Malachi 1:7-8, God explains to the priests that He is less than pleased with their halfhearted sacrifice:

You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, “How have we defiled you?” By saying that the Lord’s table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you? says the Lord Almighty.

How many times do we offer our best to our employers but leave the leftovers for God? Surely we should give our best in both arenas.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: GOD WANTS ONLY ONE THING, AND THAT IS EVERYTHING**

Psalm 50:10 reminds us that God owns it all in the first place: “For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” God obviously knows that He owns it all, but what He wants from us is to acknowledge this fact and give it all back to Him. When Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple,” (Luke 14:26) He was simply saying that we need to value and prioritize our relationship with Christ *over all others*. He continues in this same passage by saying, “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (v. 27). Then He tells a story that illustrates if you are going to do anything significant with impact, you need to be “all in”:

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Or suppose a

king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:28-33).

### **PRINCIPLE 3: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SACRIFICE**

While God entrusts us with resources, gifts, and talents while we are here on Earth, we really do not own anything in the first place and have to turn it all in when we die. I remember painting my mom's house when I was a teenager and learning this fact in the most simplistic way. While I was painting her house, I felt like I was doing a noble act for her by sacrificing my time to do so. Then, while I was watching my hands and wrist flex with every brushstroke, it suddenly dawned on me that I could not even make this simple movement if God did not equip me to do so. What then was mine to sacrifice in the first place?

### **PRINCIPLE 4: IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO AVOID SACRIFICE**

Guess what? You are going to make a sacrifice someday—in fact, you are going to sacrifice it *all*. We get to play the game while on this earth, but the day comes for each of us when we get to “turn in all of the chips.” It is better to be a willing participant in the sacrificing process than a surprised one who played the game believing the chips belonged to them.

### **PRINCIPLE 5: SACRIFICE IS THE KEY TO BLESSING**

This final principle is the good news about sacrifice: If we give it all up, we gain what was not even ours in the first place and so much

more. This principle holds true when it comes to the most important thing—eternal life—as well as our lives here on Earth: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”<sup>34</sup> Consider these promises from Scripture that are given to those who sacrifice all and dedicate all to the Lord:

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:29-31).

Christ *voluntarily* emptied Himself of anything and everything that stood in the way of the glory and gain of His Father through Him. Our response is to sacrifice our pleasures, rights, privileges, possessions, expectations, and even our plans to the Lord. Next, let’s turn to an example of complete sacrifice made by a knight of old—a famous knight named Roland.

It was Saturday evening, August 15, 778 AD. On this hot summer night, French Prince Charlemagne marched his army through the dangerous Roncevaux Mountain Pass in the Pyrenees, completely unaware that he was leading his troops straight into an ambush. A large guerilla force of Basques (who were very familiar with the terrain) attacked Charlemagne's rearguard and began decimating the army, plundering their baggage wagons and stealing their gold.

Sizing up the situation and the odds, three of Charlemagne's most valiant knights, Egginhard (who was mayor of the palace), Anselmus (a high-ranking count), and Roland left their stations in the march and headed straight back to the rearguard to join the fight. Their goal was not to win the battle—for they knew they were far too outnumbered to pull off a victory that day. They fought knowing that the very best they could do was hassle the enemy for as long as possible to allow the others to escape. All three men died that day, but they saved thousands.

A knight's most honorable service is one of sacrifice—sacrifice of his or her time, talents, and treasure for the kingdom's sake and for others. The ultimate sacrifice was laid down by Christ, who gave His life for us. And even Christ recognized that the sacrifice of one's life is the greatest expression of love: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

While the greatest sacrifice may indeed be laying down our lives for others, there is a way to do this while still living to fight another day. The book of Isaiah provides a great contrast between fasting *our* way versus *God's* way. In fact, this passage explains that one of the best ways we can fast (and sacrifice) our life to God and for the benefit of others is by how we *live*:

## OUR WAY OF FASTING

"Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.



will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings (Isaiah 58:6-12).

This passage shows that a knight's way of sacrifice is by *using his strength on behalf of the weak*. Loosing the chains of injustice, untying the cords of bondage, setting the oppressed free—these are all feats of strength that are used on behalf of the needy. And sharing our food and providing the wanderer with shelter and clothing are acts of sacrifice. We are to spend ourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed—that is true sacrifice. Then God's blessing pours into our lives—breaking forth like the dawn, with the glory of the Lord as our rearguard, and our nights become like the noonday. God's guidance will be with us always, and he will strengthen our frame.

A final thought about sacrifice: Do not whine, complain, or boast about your sacrifice. The Lord sees your sacrifice, and He will reward you openly before men for what you have done in private (Matthew 6:1-6).

### **REFLECT**

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. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I

am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

—John 12:24-26

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

—Acts 20:23-24

Still another said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

—Luke 9:61-62

### *RESPOND*

1. How might God test us with making small sacrifices before He asks us to make larger ones?
2. How does making sacrifices show our faith and trust in God?
3. What are some of the circumstances where we should not make sacrifices, even if they might seem like good sacrifices to others?
4. How can we be sure that our heart is in the sacrifices we make?
5. If we sacrifice our strength on behalf of others, how can we be sure to fill ourselves back up again to be ready for new opportunities to serve?