

Fully Devoted

Romans 12:1-2

Children's Message - God wants Everything

We have something special for the kids today - as you come up front, we have a magical square for you called a Starburst. Who likes Starburst? Adults, the ushers have plenty more if any of you would like to participate in this little exercise.

Ok. Everyone take your Starburst and open the wrapper. But don't eat it! I want you to just **take a tiny nibble off the corner**. See what's the smallest bite you can make - and then show your little nibble to the person next to you.

Now wrap your Starburst back up. Close it all up. And put it in your pocket. Don't leave it there for the laundry. That would be a big mess.

Wasn't that great? Wasn't that sooooo tasty? Who likes Starburst? Of course! They are delicious. Maybe tomorrow you can have another little nibble. And the next day a little more. At that pace you can enjoy this one Starburst for a week - maybe a month! Wouldn't that be awesome? Who likes that plan?

No? Why not? I don't understand the problem... What do you want to do? Eat the whole thing? Why in the world? You think you need that much sugar right now, in the middle of a worship service? Do you think I've never had children and I don't know what sugar does to you monkeys?

Ok. Adults you can answer too. Who wants to eat a little more of your Starburst? All right... In a minute I'll let you eat a little more but for now, **listen to what Jesus said is the first and greatest commandment in the whole Bible**. I bet most of you already know this one.

“Jesus answered, **The most important commandment is**, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God **with a little bit of your heart and with a little bit of your soul and with a little bit of your mind and with a little bit of your strength.**” Mark 12:29-30

Now, Jesus said this is the first and greatest and most important rule in the whole Bible so we should really listen to it, right? We should be sure we understand what Jesus means and be sure we obey Him, right?

So what does it mean to love God with a little bit of your heart? Wait - are you saying that's not right? That's not what the Bible says? But it's on the screen? Do you think I would mess with you? Ok... Does this sound better?

“Jesus answered, **The most important is**, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God ***with half of your heart*** and with half of your soul and with half of your mind and with half of your strength.” Mark 12:29-30

Why don't you eat half of your Starburst. That's great, isn't it? Much better than a little bit. Then put the rest away and you can eat the rest tomorrow. Half is a lot, right? Would you say you give half of your heart, soul and mind to the Lord? That's good because it means you can keep the other half for whatever you want, right? You can still be halfway selfish and halfway mean and halfway disobedient to your parents. That was nice that Jesus gave us that half-rule, right?

No? Are you saying he didn't? Wait a minute... What did Jesus teach us? Oh... ALL?

“Jesus answered, **The most important is**, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God ***with ALL of your heart*** and with ALL of your soul and with ALL of your mind and with ALL of your strength.” Mark 12:29-30

Now hold on. All... ***That probably means MOST, right?*** God gets the biggest part of our heart, soul and mind, but we can still hold on to some little pieces, can't we? I mean - ALL? That seems a little radical, doesn't it? Can God really ask that much of us?

Ok. Open up your Starburst. How much of that candy do you want? Just a little bit, right? Well, you've had half. How much more could you want? You're reasonable kids and can exercise restraint, can't you? ***Wait... you guys want ALL of that piece of candy?*** Don't your parents feed you? Won't you get lunch in a little while?

All right. I'm a risk taker. **Go ahead and eat the whole thing.** But here's the lesson, ok? Just like you want that whole Starburst, ***when God looks at you, He doesn't just want a part of you - He wants everything.*** He wants you to give yourself COMPLETELY to Him - 100%. That's pretty amazing to think about, isn't it? It means there is no part of you that God does not love and accept. He wants you to be **HIS** - heart, soul, mind and body. 100%. All in. Whenever you have a piece of candy - and probably eat the whole thing - remember that's exactly what God wants from you - EVERYTHING!

We are in a series called Serve the Church. There are six parts to this series.

SERVE THE CHURCH

1. As Jesus Served us (John 13)
2. Fearless in Faith (Num. 13-14)

3. Fully Devoted (Rom 12:1-2)
4. United in Christ (3-5)
5. Using our Gifts (6-8)
6. To Love one another (9-13)

First we studied John 13, when Jesus washed his disciples' feet, and saw our example and our motivation to serve - **because Jesus served us**. He not only lived the life of a servant, devoting Himself to the needs of others, but He gave up his life on the cross as the suffering servant and Savior of the world. That is our model. When we say that we follow Jesus it means we follow him on the way to the cross, we wash feet as he washed feet. Jesus is our King and yet he knelt to serve us and wash away our sins. We serve our King and his desire and command is that we serve one another.

Two weeks ago Pastor Steven Barr of Cast Member Church at Disney World challenged us from Numbers 13-14 **to overcome fear with faith**. Identify your doubts and fears - face them head on and conquer them as you look to the One who is with you, who is greater than the one who is in the world.

Today we start **a four part sequence in Romans 12**. As those who are fully devoted to Christ, who are united in Him, our calling and commission is to use our gifts to love and serve one another. This is not a suggestion or optional elective. This is the clear and explicit command of our Lord. **You cannot claim to follow Jesus and then have no part with His church**. Listen to Jesus' own words:

Service in the Church is not Optional

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that *you also should do just as I have done to you.*" John 13:14-15

In case that one isn't clear enough, a few verses later Jesus said:

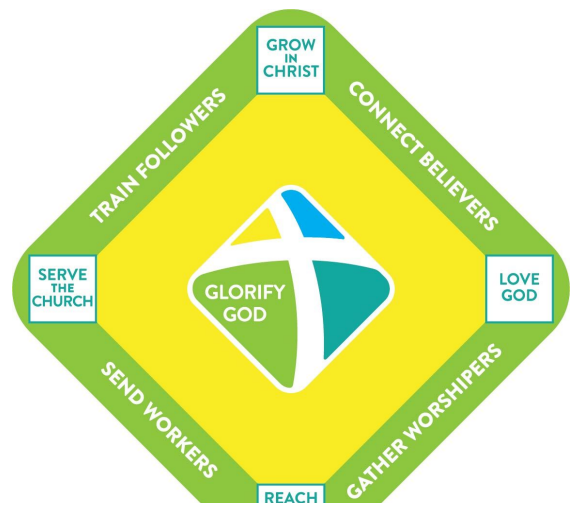
Service in the Church is a Clear Command

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, *you also are to love one another.* By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

Our mission at Oakwood is:

[Slide: strategy diamond w/ mission statement]

Our mission: *to transform ordinary people into fully devoted followers of Jesus.*



We have **a four step pathway to follow** that looks a lot like **a baseball diamond**. First base is to love God by gathering to worship Him. Second base is to grow in Christ, connected in fellowship with other believers. Third base is the focus of this series - the third step in our process of training followers of Jesus is mobilizing and equipping you to serve one another in this local church. And you cross home plate when you are sent out here in Tampa and elsewhere in the world as an ambassador of the Gospel.

At the center of this diagram is the cross of Jesus Christ. **The Gospel is our fuel. The glory of God is our goal.** We train followers of Jesus to love, grow, serve and reach out - all to bring glory, honor and praise to the only One who is worthy of it.

Romans 12:1-2 makes this connection for us. Our love for God and our worship of Him, fueled with gratitude by the Gospel, empowers us to lives of wholehearted service.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, **by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, **which is your spiritual worship**. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed** by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1-2

This passage calls us to **a threefold commitment**:

<p><u>We serve God:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. With Grateful Hearts2. With Devoted Bodies3. With Holy Minds	<p>I appeal to you therefore, brothers,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. by the mercies of God,2. to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...3. be transformed by the renewal of your mind. <p>Romans 12:1-2</p>
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This is what it means to worship and serve the Lord - we love him with ALL of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We hold nothing back - we give it all to Him. In the strongest possible terms Paul exhorts the believers in Rome “by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

What was a sacrifice in those days? Foregoing your daily trip to Starbucks? Writing a check for \$100? An hour a week serving in the Nursery? Listening to an annoying co-worker over lunch? A sacrifice was an animal - a sheep or goat or bull; a real, living animal. And when you presented that to the Lord at the temple, did you keep part of it for yourself? No! You gave it to the priest and he killed the animal and then burned it all up on the altar.

God is not calling us to half measures here. It is in or out. A total commitment - of heart, body and mind. Let's take each of those commitments in turn.

First, we are called to serve God with grateful hearts.

We serve God:

1. With Grateful Hearts

"I appeal to you **therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God**, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, **holy and acceptable to God**, which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1

THEREFORE is a very important word in the New Testament. When you see it you should ask, what is it THERE FOR? Paul is saying, in Romans 12, that the commands he is about to issue are based on chapters 1-11. We spent 12 weeks just in Romans 8 earlier this year, studying how Jesus' sacrifice set us free from the penalty and power of sin and how nothing can separate us from the love of God. Romans 5:8 sums it all up saying, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

THEREFORE, by the mercies of God - present your bodies as a living sacrifice. **Because of God's mercy and grace** - because we were sinners when Christ died for us, undeserving of His love and fully deserving of His wrath - **our hearts should be filled with gratitude.**

Christian believers should be the most grateful people on the planet. Consider what we deserve.

What we Deserve from God

- Romans 3:23 - "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- Romans 6:23 - "For the wages of sin is death."

Our culture is all about entitlement - as if everyone deserves the American Dream and if, for some reason, you are not as happy as you could possibly be, you should protest and fight for your rights. The Bible says exactly the opposite. What we deserve from God is not good things, blessing and happiness. **What every one of us deserves from God is His wrath**, condemnation and punishment.

Let's say you come into my office for some wisdom and encouragement. You come in to tell me about the abuse in your past. Your dad or your uncle or someone else who should have loved and protected you - instead they abused you and the pain of that betrayal still haunts you. I would listen and empathize and tell you how my heart breaks to hear of the pain you have been through.

But then, eventually, I would lead you to the Bible to answer the question: **What do you deserve?** Were you entitled to a happy childhood with all of the suburban amenities? Did God OWE that to you? Did God fail you by allowing you to suffer? Does your suffering prove that God does not love you?

Here is the principle from God's word:

Whatever evil you have experienced from a person, whatever suffering you have experienced in this life, you deserve infinitely worse from the holy God of heaven.
"Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? ... Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" Job 40:1,8 (NIV)

God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind because Job dared to challenge God for the suffering the Lord had allowed in his life. It was terrible suffering. But listen to God's words to Job: "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? ... Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" It is a dangerous thing to question the justice and wisdom of God. He is, after all, GOD.

Before we can appreciate the good news of the gospel we have to understand the bad news of our sin. ***None of us deserve happiness and blessing from God.*** All of us deserve His judgment and condemnation. Realizing that is the beginning of clear thinking about life and salvation. The wrong question is: Why is there so much evil and suffering in this world? The right question is: **Why isn't there MORE suffering in this world?** God has every right to pour out the full strength of His wrath in fiery judgment on everything and everyone down here.

That's why Romans 12:1 talks about the mercies of God. Salvation was an act of mercy. Jesus' death and resurrection were undeserved gifts of God's grace. We were not entitled to them. We could never have earned them or deserved them.

Appreciating that mercy should fill our hearts with gratitude.

We serve God:

1. With Grateful Hearts

"I appeal to you **therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,** to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, **holy and acceptable to God,** which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1

Have you ever received mercy from someone? It is a wonderful and humbling experience. I was in New York City for a college trip and came to a red light in my little Honda Civic. I moved up to turn right on a red light, just behind a large delivery truck. The truck pulled around the corner, making the right turn ahead of me, so I looked back to the left to see if I could go as well. Seeing there was time, but only barely, I gunned it and snapped my head back to the right to make my turn.

As you might have guessed, suddenly, there was that delivery truck dead smack in front of me. I slammed on my brakes and skidded right into his bumper. Clunk. The driver jumped out and came back to me. I thought - I'm dead! This tough New Yorker is going to pummel me - a college kid from Chicago... I just ran into his truck! But instead he came around - didn't even look at his truck, and said, "Hey man, you ok?" I stammered out, "I think so."

He glanced at my car and said, "Fuggetaboutit. Do you see this old beater of a truck? What's one more little scrape? Get goin'!" I breathed a huge sigh of relief and suddenly felt a deep sense of gratitude for delivery guys in New York City.

There are two other gospel references here in Romans 12:1, meant to put gratitude in our hearts. First, Paul calls us all brothers. Your footnote says that means "**brothers and sisters.**" All of us have been adopted - by grace, through the payment God made for us in Christ - into the family of God. We are sons and daughters of the King. Therefore we are brothers and sisters in Christ. That is a gift of God's mercy! We deserve to be left on the outside, orphans in the cold - but God has graciously taken us in and called us His own!

Second, when we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, **it is HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE** to God. What makes it holy and acceptable is not our effort or nobility or the magnitude of our faith. What makes our commitment holy is the blood of Christ. We present ourselves as a living sacrifice, because He presented Himself as a sacrifice for us. And His sacrifice, once for all, paid for all of our sins - past, present and future. His death and resurrection satisfied the righteous requirements of the Law for us - so that when God looks at you, He does not see you and your track record, He sees Jesus and His perfect track record.

Hear this, brothers and sisters - only because of His mercy, all because of Jesus, we present ourselves to God as those who are holy and acceptable. That's why He wants every bit of us - with nothing held back! Because Jesus paid it all - He paid the price to wash us completely clean and make us perfectly righteous.

With grateful hearts, we serve God. Second, we serve God with devoted bodies.

We serve God:

2. With Devoted Bodies

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual worship.*" Romans 12:1

The word **DEVOTED today means "I read my Bible."** "I like to pray." I'm devoted. We do "devotions." So when we say that our mission is to transform ordinary people into fully

devoted followers of Jesus, most of us have warm, fuzzy feelings about how we want to be more “devoted” to God - with our Bibles and notebooks and beach chairs and waves at the beach and flowing rivers and chirping birds.

But that is not the Biblical picture at all. We saw earlier that the analogy Paul uses here is one of SACRIFICE: an animal that has its throat slit, blood poured out and bodie consumed with fire on an altar. I don't see any warm fuzzies in that.

The other Bible meaning for the word “devoted” is also from the Old Testament. When Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and into the promised land, the first fortified city they encountered was Jericho. After they marched around the city seven times on the seventh day:

“Joshua said to the people, ‘Shout, for the Lord has given you the city. **And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction...**But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it.’”
Joshua 6:16-18

This may sound severe to our fragile modern ears, but it was God's clear directive as the nation of Israel marched in to conquer the land of Canaan. In some battles, as was the ancient custom, the soldiers were allowed to keep some plunder for themselves. Risk battle, gain a reward if you win. But in other battles, God was clear that the plunder was His. **Everything from the conquest was to be DEVOTED to destruction.** The whole city of Jericho was to be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord - utterly destroyed, nothing held back.

There were important reasons for this direction related to the holiness of God and the idolatry of the Canaanites. But for our purposes today we should simply note what the word **DEVOTED** means. **It means given over completely to the Lord.** It was represented by everything captured in battle being piled up and burned - totally consumed. Devoted.

So you can choose which image you like better: an animal sacrifice, slaughtered and laying on an altar to be burned up; or the plunder from war to be given entirely up to the Lord - destroyed as an offering of praise to the holy, almighty God of Israel.

We serve God:

2. With Devoted Bodies

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**” Romans 12:1

This is what worship is all about: giving ourselves completely to the Lord - holding nothing back from Him. Just as God gave the victory at Jericho, knocking the walls down - so God has given us the victory in Christ. He did all the work and asks that we give Him all the worship. With hearts filled with gratitude, we present our bodies to Him as a living sacrifice.

Notice the plural and singular here. We, corporately, together present our BODIES. But we present them as a single, unified living sacrifice. One holy and acceptable offering for a merciful and holy God. That is our spiritual act of worship. That is our reasonable service to the God who has served and loved us.

Is *your life* DEVOTED to the Lord? Do you belong to God 100%? Have you given everything over to Him?

When I meet with people I like to draw pictures. One of my favorites is a simple line down the middle of the paper. And I ask two questions about it:

1. Have you made a decisive break with your old life?	2. Have you made a decisive commitment to Jesus Christ?
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Can you see a before and after in your life? A time before Jesus was Lord and a dramatic difference after you gave your life to Him? The process of committing to Christ may have taken a couple of years, but the reality of a before and after should still be very visible. If it isn't you should think strongly about whether you have yet made such a commitment and meet with me soon to talk about baptism.

That is what baptism represents. You have drawn a line in the sand and said publicly, "I am not who I was. I am a new person now in Christ. I am His and He is mine. I belong to Jesus." That's what baptism is about: a visible declaration of a before and after. A line down the middle of the page of your life.

Once you have drawn that line - and most of us in the room have - does it remain true for you day by day? Are you fully committed to Christ? Does your BODY belong to Him? Can you honestly say that you are DEVOTED to Christ? That you present yourself to Jesus as a LIVING SACRIFICE every day - saying "whatever you want for me, Lord, I am yours to command"?

I got to work with **Stephen Baldwin** on a very cool outreach in Chicago. Pastor Colin wrote a book about the thief on the cross and a member of his creative team suggested turning that book into a stage play. Someone called Stephen's agent and pitched the idea and Stephen

said, “No way - I’ve never done live work on stage - I’m a movie guy.” The agent, still holding the phone said, “You would get to be the thief on the cross.” Stephen, without hesitation said, “Tell them I’ll do it.”



is all in. When Jesus calls him, he goes. Whatever it is. “Tell them I’ll do it.”

That should be our attitude when the phone rings or an email comes in asking for help with something at church. My life is not my own. I was bought with a price. I am a living sacrifice. I am DEVOTED to the Lord. Whatever it is. “Tell them I’ll do it.”

We serve God with grateful hearts; with devoted bodies and third, we serve God

We serve God:

3. With Holy Minds

“Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Romans 12:2

This world, our sinful flesh and the devil are working overtime to shape us - to conform us to this dark and corrupted, sinful place we live in. We have to train our minds to resist the old desires of our flesh and to follow the new desires of the Holy Spirit. The outcome is that we will consistently know AND do what is good and acceptable and perfect, growing more and more into lives that are pleasing to God.

This is another whole sermon so I will close with just one more story - a story of someone who served the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength.

David Brainerd lived in Connecticut in the early 1700s. His father died when he was 9 and his mother five years later. From then on he was raised by his older sisters. At the age of 21 he



had an experience of “unspeakable glory,” and committed his life to the glory of God and seeking His kingdom first.

Brainerd enrolled at Yale to prepare for the ministry. It was a time of revival, with visits to the college from George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. Students, like Brainerd, were catching fire for the Lord while their professors mostly remained cold and aloof. Any criticism of school authority figures was grounds for expulsion and Brainerd was kicked out for questioning the faith of a school official.

Unable to pursue formal ministry in the church, he became a missionary to the Indians. This was a dangerous path, fraught with difficulties. The diary and journal of David Brainerd has been a classic since Jonathan Edwards published it in 1751. In it Brainerd pours out the fears and concerns, the desires and hopes of his heart.

In the face of loneliness and stress, often without food or sufficient heat, frequently in danger, Brainerd wrote:

'[I] could have no freedom in the thought of any other circumstances or business in life: All my desire was the conversion of the heathen, and all my hope was in God: God does not suffer me to please or comfort myself with hopes of seeing friends, returning to my dear acquaintance, and enjoying worldly comforts'.

Brainerd devoted himself in service to the Lord. His ministry only lasted three years before tuberculosis forced him to leave the mission field and he died before his 30th birthday. He was committed to the Lord heart, body and mind.

This wasn't easy - he struggled greatly with depression and several times despaired even if life itself. But he pressed on in faith, pursuing the calling God had given him.

Brainerd only saw a few dozen converts from among the heathen Indians. But by giving his life to the Lord as a grain of wheat that fell to the ground and died, his story and example and faith inspired thousands of believers who came after him to give their all in service to the Lord as well. People like William Carey, Henry Martyn, Adoniram Judson and Jim Elliot.

May the faith of people like that - their devotion to the Lord as a living sacrifice - inspire us to lay down our lives, heart, body and mind, in service to our Lord!

May we all aspire to serve the Lord in that way!
Let's pray!