

# YOU HAVEN'T BEGUN TO LIVE

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I'll bet you're familiar with the phrase, "No pain, no gain." The idea is that it will cost you something to make progress. The value of sacrifice has long been promoted.

No progress without sacrifice. You can substitute any other aspiration for the word "progress": change, freedom, peace, or victory. We could even say that there is no worship without sacrifice.

## **Sacrificial Worship**

Sacrifice was a prominent feature of biblical worship, as seen in the lives of Adam's sons, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the children of Israel.

By God's design, the Tabernacle illustrated the essential nature of sacrifice in worship. Entrance to the Holy Place was blocked by an altar; the altar of sacrifice blocked access to the Presence of God.

Here's a brief language lesson that you should find illuminating. The Hebrew word for "offering" is *kar-ban*, derived from the root *ka-rav*, which means "to come near," or "to approach."

The psalmist recognized the connection when he said, *"Give to the Lord the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come into His courts."* (Psalm 96:8)

People do try many other ways of approaching God. Some put on their finest clothes; some, their finest behavior. But trying to approach God by making ourselves presentable is a spiritual oxymoron. In God's arrangement, the altar of sacrifice comes *before* the laver of cleansing.

## **First of All**

Sacrifice involves putting God first. Thus, He claims the first-born and the first-fruits for Himself. Giving the best to God is the essence of worshipful sacrifice.

King David once said, *"I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."* (2 Samuel 24:24)

Acts of sacrifice draw out real faith! Only when we sacrifice must we trust that God *"will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory through Christ."* (Philippians 4:19)

In response to God's sacrifice of His Son for our redemption, we may make all manner of sacrifices to Him. The Bible mentions:

- sacrifice of thanksgiving (Psalm 116:17)
- sacrifices of prayer and praise (Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 50:23)
- sacrifice of our gifts (Philippians 4:18)
- sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17)
- sacrifice of the whole life offered up to God, as seen in Romans 12:1-2: *"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."*

## Count the Cost

If you would like a good measure of how significant your faith and religion are, count up what they are costing you. Usually, one's wallet is the last thing to be surrendered.

When religion gets stale, the lack of sacrifice is often the problem. There are times when we need to just recklessly offer something to God - something that is really precious to us.

Martin Luther once said "I have held many things in my hands, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." The author of Proverbs says something very similar: "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty." (Proverbs 11:24) Missionary Jim Elliott summed it up well: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Some will suggest that if you make sacrifices you're going over the top, jumping off the deep end. Others will tell you that without sacrifice you haven't begun to really live.

## You Haven't Begun To Live...

Scuba-diving, hang-gliding, bungee-jumping, sky-diving—all are thrilling (I imagine)—but I say you haven't begun to live until you've learned the joy of giving! Jesus taught: *"If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life."* (Matthew 16:25)

Many people think they are givers, when they are not. Is the person who routinely puts a five-dollar bill in the offering a giver? Yes, and no. My reason for saying "yes" should be obvious, but my reason for saying "no" may not be apparent.

It's not just the amount; giving \$20 instead of \$5 wouldn't necessarily change my mind. It's the motive that matters, or the lack of one.

*"Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies. He called His disciples to Him and said, 'I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.'"* (Mark 12:41-44)

Clearly, she did not give more than they in dollars and cents. But the *value* of her gift to God was greater because her sacrifice was greater than theirs.

## You Haven't Begun To Give

You haven't even begun to GIVE until you've...

- Given more than the tithe
- Cared for someone outside your own family
- Served beyond your own church

How can I say such things?!

How can I say that you haven't begun to give until you've given *more* than the tithe? Because the tithe *belongs* to God. It's not your gift to Him; you owe it to Him. To withhold it is to steal from God.

*“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But you say, ‘In what way do we rob You?’ You have withheld your tithes and offerings.” (Malachi 3:8)*

The other 90% is His gift to you!

How can I say that you haven’t begun to give until you’ve cared for someone *outside* your own family? Because you’re *supposed* to care for your own family; they cared for you.

*“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.” (Luke 6:32-33)*

Credit begins to build when you love your neighbors and your enemies.

How can I say that you haven’t begun to give until you’ve served beyond your own church? Because you’re expected to serve *within* your own church; that’s why God has given you a spiritual gift. Everyone is to share the work and serve one another in love.

*“A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.” (1 Corinthians 12:7)*

*“‘When you put on a luncheon or a dinner,’ He said, ‘don’t invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will repay you by inviting you back. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you.’” (Luke 14:12-14)*

## **Reaching Beyond**

You haven’t begun to give until you’ve reached *beyond* your responsibilities.

You’re *responsible* to give God the tithe.

You’re *responsible* to care for your family.

You’re *responsible* to serve in your church.

*Jesus explained, “When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, he doesn’t just sit down and eat. He must first prepare his master’s meal and serve him his supper before eating his own. And the servant is not even thanked, because he is merely doing what he is supposed to do. In the same way, when you obey me you should say, ‘We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.’” (Luke 17:7-10)*

Giving begins where duty ends, because giving is an act of love, not obligation.

Abraham built altars of sacrifice regularly. It is our altars that break open the heavens for us, for our children, and for others around us. Count the cost and make the sacrifice. Become a real *GIVER!*