How do I cultivate a life of sacrificial service?

Key Verse: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship.” Romans 12:1

Several years ago, a barbers' supply company held a large convention in a metropolitan city. To show the world how good their products were they organized a publicity stunt. They went to the worst section of town and brought back the dirtiest and most helpless drunk they could find. They presented him on the stage.

Everyone saw how dirty and unkempt his hair and beard were. Then they took him out and cleaned him up. They shaved him. They shampooed and styled his hair. They sprayed him with cologne. They washed him with a new kind of soap they were trying to sell. They bought him a new suit, a new shirt, new tie, and shoes. He looked great. He looked and felt like a new man.

They brought him back to the stage to show him off, saying to all the world, "This is what our barber supplies can do for you." The audience could hardly believe that this was the same man they had seen earlier that day. Looking at the man on stage no one would ever have guessed that he was living in the streets just a few hours before. He was completely changed.

The very next day the organizers of the convention went looking for this man again. Would you like to guess where they found him? That's right - lying in a gutter, filthy and drunk! They may have changed his appearance on the outside, but ignored everything about him that truly mattered on the inside.

In our Key Verse for today, the Apostle Paul wasn't concerned with how people look on the outside. He wasn't concerned with dressing people up. His concern was inner change. "Offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." In verse 2 he continues this thought and says, "Do not be conformed to this world..."

Paul wants us to see, first of all, that nothing is more deceptive than the spirit of the times. The standards by which a culture lives, even our enlightened culture, may not be the standards of God. Let me give you an example.

Writer Philip Yancey once made a fascinating observation about finding fulfillment. In his career as a writer and journalist he has interviewed a wide range of people. He divides these people into two groups: stars and servants. For the stars, super star athletes, famous authors, TV personalities, he has only sympathy. These "idols," he says, "are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met."

According to the standards of this age these people have it made. They're famous, have their pictures in magazines, live in big, expensive homes. Some of us wish we were like them. {But} we don't see the troubled marriages, the tormented psyches, the incurable self-doubts.

Yancey contrasts the life-styles of these stars with a group he calls servants. Servants include such folks as relief workers in Bangladesh and language experts scattered through the jungles of South America translating the Bible into obscure languages.

"I was prepared to honor and admire these servants," Yancey writes, "to uphold them as inspiring examples. I was not prepared to envy them." But envy them he did. As he reflected on the two groups, stars and servants, he declares that "the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones. They work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, "wasting" their talents among the poor and uneducated. But somehow in the process of losing their lives, they have found them."\(^2\)

That's a message many of us need to hear. It's a message that runs counter to the prevailing message of our culture. The words of Paul challenge us to live our lives not conforming to the standards of the present age, but to allow ourselves to live above those standards, to be transformed.

**Paul also warns us about separating our lives into various compartments.** That's the way many of us like to live our lives, isn't it? Neat little compartments - all separate and tidy.

Sundays, we tell ourselves, belong to God, at least Sunday morning. On Sunday we worship and learn about God's love for each of us. On Sunday we talk about loving other people, about helping people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Come Monday, though, it's a different story. We like to compartmentalize our lives.

Paul wanted the early Christians to understand that everything they did, whether it be Sunday or Tuesday, they did for the glory of God. There were no neat little compartments in our lives. We are to present our total lives "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

As a teenager Richard Foster spent a summer among the Eskimo people of Alaska. It impressed Richard that Eskimo Christians have "a deep sense of the wholeness of life, with no break between their prayer and their work." Richard went to Alaska on the adventure of helping to "build the first high school above the Arctic Circle." The work, however, was far from an adventure.

It was hard, often backbreaking. One day he was trying to dig a trench for a sewer line, not an easy thing to do when the ground is frozen. An Eskimo man, whose face and hands displayed the leathery toughness of many winters, came by and watched him for a while. After a while the man broke his silence and said. "You are digging a ditch to the glory of God."

The words stuck with Richard. Beyond his Eskimo friend, no human being ever knew or cared whether he dug that ditch well or poorly. In time that ditch would be covered up and forgotten. But because of that man's words, Richard says, "I dug with all my might, for every shovelful of dirt was a prayer to God." Richard made the discovery that everything we do, whether great or small, we do for the glory of God.\(^3\)

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All of our lives belong to God. Every task we do is for His glory. There are no neat little compartments in life marked "secular" and "sacred." Everything belongs to Him. If we are to be changed on the inside, we cannot conform to the spirit of this age.

Lastly, we will move from being self-centered to being community minded. In verse 3 Paul challenges the Romans, "... not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think." Paul compares the church to the human body. The human body has many parts. The body functions best when all the parts forget themselves and work together.

So it is with the church. Everyone has been given a gift and when persons share their gifts, the community of faith is strengthened. And when the community of faith is strong, the church is able to reach outside of itself to those beyond these walls and into the community for which Christ died.

North Philadelphia has some of the worst ghettos in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of people live in dilapidated, unsafe housing. Violent crime is an everyday occurrence, as drug cartels compete to control the lucrative trade in "crack" and "ice." Most people living in the area are afraid to go out after dark. Even the police patrolling the streets are filled with fear.

During daylight hours, children play in vacant lots amidst trash and junked cars. Teenagers who cut school seem to be everywhere. Baptist preacher and teacher Tony Campolo says, "In the midst of this dying ghetto something incredible is happening. A Pentecostal church is growing by leaps and bounds. This church is committed to doing work that many might consider impossible: rebuilding the community."

The church has organized and trained young people to remodel the thousands of rundown, deserted houses. Young people are given jobs rebuilding homes while inexpensive housing is being offered for sale to many.

"Living as they do, in a social environment that is both anti-Christian and delinquent," Campolo writes, "it’s nearly impossible for most teenagers and young adults...to stand alone and withstand the pressure to conform." It is "the relationships developed through the church [that] have given them the fortitude and courage to maintain a Christian counter-culture mentality in the midst of a very tough environment."

When our lives are transformed, we move from being self-centered to being community-serving. Our lives run contrary to a hedonistic culture saturated with drugs. We learn to reach out to others.

Some of us have been more concerned about being dressed up on the outside than about being changed on the inside. "Do not conform to the world’s standards..." writes Paul. "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think..." Words of wisdom for those who would be beautiful on the inside.

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“Total Surrender”
Romans 12:1

1. **Nothing is more deceptive than the spirit of the times**
   a. Philip Yancy talks about the ______________ that some want to be

   b. Philip Yancy talks about the ______________ that he wishes we were like

   c. The difference between the two groups for me is…

2. **We should not separate our lives into various compartments**
   a. Christians need to understand that everything we do is for the ______________.

   b. All of our lives belong to ______________.

   c. There are no neat little compartments in life marked "_________" and "_________.”

3. **We will move from being self-centered to being community minded**
   a. The body functions best when all the parts _______ themselves and work ____________.

   b. When the community of faith is strong, the church is able to ______________ to those beyond the walls and into the community for which Christ died.

   c. When our lives are transformed, we move from being ______________ to being ______________