

gracepoint



EXTREME
SACRIFICE

EXTREME CHRISTMAS 2010

DEVOTIONAL
WEEK FOUR

Monday 27 December 2010

Our response to a sacrificial God

Scripture readings:

Psalm 84 vs 11-12

Romans 8 vs 32

There is nothing that God has not given; nothing that has not or is not willing to sacrifice for you. He gave everything – His very life – for each of us. His Word also promises that He does not withhold any good things from those who walk in His ways and love Him. He is an extravagant Giver by nature who willingly sacrifices whatever is required to redeem and be in relationship with those He has created.

Jesus' life was marked by many great virtues – total obedience to God, complete surrender to His will, lavish love, vibrant faith, great wisdom... but above all, His life was marked by sacrifice. Is yours?

As we remember the extreme sacrifice of God that begins with a baby in a manger and ends with a mangled man on a cross, how can we respond with anything but a willingness to sacrifice for Him in return?

"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." – C.T. Studd

Extreme Sacrifice Challenge 1:

Spend some time today reflecting on and asking God to reveal to you what He wants you to sacrifice for Him. Perhaps it is your comfort or status? Perhaps it is your security? Perhaps it has to do with your finances or your faith? Resolve today that no area of your life will be off limits to God and that all you have and are belongs to Him. Make a decision that no sacrifice is too great to make for the One Who gave everything for you.

Tuesday 28 December 2010

Sacrifice rooted in love

Scripture readings:

John 3 vs 16-21

John 15 vs 12-17

Philippians 3 vs 7-14

True sacrifice is always rooted in love. It was God's love for us that compelled Him to send His Son to take the punishment for our sins. It was Jesus love for us that held Him to that cross as He sacrificed His life. It was because of His love that He willingly chose to lay down His life for His friends.

When God calls us to sacrifice for Him we should not respond merely out of a sense of obligation or duty, but out of love. It is far easier to sacrifice for those we love than for strangers and so we have to ask ourselves when we are unwilling to make sacrifices for God, is it perhaps because He is a stranger to us? Are we keeping Him at a distance? If we really turned our eyes upon Him and drew near... if we truly lived in His glorious presence and experienced His love for us, would it be difficult to do what He asked us, no matter what the cost? Let us dare to look into the eyes of Jesus and see the depth of His love and sacrifice for us and then, let us count everything else as loss compared to the joy and wonder of knowing Him.

Extreme Sacrifice Challenge 2:

Take the challenge to examine your relationship with God today and to honestly evaluate whether you generally respond to God out of a sense of obligation or out of a deep, grateful love. What is one practical thing you can do today to grow and deepen your love-relationship with God?

Wednesday 29 December 2010

Dying and living

Scripture readings:

Matthew 16 vs 24-28

John 12 vs 24-28

In the paradoxical Kingdom of God it is true sacrifice – dying to self – that brings about real life. Jesus told those who wanted to follow Him that in order to be His disciples they needed to deny themselves... make a decision to put their own desires and needs aside, sacrifice their ambitions, dreams and comfort, take up their crosses and follow Him. We cannot be disciples if we are unwilling to sacrifice and we cannot experience the abundant life God intended for us if we are not willing to die to ourselves.

Like a grain of wheat that appears to die when it is planted, lifeless and buried, when we are willing to sacrifice and surrender – to die to ourselves – we become bundles of infinite potential and fruitfulness in the hand of God. When we are truly surrendered to His way and will, He will use us in ways we cannot imagine. It is in the moment that we release all the things to which we cling and open our hands in surrender to God that He can take our hands in His and lead us down the path of true life and abundance.

Extreme Sacrifice Challenge 3:

Are you willing to die to self and live for God alone? What is keeping you from true surrender and sacrifice? Make a decision today to decisively deal with the things that are holding you back from dying to self and finding true, abundant life in God.

Thursday 30 December 2010

Sacrificial love

Scripture readings:

Matthew 5 vs 38-48

Romans 5 vs 8

Jesus' teaching was revolutionary and sometimes, difficult to take in. He taught a sacrificial, radical love that does not stop with simply loving those who are lovable, but that loves the unlovely, the outcast, the misfit, the traitor and the enemy.

Romans 5 vs 8 reminds us that God's love is revealed to us by the fact that He was willing to die for us while we were still His enemies – while we were still turned against and away from Him. He did not wait for us to be converted or to change our ways before He loved us. It is in His extending His love to us first, undeservedly, that we are touched and changed.

Are we willing to take this approach with others – to love them before they deserve it and to show them kindness before they are worthy of it? Are we willing to break down barriers and reach across the divide between people with sacrificial love that finds people where they are – in sin, dirt and darkness – and draws them to Jesus?

Extreme Sacrifice Challenge 4:

Who is one person you find very difficult to love? Take the challenge to show that person kindness and to love them sacrificially, despite the fact that they don't deserve it.

Friday 31 December 2010

The cost of true sacrifice

Scripture readings:

Luke 14 vs 26-33

1 Chronicles 21 vs 18-26

There is always a cost to true sacrifice. Jesus made it clear to those who wanted to follow Him and walk in His ways that there was a cost involved – one He wanted us to carefully consider and weigh.

Superficial faith asks questions like, “What can I get out of this?” or “How is this going to benefit me?” but those who have walked a ways with Jesus know that while the journey with Him is the only way we can truly discover life, it is a difficult one that costs much. It costs our comfort and perhaps our being understood or accepted by others. It costs our time, our possessions and our energy. It costs our right to know “the plan” for our lives or to make our own decisions. It costs our right to our own lives.

When King David had to make an offering to God, he was unwilling to make it if it did not cost Him anything. He understood that it is not a sacrifice at all if we do not personally feel it and it does not impact our lives. Sometimes we feel like we are making sacrifices for God when in fact, we are giving Him the things on the periphery of our lives – our extra time, our leftover money, our residual energy. A life of true sacrifice gives and surrenders from the core. It does cost much... but it gains much too. It gains the life that is truly life.

Extreme Sacrifice Challenge 5:

What does your faith really cost you? Commit that this next year, you will step out and truly live sacrificially. If your faith has not been costly, why do you think that is and how do you think you need to change?

Saturday 1 January 2011

The filling of our emptiness

Scripture readings:

Psalm 23

Acts 20 vs 35

2 Corinthians 12 vs 9

Psalm 23 is perhaps one of the best known Scriptures and it is a beautiful image of the love, care and provision of our God. It paints a picture of His nearness when we find ourselves out in sunlight, resting in the bountiful fields of life as well as when we walk in the darkness and uncertainty of the valleys.

As we emerge out of the dark valleys of pain into the sunlight we see a table set for us – a banquet prepared by our King – where we are fed, nourished and filled again. His faithfulness always remains and pulls us through and after we have spent time in darkness and difficulty – when we have given and sacrificed much and feel empty – He is waiting on the other side, ready to anoint us and fill us to overflowing again.

It is more blessed to give than to receive because when we expend ourselves for our King, we find that His grace truly is sufficient for us. When we have emptied ourselves for others He fills us up with His blessing and anointing so that our hearts cannot contain it and our cups overflow.

Extreme Sacrifice Challenge 6:

Dare to expend yourself for God in 2011. Don't hold anything back! Commit to giving everything for Him, knowing that He will fill you up with His anointing and blessing when you do.