

# 8.20.23 Sermon

## Living Life | Romans 12:1-8

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

god, today, sacrifice, people, life, living, church, purpose, call, good, created, brothers, neighborhood, earth, adventure, bible, paul, renewing, scripture, sits

### SPEAKERS

**Rev. James Bady**

Good morning!

Just in case you weren't already awake, that sound will wake you up. It's good to see you. It's good to be with you. Some people are waving at me, sort of a wave back.

Thank you for allowing me to get comfortable with you and to just roll into this adventure. We're going to explore the Bible as each of the individual speakers dive into some of their favorite texts and topics. I think they put me up first to say, "you know, if he bombs, it takes the pressure off the rest of us." Thank you, team, thank you.

But no, it's just the opportunity to allow each and every one of us to freely explore where God is leading us, as we do our own personal Bible study. A speaker in a church doesn't just study the Bible to bring sermons. We study it also for application to our own lives, for things that inspire us, that have taken us through tough times, and helped us get to the other side. That's some of the stuff that I'll delve into today.

I also want to remind us, as we go through this, that every Sunday, after the sermon, we have the gathering room. People go there to have coffee, tea, and discuss the sermon and other topics, getting to know each other as a community. I grew up during a time when church was on Tuesday, Friday, Sunday school at about 8:30, followed by church, then afternoon church, and evening church on Sunday. You really got to know people then. We don't do that anymore because of our busy lives. However, we still need the opportunity to know each other. So take that chance. We also have podcasts, Instagram, Twitter, and more. If there's a topic you think will inspire you, check these resources. If today's service doesn't resonate, remember, there's more.

Well, let's pray. We thank you for this moment in time. We thank you for this time together. And I ask that you lead and guide us so that the words spoken bring life, healing, and refreshment to your people. In Jesus' name, I pray, amen.

So, I think today is officially the end of John. I will be preaching for something else. We ended last week talking about John the character, not just John the Bible. His expression throughout the book of John was to let everyone know that no matter who you are or where you are on your scale of feeling connected or disconnected, our God, who is loving, can transform your feelings of disconnection and isolation into the sensation of being totally beloved, totally integrated into God and your purpose.

We're building out from that, and I'll start today from the scripture of Romans 12, verses one through eight, from the NRSV version. It reads:

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, 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 renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me, I say to every one among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function. So we, who are many, are one body in Christ. And individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophesy in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teaching of teaching; the exhortations in exhortation; the giver in generosity; the leader in diligence; the compassionate in cheerfulness." That concludes the reading of the word.

You know, I became acquainted with this text when I was very young.

Right, so when I would go to Sunday school, and when the only Bible that most people were reading was the King James Version of the Bible, that's why "therefore" kind of snuck in there. It connected with me because the opening seemed so poetic. As a little kid, hearing verses like "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," seemed so mesmerizing. These are not words that you commonly hear every day. For a little kid, these words seem big and important. It's like the verses were saying to a child, "Hey, listen, because this is important. What I'm about to share with you is transformative."

I am very aware that our interpretations of things are shaped by where we are and when we were introduced to certain things. I was born at the end of the Civil Rights Movement, kind of in the shadows of it. That's how I grew up. Many of the things that I was exposed to are shaped by that reality. In the neighborhood that I grew up in, during the civil rights movement, the focus was primarily on group sacrifice. It was all about what can I do for the benefit of my neighbor, my neighborhood, my family, my friends. So when you come across scriptures

talking about sacrifice, you start thinking about how to take care of others and how to participate with others. What do I have that others don't? And if we all had it, wouldn't we be better off?

An example of this concept being lived out in my neighborhood was a gentleman who lived across the street from us. He worked for a bakery and would make deliveries to grocery stores, restaurants, and other customers. If at the end of the day an order was messed up, or a customer rejected an order, these bakery products would usually be thrown away. That's why we have people today going dumpster diving, trying to find good food that's been thrown out. But this gentleman, about ten years ago, would take all that bread that would've gone to waste and bring it to our neighborhood. He made sure that no child or family on my block ever went hungry for bread products. Everyone would be taken care of because he had something that others did not. If we all had it, we would all be better.

Another example from my neighborhood was a lady who was the human version of the Ring service. Do you guys know what the Ring service is? It's a video camera that sits on your door and films everything happening in front of your house. This lady was the human version of that. There wasn't one thing that would happen in our neighborhood that she couldn't give a full account or recap of.

She knew who did it, when they did it, and how it started. And "Who's Your Mama?" Why? Because she knew that because of the information she had, if all of us had it, we all would be better because there would be less crime at our block. I don't remember one time, or very, very few times where the police would come to our block and have to follow up to find what's going on. Because we all knew she would ask questions like, "Are you sure you should be over there? What are you doing over there? Why are you over there?" and you're like, "Okay, okay, I'll go about my business." But it made life better for us all. Our community, and our little part of the world, got better because of the different skills and capabilities that we all had. And so she used her skill of nosiness to protect us, alright. And so, it's a skill.

This was not, unfortunately, what we see today where, in the past, we took this very noble activity of sacrifice for one another and turned it into something that was kind of oppressive in a way. This was not an activity that released personal accountability and responsibility. My neighbor did not bring home food for the block so that you could take your budget and waste it on something that was irresponsible. My neighbor did not watch the block diligently, so you could leave your underage child at home unattended because that would be irresponsible activity. It was not for that. It was for us all to progress. Sure, there are moments in time when it seems like an irresponsible activity merits sacrifice from others, but it's very rare. Primarily, sacrifice is for progress. Progress.

That is the definition of the scripture that I was first introduced to. But I think there's more. Because Paul calls for it to be a living sacrifice. And I think it also short changes the overall context of the scriptures. Well, when I apply the five W's, and the how, you remember those: the who, what, when, where, why, and how. If you apply that to the whole text, you can add to the story of sacrifice. It isn't just sacrificed; it is also you have to capture living. Living. And what do I mean by living? I don't mean just having air in your lungs. I mean life to the fullest. I mean life that drives purpose. I mean life, like Jeremiah 1:5 that says, "Before you were formed in the womb, I knew you and had a purpose for you." Has anyone ever felt that? That there was something more for you? You weren't necessarily concerned or redirected by what somebody else was doing, but I have a purpose that I am going to live out. That is what is exciting.

Well, where am I getting that? Well, if we look through that entire section of verses, here's the "who." Romans calls it the brethren, brothers and sisters, who are diligently trying to find and follow Jesus Christ to the best of their ability. We call them Christians. That's who Romans is calling out to. And then you go, "Well, what is the 'what'?" The word is following after the "who," because the "who" is the Christians. The Christians are following Jesus. Jesus was introduced to this sacrifice that wasn't to death. But Romans said, this sacrifice that I'm calling you to, is to life. I want you to present yourself as a sacrifice that is living, that is prospering, that is progressing, that is doing more on this earth. And then "how to" be not transformed to this world. But be ye, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

What is the world's understanding of church people today? I won't have you say it; I will say it so I can take the heat instead of you. To be honest, most people think that church people are kind of weird and boring and sometimes overly spiritual.

That is the world's definition and expectation out of you. It also expects that based on your race, you go to a certain type of church. Based on your economic status, you go to a different one. Based on whether you're educated or not, you go to yet another. That has the world's expectation of you.

Paul is saying, "Don't be conformed to that; be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Because there's something more and there's something different. When I look at Jesus's life, who we are supposed to be modeling, I don't see weird. I don't see boring. I don't see all of these categories that are separated from one another. That is not what I see. What I see is an extravagant God, and an extreme God.

If you look at nature, if you ever go out and look at cliffs, the mountainside in the morning, and how the flowers open up, it's a majestic movie. So how does a God who thinks that way create in that way? Then creates you? Boring? Really?

Think about this. In Genesis, God created everything upon the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, right? On day one, there was light. On day two, there was a sky and Earth. On day three, dry places were called Earth and wet places were called the sea. Day four brought the sky with the moon and the sun, controlling both daytime and nighttime. Day five saw creatures in both the sea and on land. Then God gets to you, and the world changes. You are "very good." There is almost a smile that comes to God's face when he looks at the creation of you and the possibilities of life that he's created for you.

It's almost like preparing a Thanksgiving dinner. All the ingredients going in, the stove heating up, the dishes getting ready, and when everything is done and hits the table, it's perfect. And just like us after a meal, God rested on the seventh day.

The majesty of the world was created for you. And while there is a spiritual component to it, I also believe you should live an adventurous life. Everything on this Earth was created first for you. It was all put into place and then you were placed in it. Why are you not seeking God's creations for you? Why are you exiting God's purpose and the adventure of life for you? Why have you decided to play it safe and not explore the boundaries of life that God has created on this earth?

Romans tell us why you should be engaged in life. We're all different, with unique skills and capabilities. We're all connected to one another. We all have something that others don't have, and together, we are better. Just as Jesus prayed for unity, and as the Trinity has different purposes that complete things, exploring the boundaries of your life completes things. You create an existence that couldn't exist without you doing your thing.

Are you ready to embrace that? That's the who and the what of living, and the why is so we all can grow and have an experience together. That "why" creates an environment where you feel fulfilled, and where those searching for fulfillment are drawn to. Isn't that what people are searching for today? They want to find their purpose, find peace and calm in the storm. When we work together, that's how we get there. And as Jesus said, "if I be lifted up, I will draw to me." You don't have to go looking for people. If you live a purpose-filled life, they will look for you because they are also searching for that purpose-filled life. Live that life. That's why.

And that's how the renewing of our minds works. So that just leaves the question, when?

Paul doesn't touch on it, but I would submit to you this: I would start today, right where you are. Today, I would start living my best life. I would set my focus on only the things that matter. I was spending my life on tasks twice, but I would set my life on the purpose given today. Today, I would ignore any haters I have because they don't know what I'm intended to do. Today, I

would take a few more risks that others would think, "You know, you're too old for that." But this is what I need to do today. I would do things for my loved ones that bring me joy, things that we could all do together. Today, I would see everything I could see that was interesting to me.

You don't know what's left. You don't know how many moments you have, but you have today. Live today. You've already sacrificed for others and that's fine. Now live. Be the thing that allows others to be drawn to you and understand why the Earth couldn't be the same without you. Do that today.

I'm reminded of a professor I had, Lisa Bowens, who wrote in her book, "Understanding Paul's writings." She pointed out one interesting thing about Paul and said that Paul is asking us to live life with purpose. We're all on this journey, traveling to a new earth and new existence. So run that race well. She then quotes Acts 20:24, "Nothing in my life really matters, but that I have run my race, and it is now complete. Based on that, I am at peace."

I want each and every one of you to be comfortable and at peace with the decisions you make every day. Your purpose and your calling throughout your life will shift and change, but in that, I hope that each day is filled with the call of God for what you need to do today. Not the call of me, not the call of the people around you, but the call of God. Until you satisfy that, there will always be this emptiness. So, I implore you to present yourself as a living sacrifice. Amen.