

Let Jesus be Lord of Your Life

By Russ Divine

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." -Rom. 12:1-2

I was born again at a young age and though saved, I was unwilling to give my life over to God in a complete act of surrender. There were many parts of my life that I wanted to control, places in my life I didn't want God to touch. I knew the necessity of yielding my life to God but I was afraid to. As a result of being afraid to do something that I knew I should do, passages like the one above would make me feel sad and condemned.

As I look back on my predicament I have to laugh at myself. I was so ignorant about God. I had no clue about His goodness. I'm still discovering greater depths of His goodness and will continue to do so for the rest of my journey, but I know now that making Jesus the Lord of my life is the smartest thing I've ever done. Since I've made that decision my life is off-the-charts better than before. I have so much more fun. I'm not stressed or anxious or worried or afraid. I have purpose and certainty whereas before I was aimless and full of doubt. I could go on and on, but the bottom line is that it's been a night and day kind of difference, no comparison whatsoever! So if you have a sad feeling about the opening passage or if you feel condemned by it, then please read on. I believe some of the things I've learned about God will help you too.

The Twofold Basis for Fearing God's Lordship

Resisting God's Lordship comes down to two factors, **ignorance** and **arrogance**. I know that accusation stings a little but hang with me on this because it really helps. Let's take a look at the fears I had about turning my life over to God.

Really, I was afraid of two things. I was afraid that if I gave my life to God that He'd ask me to do something I didn't want to do. I was even more afraid that if I gave my life to God that He'd ask me to give up something I wanted. So basically, I didn't think God had any of my interests or desires in mind, just His kingdom. Some of you might feel that way about God, that He really isn't interested in your

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happiness and that He only wants you to serve Him so that He can send you to some third world country to be a miserable missionary. Some of you might be worse off in your view of God and actually believe that He has bad things in store for your future. You know, to teach you a lesson and build character or maybe pay you back for all the grief you caused Him and others along the way. If any of that comes even remotely close to the way you think God is, then ***you are ignorant.***

God isn't like that. As I said before, I was ignorant about God. I didn't know what He was really like. I am still discovering what He is all about and I must say that the more I get to know Him the more impressed I am by the quality of His character. One of the ways I got to know Him, especially at first, was through His Word. Let's see what the Word says about God's view of your happiness and what kind of plans He has for you:

"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."-Psalm 16:11

"Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart."-Ecclesiastes 5:19-20

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." - John 15:11

"Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." - John 16:24

"for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."- Romans 14:17

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."- Romans 15:13

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."- John 10:10

"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,

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And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.”- Psalm 36:7-9

”Blessed is the man You choose, And cause to approach You, That he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Of Your holy temple.”- Psalm 65:4

*”Let them shout for joy and be glad, Who favor my righteous cause; And let them say continually, “Let the LORD be magnified, Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.”
- Psalm 35:27*

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!”- Psalm 34:8

“Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.”- Psalm 40:5

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”- Jeremiah 29:11

Can you see that God thinks a lot about your happiness, that He has good things in mind for you? If you are ignorant about those things then you too will likely remain afraid of allowing Him to be Lord of your life. And if you're afraid to let God be Lord of your Life then by default you have taken over that position. That is where the second factor, arrogance, comes into play.

Consider the absurdity of thinking that you are better than God, that you are more capable than the One who fashioned you. That's pretty **arrogant** is it not? While many of us would never concede to such a position of arrogance, that's really what we do when we fail to give God our lives in full. If you are playing Lord of your life because you don't trust God to do it, then what you are really saying is that you are better than God.

The arrogance of playing God over your life is the natural consequence of being ignorant about His goodness. If you think God is not going to give you a better life than the one you have in mind for yourself, then your **ignorance** about God's goodness has led you to the **arrogant** position of believing that you are better than God. So if you have made the same arrogant mistake I made by assuming

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Lordship over your life then read these scriptures that helped me to see that God is better than I am at being Lord of my life.

*"There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death."-Proverbs 16:25*

*"A man's steps are of the LORD;
How then can a man understand his own way?"-Proverbs 20:23-25*

*"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself;
It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." -Jeremiah 10:23*

I had been looking at my own desires to determine what I wanted and relying on my own intellect to figure out what was best for me. Those questions can't be answered by introspection because a person's way (path or life plan) is not within him/her. I couldn't understand my way because I wasn't even smart enough to know what I wanted. That's not just me either. These scriptures teach a universal principal; you are not smart enough to plan your life. God has things in mind for us that we can only know by hooking up with Him.

When we think we are smart enough to plan our life apart from God we really place a load on ourselves that we were never meant to carry. That's one reason people are so stressed, anxious, worried, tired, bitter, hurting, restless, hopeless, uncertain and unhappy. If people only knew that they were never meant to carry that load then they would be free to put it down and discover that Jesus' load is light and His yoke is easy.

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."- Matthew 11:28-30

God's Will for Your Life

Let's go back to the opening scripture and take a look at the last part, "...that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." First off, let me reiterate that God's will for your life is not only good and acceptable, it's perfect. Of course it is, He made you with a purpose in mind (Ps. 33:14-15, Ps.

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139:13-14, Eph. 1:11-12, 2 Tim. 1:8-11). He's waiting for you to embark on a journey with Him that is far greater than anything you can conceive of without Him. But, you'll only discover why you were created if you let Him be Lord.

So how exactly do I find God's will for my life? That's really what the passage in Romans is all about. It tells us the first three things we need to do in order to find out what God's will is for our life. Look back at the scripture and see if you can identify those three steps. At the top of the list, the very first step we must take is to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God.

So how does giving your life to God show you God's will? One principle involved deals with your desires. I learned about this from a passage in the Psalms. It reads: "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). I used to think this meant that if I put God first that He would give me what I wanted, but it's much better than that. What it really means is that if God is your first desire, if you are seeking Him more than anything else, then the desires of your heart will be conformed to His. You will then have the same desires for yourself that God has for you. A person in this state can discern God's will by looking into their heart.

I said before that because of the fact that man's way is not found within him, his path cannot be discovered through introspection. That is true of a person who is not in a close relationship with God. Such a person is looking into a heart that God has not been allowed to fill and therefore the desires contained within have not been dealt with by God. Someone who is delighting themselves in God can look at their desires for direction because they have given Him permission to kick out what doesn't belong and deposit His plan instead.

So if we recall my original fears in light of the principal of Psalms 37:4 we can see that they are unfounded. I didn't have cause to fear God asking me to do something I wouldn't want to do, because if I am delighting in Him, then my desires would be conformed and I'd desire to do what He wants me to do. In fact, there wouldn't be anything that I'd want to do more than the very thing that God wanted me to do. I also had no reason to fear God taking away something that I

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wanted because if I am delighting in Him, then I'd lose any desire that He didn't have for me. Here's another passage that confirms the same principal:

"for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."- Philippians 2:13

God works in the area of your will so that it matches His will. Notice what it says about His will. He calls His will "His good pleasure". If you let Him work in the area of your will then God's will can become your good pleasure too.

What's so Radical about Sacrifice Anyway?

Imagine your hands open flat, palms facing up with your arms extended out in front of you. On top of your hands sits your life complete with all your hopes, dreams, desires, aspirations, and plans. Now lay it all down at the foot of the cross giving everything to God. That is what Paul is asking, no begging you by God's mercy, to do. That can seem pretty radical, and so can Paul's words, "a living sacrifice". I used to think a move like that fitting for a pastor, or someone who was called into the mission field or full time ministry of some kind, but not for the average Christian. Well, Paul wasn't talking to ministers only, he made no such distinction. He also calls it our "reasonable service". So then, this seemingly radical step is really a reasonable one meant for every Believer everywhere.

As a materialistic and religious culture we tend to look at the concept of sacrifice backwards. We tend to concern ourselves only with what is being lost, unaware that there is anything to gain. That's not how God looks at sacrifice. When He sent His only begotten Son, whom He loved, to die on a cross it wasn't so that He could prove His selflessness and be miserable. He did it with what He would gain in mind. And what did He gain? He gave up one Son, and got back not only that one Son, but billions of sons and daughters (John 3:16-17, Gal. 3:26, Eph. 3:6, Rom. 8:14-17).

God has set forth a very simple principle, the same that allowed Him to gain so many children after His sacrifice. The principal is this: whatever you willingly and cheerfully give away comes back to you in increased measure. You see this connected to finances quite a bit in the Bible (Prov. 11:24-25, Luke 6:38, 2 Cor.

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9:6-11). But this principle also works with even your very life. That is what Jesus was talking about when He said, "...whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25).

So when God asks for a sacrifice it's not because He's trying to take anything good from you. He wants to do the opposite. He wants to give you a more abundant life. Your primary focus should be on what you stand to gain, not on what you have to lose.

Counting the Cost

Even though we focus more on gain than loss, we are told to count the cost of being a disciple of Christ (Luke 14:25-33). There is a cost. There is loss. It's a little bit like when you pay for food; you lose money but you gain whatever food you traded it for. The decision we are asked to make is kind of like what we would make in the store. We assign a value on what we gain and compare it to what we will lose and then we ask ourselves, "Is it worth it?" We need to do some arithmetic and add up what we stand to lose in the light of what we gain.

So, what do we have to lose? Your decision to follow the Lord may lead you away from certain relationships (Matt. 10:34-39). The Lord may also ask you to give up possessions or wealth (Mk. 10:21-22). You may have to abandon plans you thought were important (Matt. 4:18-20, Matt. 8:21-22). Let's not view these losses apart from a promise Jesus made concerning them.

"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life."-Mk. 10:29-30

In light of what we gain, these losses don't seem to count for much. I'd trade my house for one a hundred times as grand. Sometimes it looks like we are giving something up, but the Lord is really trying to get more to us. I believe that is part of what Jesus was getting at when He asked the young man described in Mark 10 to give up his wealth. Sometimes certain people are hindering our relationship

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with the Lord in one way or another and in order to move forward with God we have to leave them behind. Again, it looks like a loss but if you trade a relationship with a person for relationship with God you're making a good deal.

As you walk out the decision to make Jesus your Lord there will be plenty of times that it looks like loss, but you really are making a good trade. This is where trust comes into play. The Lord wants us to trust that He is good and that He has your best interest in mind (Heb. 11:6).

The Cost of Suffering and Persecution

The passage we looked at in Mark 10:29-30 mentioned persecution in the mist of gain. The Bible makes it clear that every believer will suffer from some form of persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). This is a kind of loss that seems extreme because much suffering may come as a result. I'd like to examine a case of much suffering along with the man's perspective on it. That perspective will help us add this loss accurately.

Let's look at the life of the Apostle Paul. There is no record in scripture of a follower of Christ suffering to the extent that Paul suffered. When he was converted, before he even got going serving the Lord, God showed him that he would suffer many things for His name sake (Acts 9:10-18). Take a look at some of Paul's suffering.

"...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."-2 Corinthians 11:23-28

As you react to Paul's suffering, you might be thinking, "No thanks man, not for me". Well you're probably right. Very few will have to go through anything like that for God. But it's important to know that God didn't do all that to Paul, nor

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did He want suffering for Paul. The suffering that Paul went through was the result of ungodly people coming against him as he served God. That's what persecution is all about. Though God doesn't deliver us completely from every persecution, He does provide a way for us to go through it with His perspective.

The reason I wanted to look at Paul's life is because He had gone through so much and retained God's perspective on all of it. Do you know what Paul had to say about his long list of suffering? He called it a "light affliction" (2 Cor. 4:17). If Paul, with all he went through, views his suffering as light, then we can have the same perspective about the lesser forms of persecution that we might face. The trick in doing so is to assign the proper value to suffering. Paul gives us a clue about how to do that.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." -2 Corinthians 4:17-18

The seemingly extreme suffering that Paul went through was light to him because he was focused on the gain and not the loss. He knew that the gain had 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory' than the loss. What you focus on gets magnified. I heard one minister say that the devil will place a tooth pick in our path and by the time we're done with it we've got a tree in front of us that's so big we can't see our way over it or around it. If we look at what's beyond the toothpick, the eternal, we can see the toothpick for what it is and just step over it. I can hear someone saying, "Paul's troubles weren't a toothpick." Well, to him they were probably more than a toothpick, but definitely no more than a light affliction.

Paul suffered much more than what is recorded in 2 Cor. 11. He spent quite a bit more time in prison and eventually became a martyr. Paul didn't shrink back even at the thought of giving his life for God. In fact, he looked forward to going on to be with the Lord, the only reason he wanted to stay on Earth was because he was a benefit to the other Christians (Phil. 1:20-24).

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There came a point in Paul's ministry when the other Believers knew what awaited Paul, that he would face chains and prison in Jerusalem. They urged him not to go, but Paul had this to say, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts. 21:13). Paul's bottom line when it comes to adding up the cost can be seen in his attitude toward death, but there are a couple more scriptures that are more direct.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.... ..because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."-Romans 8:18, 21

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."-Phil. 3:8

If a man who has gone through such great suffering for the sake of God can come up with an answer like those above when counting the cost, then there must really be something wonderful about God.

It's All about a Relationship

Up to now we've been dealing with the question of making Jesus our Lord from a 'what about me' frame of reference. I've tried to explain that if you make Jesus Lord, your life will be better off than if you don't choose Him. Though that is true, it's really missing the point. It's not only about you; it's about a love relationship that involves you.

Let's revisit the young man from Mark 10 and draw some more from the passage.

"Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have

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treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” -Mk. 10:17-22

I said before that part of what Jesus was doing here was an attempt to bless the man with more wealth. In light of the law of sowing and reaping, this would have worked out for the young man’s advantage. There is much more to this story, however.

Jesus exposed the young man’s love of money. Money wasn’t the issue and contrary to popular belief, money is not the root of all evil. The Bible says that it’s the **love of** money that is the root of many kinds of evil (1Tim. 6:10). Jesus knew the young man’s heart and exposed an area of it that wasn’t given over to the Lord. Jesus didn’t want his money, He wanted his heart.

We talked about viewing loss in the light of gain and assigning value to that loss like we might do in a grocery store. Sacrifice runs much deeper than trading one thing for another. Sacrifice is really about love.

Think about how sacrifice works in our human relationships. A mother wouldn’t hesitate to lay her life down for her child. She doesn’t even have to think about it, it’s just the natural response of a heart given over in love. A father sacrifices the vast majority of his time to provide for his family. It’s for love that he does it. He could have stayed a bachelor and worked less, but he chose the way of sacrifice because his life of love with his family is much fuller than his bachelor days.

Becoming a living sacrifice is not about gaining or losing your life, it’s about making God your greatest love. It’s about opening the door of your heart to a God who wants to love you more than you can possibly imagine. God’s not satisfied with anything less than complete intimacy. That’s why idolatry is such a big deal. Loving and worshiping anything above God, like the rich young man did with his money, is idolatry. For these reasons God asks us to be a living sacrifice. That’s how we put God first in our heart and give Him His rightful place.

Don’t feel condemned if there is something in your life that is above God. Remember from the story that Jesus looked at the man and loved him. Jesus

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loved the man even in the midst of his idolatry. Jesus just wanted the man to follow Him, to walk with Him and be with Him, but He knew that the man's love of money was in the way. So He said, in essence, "Let me take the place of your first love". He's saying the same thing to you. Just put down your life and make Him your first love.

I began by talking about what we gain in life by becoming a living sacrifice because that's where I got hung up, but hopefully now you can see that Love, and not personal gain is our real motivation. In fact, if we act with the knowledge that we will gain things other than a relationship with the Lord and that's our prime motivation, then we have defeated the purpose. Imagine that the young man from the story knew about Christ's laws of sowing and reaping. What if he acted in obedience to Jesus just so he could reap a hundredfold and be even richer? That's obviously the opposite of what Jesus wanted.

So, yes we will gain a better life, but we must be motivated by love and the thought of gaining Him because it is only out of a love relationship with Him that you will live your best life. Paul counted all loss as rubbish that he may **gain Christ**. It's only in the context of a love relationship with God in which Jesus was Lord that Paul did his arithmetic.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."-Romans 8:35-40

If you were saddened at all or condemned by the opening passage in Romans, please don't be like the rich young man and walk away sad. Instead, run to the River of Life and jump in. The water's nice!

Some practical Tidbits

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I heard a minister say that the problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps trying to crawl off the alter. It's true, being a living sacrifice is a choice you make continuously. That's why Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow Me. It's a daily decision and under some circumstances an hourly or even a minute by minute decision. Sometimes you make the wrong choice, but if you keep going with it, you make fewer and fewer of those mistakes. Don't worry about it, just keep going.

We also related making this decision to discovering God's will for your life. That's very true because making Jesus your Lord is the first step in that discovery. It's important that once you make this step that you immediately follow through with the other steps. As per Romans 12:1-2 they are: Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind. We will talk more about how to do that in later articles, but for now, turn off the television and read your Bible.

If you have decided to jump in a let Jesus be the Lord of your life, then you can pray this prayer as a way to get started:

Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus. Thank you for making it possible for me to have a love relationship with you through Him. I want to have an intimate relationship with you. Thank you for being good and having good things in mind for me. I trust you and I ask you to help me to trust you with my life. I trust that your plan for my life is better than my plan. I choose your plan. From this moment on I choose to let you be the Lord of my life. I believe that you will help me to keep making this decision as often as necessary and that you will draw near to me as I draw near to you. I give you my life, go ahead and take every part of it. I allow you to make the necessary changes in my heart and I will obey you because you are already working on me both to will and to do your good pleasure. Your good pleasure is my good pleasure and I'm excited to walk this life's journey with you as my Lord. I believe that I have your help in keeping an eternal perspective and I focus on the things that are unseen and not on the things that are seen. In Jesus Name, Amen!