

“Desiring the Will of God”

Romans 11: 33 – 12: 2

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Building a Desire to do God’s will: We live in a culture where the desires of greed and individualism are encouraged. We are taught to desire to look better than the next person and to have more things and opportunities than our neighbours. We are urged to desire to make a priority on building our kingdom so that we can enjoy all the things we think we deserve. We have learned to want the ‘Good life’ as defined by our marketers and sustained by all of us who buy into it. As we come to worship today, we are asked by the Holy Spirit, what is it that we truly want? Is your main desire to please yourself?

Giving of your whole self: In Romans 11: 33-35 we read about the depths of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. In verse 36 we read, *“For from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory forever. Amen.”* In other words, the Lord is the creator and giver of all! Let us give thanks and praise God! Then Paul the author of the book of Romans, in light of these attributes of God, appeals (urges, begs) to the congregants of the church in Rome to give themselves as a living sacrifice. In an animal sacrifice the animal’s life ends, and the blood comes pouring out. The scripture here points out that a total sacrifice now is in a living human body where your blood stays in your veins— and where your life purpose is not for your own satisfaction but for the greater good of God’s kingdom.

I was visiting with one of our members this week, and he was saying that while working with a construction crew for a number of years, his fellow workers would seek him out for counsel. They would ask him advice about a number of life issues. A man would share, for example, that he had a big fight with his wife the night before. The man asked what he should do. After hearing the story, our church member advised the man to love and encourage his wife, seek resolution and tell his wife he loves her. This advice came from a place of desire to follow the will of God to love others with unconditional love.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual^[b] worship.” (Romans 12: 1) What is this ‘Spiritual Worship’ Paul is talking about?

I read a story about a young woman who approached her Pastor in distress and was crying. She said to the pastor that she just could not live the Christian life the way she should. She said she was frustrated and did not experience a sense of moving forward or a peace in her life. The woman continues to struggle with simply being obedient in her Christian life. Every day she feels defeated. The Pastor asked what she had been doing herself to work on the problem. She shared with the Pastor that she tried everything. She had been going to a church where they spoke in tongues, healings had occurred and other kinds of spiritual experiences. She participated in all of these

experiences. She spoke in tongues, she had other ecstatic experiences. She had been slain in the Spirit and felt she had experienced the gift of prophecy. With all of these experiences she was still not pleased with her life. Then she said a very telling statement, "I have tried so hard to get all I could get out of God."

And that is the problem, isn't it. The key to 'Spiritual worship' is not getting all you can get out of God, but by giving all you have (be a living sacrifice). There is a big difference here. I believe that is the meaning of this passage today. This woman approached her faith from a worldly consumeristic perspective - satisfying the self. The spiritual experiences she participated in were not the problem per se, but the perspective in which she approached God and worship.

² Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how his ways will really satisfy you (The Living Bible version). I believe this satisfaction referred to is the joy we experience in God's love which brings out the best in us. By following in God's will, we are following in the way of Grace to promote healing in our souls and to those we give of our time and resources. Furthermore, in the goal of staying focused on following God's will, we do not do this from an individualistic perspective (because then we remain weak and easily distracted by the conforming culture), but in loving community, mutually supporting one another as the body of Christ.

We are on God's side: During the time of the Civil War in the United States, Abraham Lincoln met with some church ministers for a prayer breakfast. Lincoln was a man of deep faith. During the breakfast one of the ministers said, "Mr. President, let us pray that God is on our side." President Lincoln responded with deep insight, "No gentlemen, shall we pray that we are on God's side." Lincoln's comment would have reminded those ministers that faith is not a means to get God to do what we want, but an invitation to be ready to be and do what God desires.

I think we are all tempted to approach God and worship from a consumer perspective. In other words, we want God and our worship to fit into our plans and what we desire. Let us remember the essence of our faith (and to abundant living) is to give all of ourselves – as the Lord has so abundantly given us. In being in line with his way, then we will experience Spiritual formation in being increasingly aware of the joy of God's presence and more so, desire his will. Amen.