Message Title - It’s Time to OPT-IN

Passages - Romans 12:1-8, Philippians 2:1-8

Heidelberg Q&A 55 - esp second half

Date - September 7, 2025 / Waterloo CRC

Sermon Link - <https://www.youtube.com/live/BA6-v-GRFl8> - starts at 15:00

First -- The Scripture Readings & Heidelberg QA 55

**Primary Text -- Romans 12:1-8 ; Philippians 2:1-8 // Romans 12:1-8, New International Version, A Living Sacrifice**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

**Philippians 2:1-8 New International Version, Imitating Christ’s Humility**

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

**Heidelberg Catechism**

Q & A 55

Q. What do you understand by  
“the communion of saints”?

A. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts.

Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and joyfully for the service and enrichment of the other members

The Message from God’s word

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| Opening – Idea -- it is a busy season, let’s consider what we are doing and maybe Paul’s encouragement to the Romans should direct us to remember that being a living sacrifice for the church is uniquely different from other involvements. |

In Paul’s words to the Romans in chapter 12, he is encouraging his listeners to OPT-IN to the local body of believers wholly and completely as living sacrifices to experience a life-giving community. The opening words to be a “living sacrifice” probably didn’t resonate well with the believer back then, nor with believers today. For us, it is back to school season, and we are focused on OPTING-IN and TRYING-OUT for many other things -- considering all the options to explore and grow through sports, music, arts and social clubs -- but are we missing out on something if we are not offering ourselves for service with the local community of believers as Paul suggests? Could there be something unique to serving the local church that would make Paul’s encouragement more vitally important to seekers and followers of Christ today? This is what we are exploring in today’s text - let’s see where this takes us.

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| Page 1 – Trouble in the Text  Main Idea - Paul writes about being a living sacrifice for the body of Christ which sounds good, but the living sacrifice might be quite off-putting. |

When Paul wrote to the believers in Rome about **“Opting-In”** as a living sacrifice, the actual hope he has is that they will FULLY embrace all the life-giving experiences in the body of Christ. To be frank, he paints a picture of a community that is simply extraordinary.

* + He envisions a body of individuals who are benevolent to each other as they offer themselves sacrificially to one another.
  + He envisions all the members embracing a whole new mindset that enables them to know God’s will for their lives.
  + This mindset is shaped by a commitment to humbly serve one another and have sober judgements about one’s gifts and abilities amongst others.
  + There is essential belonging that arises when Paul writes “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Romans 12:4
  + Each individual's giftedness is a complement to the others and essential to others - though the gifts vary in nature, contribution and effect become ESSENTIAL because it is not duplicated.
  + The gifts are given out of grace for the community Paul states, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to **each of us**.” (Romans 12:6).
  + In summing it all up, the body of believers is a place where one’s contribution is essential, each one is valued. One has belonging as in no other place or space and others on this team will sacrifice to include us in the midst of it all. Everything that Paul says here in an **invitation to be a living sacrifice to a community, is an invitation to a community** that could not be more **life-giving to one another.**

As good as that may sound, for the Roman believers the OPTING-IN as a living sacrifice may have required some *real mind renewal* to be perfectly honest.

Here’s why…. The sacrificing of one’s life was associated with very NON life-giving experiences in their surrounding culture. In Ancient Rome, living sacrifices or human sacrifices had happened for centuries in the colosseum through gladiator battles and executions. As young men matured, there was a shift in their physical activities to sports that risked injury to life and limb. Most didn’t make that shift due to the dangers involved. While actual death rates varied greatly over the centuries before and after Christ according to my research, many of these men didn’t live to the end of their twenties. They may have been severely injured for the rest of their life. The gladiators were de-facto slaves with no rights that were ordered into the arena and some were paid by wealthy individuals. The other live sacrifices in the arena were prisoners who were unskilled, untrained and let loose in the arena with a wild animal for the purpose of an execution. **As a general rule, men were not willingly OPTING themselves IN for participation in the games of the colosseum.**

You can imagine -- these games are not about communicating a sense of value or belonging to individuals involved. Essentially, they were living beings offered as a sacrifice for the entertainment appetite of masses who loved these bloody battles. So then, if these cultural experiences came to mind when Paul mentions living sacrifices, that terminology wouldn’t be resonating favourably.

There was another sort of OPTING-IN that did happen in these times, but,...  ***still*** with danger attached. Individuals who were wishing to gain Roman citizenship would OPT-IN for Military Service. This was not life-giving by any stretch of the imagination. For military personnel, only 50% survived to retirement of about or after 20-25 years of service. OPT-ING - IN was a sacrifice to get Roman citizenship papers, but in reality, 50% paid a high price of dying and that meant they were not enjoying the benefits of their citizenship whatsoever. Given the gladiator battles and the executions, OPTING-IN to offer yourself as a living sacrifice **was not likely readily received** into the minds of the Roman believers.

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| Page 2 Trouble in Our World  IDEA: It is opting-in and trying out season and we are choosing where to put our energies -- we say ‘no’ to some things and church is one that gets put on the bottom of the list at times. |

In contrast to the culture back then and there, we are all about OPTING-IN and making sacrifices for the sake of life-giving and building experiences in our world. **We may be OPTING-IN with sports** and engaging in try-outs and evaluating the sacrifices of time and finances should we make a team. **Others may OPT-IN with music or art clubs** and that means there are auditions, and if you don’t make the cut it is time to pursue more private lessons. **Some are OPTING-IN to complete volunteer hours** and trying out different clubs and organizations just to find something interesting to do. **Students starting or returning to University** are concerned about their course loads, butknow that they should OPT-IN on some clubs for the sake of good health and well being. Generally, **adults of all ages** are looking for special clubs and hobbies that will take them out of their work worlds for stress relief -- there are unique sacrifices and typically financial ones as one pursues a specialty activity and advances in it.

Once you make a decision to OPT-IN on something additional costs or sacrifices then build up in layers.

**Parents sacrifice** well-being of their own to get their children to explore sports and gain physical, social and personal confidence. **Children sacrifice** time to explore a sport that may or may not become a long term interest or possible dream occupation for them. **University students sacrifice** time from their studies, sacrifice some additional grades to be a more healthy individual. **Then the opting in leads to serious evaluations -** there are the questions that circle around in the mind: Is this as worthwhile as I had hoped? What gains did I make from this? Will the gains outweigh the sacrifices?

**Sometimes the sacrifices for one particular thing mean something else gets less of your time or even gets cut out of your life.** One of my students Ellie, in campus ministry, has wisely said**, …for everything you say YES to, you are also saying NO to something else**. In practice then, there tends to be some agencies and organisations that will fall to the bottom of the list of options when they are competing against the special things like ***sports, music, social clubs and the like -- no surprise, …the church is among them.***

Saying NO or OPT-ING OUT of participating in the Church usually comes down to time, relevancy and competing good works.

* + Time-wise -- I don’t have time right now. God is forgiving so he will understand my constraints.
  + Relevancy -- Church is essential for particular times of life like birth, marriage and death; outside of the major life events there is no need to be too worried about church functions and the like.
  + Competing good works -- Many use talents and abilities for good causes outside the church. **Helping at church doesn’t** seem to be necessary after doing that good samaritan work since you're doing your part elsewhere.

We can’t argue with the fact that everyone is well-served to find worthwhile hobbies and interests. We can’t argue the fact that from time to time, some go through burnout from too much volunteering too. That being said, if we are always or frequently forgoing volunteering in the church, is that in ***our best interests*** or ***other’s best interests*** in the long run? Are we putting helping the church on hold for a day that might never come? **More than that,** is there a particular aspect to OPT-ING IN with church that is not replicated when we OPT-IN other options out there?

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| Page 3 – HOPE IN THE TEXT -- a living sacrifice is more understandable when we consider Jesus is our example and what he did for us |

Coming back to the Roman believers, they might have considered putting things on hold too, but Paul has some other key words in his opening line that set them up with ***a solid reason why “IT’S TIME TO OPT-IN”****.*

Paul opens up in verse 1 with “I urge you, brothers and sisters, **in view of God’s mercy** to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1) Paul proposes the reason why one should be a living sacrifice comes through “***in view of God’s mercy*”** towards us in Jesus Christ.

By stepping over to the complementary text for today, Paul rounds out our perspective on what God’s mercy looks like through Jesus,

I’ll re-read a portion to bring that back to our minds,

Philippians 2:5-8 **“…Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”**

In Christ who was sacrificed on a cross, we have a **model of someone who humbled himself to serve humanity.**  In Christ, **we have someone who suffered like a gladiator for the sin** of all of humanity - Christ took the responsibility for sin and suffered in our place. In JESUS’ way of doing this sacrifice, he is looking to the interest of others rather than his own. Because of this sacrifice, Jesus has ensured all who believed in him will have the most life-giving experience ever: eternal life. **Christ is the great model** in regards to being sacrificial in relationship to others.

***However, there is more to note regarding his sacrifice***. In Christ, we do not have a DEAD sacrifice, but a LIVING sacrifice! He rose from the dead, alive and is now seated at the right hand of God. He is now living to forever make intercession for the saints; serving as high priest acquainted with all our weakness having been in the flesh himself. He is interceding for us now and forever sustaining us in **everlasting hope and life by continually reconciling us to God.**  As Hebrews 7:25 says - “Therefore he is able to completely save those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

When considering Jesus in light of his sacrifice, who wouldn’t OPT-IN on following him given **the lengths he has gone and continues to go for the benefit of others --** always living, …always living,... to intercede for us to unite us with God the Father. OPTING-IN to follow Jesus and believe in him is the ultimate live-giving experience!

**With this life-giving experience extended towards us in Jesus,** how can we not render service to him offering our own lives back to him so wholly and completely? As we read in the Heidelberg Catechism together, QA55, explains how we share in Christ and his gifts and treasure to offer ourselves to the local community of faith: to use our gifts readily and joyfully for the service and enrichment of other members. It is described as a duty, and perhaps duty is a term that doesn’t work for you. In the Roman world of kings and emperors, serving a lord such as they did might be a duty, but serving our Lord Jesus could also be described as a delight, an honour. Any way you slice it though, to **not serve as a living sacrifice is to miss out on rendering gratitude** to Jesus who offers us the life-giving experience of eternity forever.

As the Romans are listening to their letter from Paul, he has written to them about Christ’s sacrifices too -- The very familiar Romans 5:8 shares, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). That is the view of God’s mercy and how Jesus is a loving and living sacrifice for us and in gratitude we simply are compelled to offer ourselves back to him.

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| Page 4 HOPE IN THE WORLD -- There are many examples of people sacrificing through ministries of WCM & Waterloo CRC |

Finding a balance for OPTING-IN with activities given all the options that out there, makes it a challenge to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice here in the local church community. But, *there are many people who inspire me, and perhaps you know some inspiring sacrificial people as well.* They seem to be living sacrifices for Jesus and juggling that with their other involvements out there very well. When I look at Waterloo Campus Ministry, God has raised up a number of student leaders this term who are humble and servants through and through. **Laura Dentz** has been faithfully serving WCM since I started two years ago with social events and bible study. She is preparing to lead a Christian book study this term. **Scott Adema** has been faithful to WCM for two years with outreach events. He is organizing people to do outreach events on campus and in KW including a food drive. **Timothy Thomas** has been with WCM for more than a year and will be starting to facilitate our Weekly Gathering of Table Talk. **Gabby Masengi and Ellie Harpster** are doing awesome social media for WCM and helping others to know we are on campus. **Ava Boonstra** will be organizing social events that will increase inclusion and belonging in our community. All these students inspire me by how they OPT-IN for Jesus on campus and OPT-OUT of filling all their time with just extracurricular options out there.

But, I am also inspired **by this local church Waterloo CRC**. These members are examples of being a living sacrifice for Jesus in the local community in a myriad of ways. The Friday Cook Group with the Sunnydale women is a ministry that invites women to find community, love and belonging here in this neighbourhood and Waterloo CRC helps that group with space and mentorships. There are also the leaders who faithfully organize Gems and Cadets and continue to minister to young people so they can learn about Jesus’ love for them and be grounded in their faith. They give of their time sacrificially to make that happen and deal with kids who are so full of energy, and it can take tons of energy! Moveover, the Friendship Program on Monday nights has so many volunteers that are touching the lives of those with special needs.

At the end of the year, these volunteers don’t walk away from these obligations or responsibilities.If you asked them why they continue to serve, they would say that even **if just one person comes to know Christ and believe in him it is worth it because they will have the life-giving experience of ETERNITY forevermore.** There are not many other places where the volunteering you do has an impact for people that goes beyond this world to the next. This is their reason WHY they OPT-IN as often as they can to help the church.

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| CONCLUSION -- Opting in with church is unique, Jesus is our example and the opportunity is now - It’s time to OPT IN. |

When it comes to the season of OPTING-IN, being a living sacrifice to the church community might mean sacrificing some option out there. However, it is a very unique thing to partner with God so that others can question, discover and grow in a life of faith in Jesus. It is also a gift to create spaces where others can experience the care and support of a local community when they are in need - that generates belonging. It doesn’t matter whether one is serving the coffee or teaching a lesson, chauffeuring people, changing diapers or serving as an elder. We have different functions as we form one body and it is all given for the sake of grace. This is the one place where *the life-giving experiences are ones that connect others to everlasting life experiences.*

*But, if we are still hanging back, Jesus’ is the model that inspires us - his sacrifice of his death on our behalf and his perpetual sacrifice to intercede for us - Jesus leads us to offer ourselves in gratitude to God’s work and mission in our church and our communities. The opportunity is now -- ITS TIME TO OPT-IN.*

***Closing prayer -- use these key ideas***

As we weigh all the important things we seem to need to do,... remember and be reminded of Matthew 6:33 - Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.

Holy Spirit

- raise up a community that is sacrificial to each other in a way that brings others closer to Jesus so that they can experience the life-giving presence of Christ and be known by him.

- activate hearts of compassion and self-sacrifice that will seek solutions for issues in our community that are hard to solve

-motivate ones who are willing to be sharers of the gospel in word, action and deed.