**BECOMING ALL THAT GOD WANTS US TO BE**

 **KEY VERSES**

‘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. **2**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.’ (Romans 12:1-2)

‘So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.’ (Romans 12:1-2 *MSG*)

**A LIVING SACRIFICE**

**Place your life before God**

In the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul teaches the church in Rome – and us – the doctrines of salvation and what it means to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us of the new life that God has given us through his love, grace and mercy and the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice he has made though Jesus going to the cross to die for our salvation. This sacrifice is not to be taken lightly, and Paul begins chapter 12 of Romans by describing how those of us who are in Christ should live and how we should respond in view of God’s mercy to us.

Paul begins Romans 12:1 with the word ‘Therefore’. ‘In view of God’s mercy’, for all he has done for us, Paul now gives practical application on how we are to respond and how we are to live our lives.

**A living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God**

Very often, within The Salvation Army as in many churches, there has been a culture of ‘duty’: a sense of busyness and living a certain way because it’s our duty to do those things or to abstain from certain lifestyles. There has even been a fear of God for some people, and we live a certain way and do what we do because we are afraid of what will happen to us if we don’t.

However, Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly tells us; ‘*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.’*

Nothing we can do can take us out of God’s love; and it doesn’t matter what we do for God and his Church, our good works are not what saves us. His grace is freely given, and all we need to do is to accept that grace, recognise that we are sinners who need a saviour, accept that God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross to save us, seek forgiveness, repent and be reconciled to God.

However, in view of God’s mercy, because of what he has done for us, we are urged to offer our lives to him as a sacrifice for what he has done for us. We are not called to good works for what we get out of it, or because it’s our duty or what’s expected of us, or even out of fear of what will happen if we don’t. But we are compelled to live lives holy and pleasing to God because of our love in return for what he has done for us.

When we truly love somebody, we do everything we can to please that person to demonstrate our love to them. That sometimes involves making sacrifices of our time and the things that we want for what the person we love wants of us. Nobody is perfect, but we can try to live the best life we can and do what we do for God not out of fear or out of duty, but out of love for him, for what he has done for us. Embracing what God does for us, we should desire to live a life that is pleasing to him, sacrificing our own selfish desires and living in obedience to his will. This is our true and proper worship.

**Becoming all that God wants us to be**

God welcomes us and saves us based purely out of our faith in him. And out of our faith, our salvation is secure. Yet it doesn’t finish there. When we come to know the saving grace of God and allow Jesus into our lives, we come to an understanding of God’s love for us and for the world. Through this we have a new perspective on life and our minds are transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit to be in tune with God’s will. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!’

When we accept Jesus into our lives, the Holy Spirit starts to work within us; he empowers and equips us for the work of God. The Holy Spirit also convicts us of what is right and wrong. The more we get to know God, the more we grow in our relationship with him. The more we get to understand the joy of our own salvation, and the more we grow in the Spirit, the more we become like Jesus and all he wants us to be. We grow in our desire to serve him and make others aware of him. It is our faith and love that motivates us to do the good works we do and to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. It’s faith-motivated love that transforms our lives to become all that God wants us to be.

To be a living sacrifice, we are to die to self, to our own selfish desires and ambitions, and live according to God’s purpose and will for our lives. We are to give our entire being to him, all our heart, our love, our talents, our energy, and all our strength to serve him. A living sacrifice is not so much about doing, it’s about being. It’s about who we are, how we live our everyday lives, the way we behave, the everyday decisions and choices that we make, the way in which we interact with other people.

Romans 12:1 in *The Message* translation reads: ‘So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.’

Are we living our everyday, ordinary lives in accordance with God’s will? Are our lives in tune with God’s word in Scripture? Does our everyday behaviour and interactions with others reflect the love, grace and example of Jesus?

**A life transformed … his good, pleasing and perfect will**

It’s through our relationship with him that we have a clearer understanding of all that God wants us to be. When we spend time in prayer, study God’s word and are in fellowship with other believers, God reveals more of himself to us. Our lives are transformed by the renewing of our minds to be focused on God’s will and way of living, and not being led by the distractions and patterns of the world around us. The more we grow in Christ Jesus and the greater understanding we have of God’s word the more we are able to test and approve his will for us – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Paul instructs in Philippians 4:8**: ‘**Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.’

What we fill our minds with has a big effect on how we live our lives. Negative thoughts produce negative behaviour just as positive thoughts produce positive behaviour. What we read and what we watch impacts our minds, which in turn impacts our behaviour and the choices that we make. May we renew our minds with the things of God, the things that are true, noble, right and pure. Instead of conforming to the patterns of this world, let us test what we read, watch and hear with God’s word in Scripture.

Just as much as what we fill our minds with, the people we spend our time with also have a big effect on our lives. Therefore, let’s surround ourselves with godly people who will encourage, inspire and guide us in our daily walk with God. Let’s allow the wisdom and experience of other believers to help us in the decisions and choices that we make and share our wisdom and experience with others. Proverbs 27:17 says: ‘As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.’

**Conclusion**

Today is Candidates Sunday in The Salvation Army. Maybe God is speaking to you about being a Salvation Army officer, or calling you to a particular ministry; but today is not just about Salvation Army officership. God has a calling on every one of us. Don’t ever believe that God cannot use you.

Maybe you feel that there is not much you can offer God; maybe you feel you are too young, or too old. Maybe you feel that you haven’t much confidence in yourself or you’re a person who prefers to hide in the background. It’s not just about the big things that we do – it’s about offering our everyday lives as sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God in

worship to him. It’s not about what we do, it’s about becoming all that God want us to be; it’s not just in the big things that we do, but it’s who we are in our everyday lives that God uses us.

In view of God’s mercy, are you living your everyday, ordinary life in accordance with God’s will? Does your everyday behaviour and interactions with others reflect the love, grace and example of Jesus? Are you offering your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God? Are you conforming to the patterns of this world, or are you living according to God’s will, his good, pleasing and perfect will for your life?