

# **SACRIFICIAL LOVE**

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## **WHAT IS SACRIFICIAL LOVE?**

There are many kinds of love. The love discussed here is a type of love that is necessary in marriage relationships. Without it, couples may end up only being roommates who run a house together. In my opinion, love is not real unless it is also sacrificial. This is the kind of love that Christ had for us and is the love he wants us to extend to others, especially our spouse. As Paul said in Ephesians 5:1-2, we are to "be imitators...and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." What does sacrifice look like?

When my wife was pregnant with our first child, she wanted to have a healthy pregnancy and weight gain. For many women, as they go through the pregnancy, they begin to feel as if they are getting "fat". They are not getting fat, rather, they are having a baby. However, when they look at their body, they feel fat. My wife decided that she did not want to gain an unhealthy amount of weight. Yet, she also had cravings for things like ice cream. What would have been easy for me would have been to buy a few gallons of ice cream to keep around the house. Heck, it would have been cheaper too. Instead, what we decided was that when she had a craving for ice cream, I would go out and get her ice cream from a local shop. Buying her gallons of ice cream would not have been sacrificial, but taking time to go out each time she wanted ice cream was. I know this does not seem like a big sacrifice, but sacrifice does not have to be grandiose.

A good friend of mine was taking dance lessons with his wife. They went for months and months. Finally, on one trip to the dance studio she turned to him in the car and said, "You really don't want to do these dance lessons do you?" He responded honestly, which was to say that he did not. When she asked him why they continued, he told her that it was because she liked them. He took pains to hide the fact that he did not like the dance lessons. He went every week. He was ready before her. Yet, because she knew him so well, she figured out that he did not love the dance lessons. His act was sacrificial.

## **WHAT IS NOT SACRIFICIAL LOVE?**

Take the example that was just discussed of the husband going to dance lessons. Here is how that same action would not be sacrificial. First, say he sighs heavily every time she mentions the lessons or before they go. Or, he is late getting ready. Or, he mocks the other dancers or the instructor during the class. He is making it apparent that he is sacrificing. There is nothing sacrificial in that.

A second example would be that the husband says to his wife that he will go to dance lessons as long as she promises sex when they come home. Quid pro quo is not sacrificial.

Finally, it is not sacrificial if it was something you would do anyway. Many husbands say to their wives that they sacrifice every day they go to work. Not necessarily. If they would be going to work anyway if they were single, how is that a sacrificial act. There are times that going to work can be sacrificial. My parents are divorced. My dad spent the last 10 years of his career in a job he hated, having any semblance of responsibility stripped away from him and given to younger men. Yet, he went to work every day. Why? He knew that if he changed jobs to further

his career, it would have meant moving to another state, and he wanted to be there for us as we grew up. I never knew this until much later when I asked him about his experiences at work.

Another example would be the woman who cleans the house and tells her husband how much she sacrifices for the house to be clean. If she was fastidious about neatness in all areas of her life prior to the marriage, how is cleaning the home a sacrifice? It can be sacrificial, but, if it is something she would do anyway, then it may not be.

## **HOW CAN WE RECEIVE SACRIFICIAL LOVE?**

Let's start with an example. A husband leaves his laundry on the floor of the bedroom. His wife is regularly angry with him and is becoming increasingly resentful. She wants him to clean up after himself. Yes, the husband is a slob. However, if he were single, I guarantee you that he would have hot and cold running laundry on the floor until laundry day. If he starts to pick up his laundry and put it in the hamper, is he doing it for himself? Of course not. He is doing it for his wife. Not surprisingly, most spouses have a hard time seeing these types of actions as sacrificial. As a result, they do not appreciate what their spouse does. As a result, the husband in this case, would pick up the laundry simply to avoid the judgment of his wife. Or, just as likely, the husband will not pick up his laundry in an act of passive aggression toward his wife.

In order to receive sacrificial love, we need to understand what sacrifice looks like. Sacrifices come in big and small packages. Sacrifice does not need to be grandiose. When we hold the attitude that the way we want our spouse to treat us is self-evident and that all spouses should act in certain ways (cleaning up laundry, making dinner, etc.), then we will not see the sacrifices that each makes for one another. Look at what your spouse does in the relationship and ask yourself if he or she would be engaging in the behavior if not for the relationship.