

TO BE A LIVING SACRIFICE

by Kristin Yoder and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

(Romans 12:1)

FAITH STORY:

Roman 12: 1–8

FAITH FOCUS:

In this passage, Paul encourages the Roman Christians to give their bodies, minds, and souls to Christ, becoming living sacrifices and giving everything to him. Christians are not to think more highly of themselves than they should; all the members of “Christ’s body” need each other. Christians have been given different gifts and are called to use them.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students to realize what being a “living sacrifice” for God is all about.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Explore what it means to not be conformed to the world
- Explore their gifts and ways to give themselves back to God

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for each student
- 2 Colorful 3 X 5 note cards, pens or pencils
- 3 TV, DVD player and the movie—Mean Girls. (Cue the movie to the clip where Lindsey Lohan changes her ways to be like the Plastics.)
- 4 Dry erase board or chalk board.
- 5 Newsprint and markers
- 6 If you can find one, use a Gifts Survey
- 7 Make cookie cutter cookies in the shape of a gingerbread person prior to class—one for each student.
- 8 Frosting, knives to spread the frosting, sprinkles, M & M’s, and other items to decorate the cookies.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10 minutes)

Show the movie clip from Mean Girls. If you don't show this movie clip, invite students to name shows or movies that illustrate people conforming to what other people do. As you discuss the movies, make a list of how people conform to the world.

CONNECT: (5–10 minutes)

Ask:

- In what ways is it harmful for everyone to try to be the same?
- Why is there pressure to be the same?
- Is this pressure harder for teenagers than for adults?
- What happens to people who don't conform?
- When is conforming a good thing?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15 minutes)

Hand out the colorful 3 x 5 cards and pens. Ask students to listen as you or another student reads the passage from Romans 12:1–8, slowly and deliberately. Ask students to jot down on their cards something that sticks out to them or a question that comes to mind.

Hand out the Bibles and ask students to go through the passage again on their own, adding to the comments or questions on their cards.

Divide into small groups for students to discuss what they wrote on their cards. Then come back together as a large group and continue the discussion.

Share the following mini-lecture:

This passage talks about being a “living sacrifice.” In Jesus’ time, sacrifices were mainly done with animals, although sometimes humans were sacrificed as well. Sacrifices were done for several reasons—the main one was to give praise and worship to God, or to pagan gods. It was a way to tell God you would give everything to him in appreciation for the things he would do for you. Another reason to give a sacrifice was to get rid of sins—people would kill the sacrificial animal or bird, and that would represent giving the sin to God. Once the sacrifice was given, the person would be cleansed from their wrongdoing—until they sinned again.

When Jesus died on the cross, he was the sacrificial lamb who took on the sins of the whole world. No longer were animal sacrifices needed, because Jesus took on the sins of everyone.

Paul uses the terminology here of sacrifices because it was something the people understood—sacrifices had been a part of their Jewish faith. He now asks them to present their own bodies as living sacrifices in appreciation for what God has done for them. One of the ways to give our body as a living sacrifice is to discover and use the gifts and abilities that God gave us.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Ask students to get into small groups and give each group newsprint and a marker. Ask each group to think about the movie clip, the cards, the Bible passage, and the mini-lecture you shared. Based on those elements, ask them to write down what those elements have in common and what the main points are of the lesson so far.

Bring the groups back together and compare the lists. Then post the newsprint lists on the wall and ask students to look at the lists and answer this question: *What does this have to do with me?*

RESPOND: (10–15 minutes)

Place the cookies on the table. Say:

These cookies are all the same. You might say they are all conformed to each other right now. I want you to take a cookie and make it “you.” Illustrate your gifts and what makes you unique on your cookie. Show how you can be a “living sacrifice”. Your cookie will be a piece of art that symbolizes you and what you learned today.

Give students time to decorate their cookies. When they are done, go around the group and enjoy looking at the cookies. How do they represent their person?

Give students the option of taking the cookie home with them or enjoying it in class.

Close with this blessing:

May you know what it means
Not to be conformed to the world
But to be transformed into God’s image.
May your mind be renewed
And may you know God’s heart within your own.
May you seek what is good,
And share your gifts with others
And may you never be
A cookie-cutter Christian!

And all God’s children said
AMEN!

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

In these verses, Paul ties together the mind and body in the new relationship with Jesus Christ. Christians must lay their bodies on the altar of sacrifice to God just as sacrifices were made to God as part of the Jewish tradition. And as we offer ourselves to God, our minds must be renewed and transformed.

This transformation means not looking for acceptance by being like everyone else in the world, but getting our self-esteem from being a new creation in Christ. We should not think of ourselves as worthless, nor should we think more highly of ourselves than we do of others.

God, through the Holy Spirit, gives believers different gifts. These gifts are to be used for the benefit of the church and also in the world around us, always bearing in mind that it is God who blessed us with the gifts. God's gifts to us should not be abused, misused or unused.

WORKS CITED:

NRSV Harper Study Bible, Zondervan, 1991