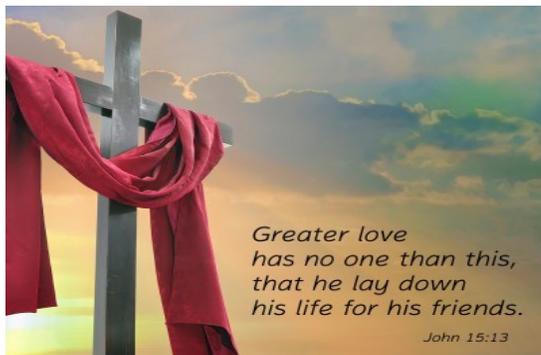


SACRIFICIAL LIVING



*“Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.
We ought to lay down our lives
for one another.”
1 John 3:16 (NIV)*

How are you sacrificially living for Jesus Christ? What are some “acceptable” things that you could do, but you refrain from doing, because it does not show Christ? Jesus died for us and cleansed us from our sins. He rose again, conquering the last enemy—death. Since He did this for you, how are you living sacrificially in response?

For example, it is legally permissible for you to smoke, apart from the health concerns. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you give up smoking because this is not being a good steward of the body that God has given to you. It may be socially acceptable for you to use certain “cuss” words, but you give that up because it is not a good reflection of the Holy Spirit that lives within you. It may feel good to hold a grudge, but you realize, as a believer in Jesus Christ, you are called to forgive 70 x 7 times. This means letting go and not allowing the spirit of bitterness build up with in you.

How do you answer the question? What is the motive behind your sacrificial living? Do you live to please God, or yourself—maybe both?

SACRIFICE

What do I sacrifice for Christ? Surely “not enough” is the resounding answer of my soul, if I am in the least degree honest! On my best days, perhaps my sacrifice can be found in some particulars, a “this” or a “that”. It is the overarching target of sacrifice that I need to keep at the forefront of my mind. It is the “bull’s eye” and not the outer rings that I have found most helpful in striving after holiness. *“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* Hebrews 12:14 (NIV).

That “bull’s eye” is my will. I must die daily to self (1 Corinthians 15:31). I must, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, flowing from the risen and ascended Lord of Glory, through the channel of faith, sacrifice my selfish desires. Martin Luther wrote that he feared “Pope Self” more than any pope in Rome. It is true, that once born again and united to Christ, the old has passed away and all has become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). However, in this life, we still have the battle of not doing that which we in principal hate (Romans 7:15). As Luther well knew, and as every Christian can only testify to, the old nature is present with us, “Pope Self” must be daily dethroned, and Christ kept at His rightful place, reigning and ruling in our hearts by faith.

Lest we be discouraged in this battle, we look to Christ, our great High Priest. He sacrificed His life to redeem sinners and has sent His Spirit to indwell and enable us to, in loving response, offer our lives as a living sacrifice back to Him (Romans 12:1-2). It is “Me” that I must, by grace, daily sacrifice in every situation, in every word, in every thought, “Self” must be sacrificed. This impossible task drives me to the One that makes it certainly possible, and to His Word, that gives me certain ground upon which to plead: *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV).

Written by Greg Oliver, Director of Development

BANQUET REFLECTIONS

God received all the glory for His work in the lives of the residents of Living Water Ministry Network at the recent Banquet. His work was seen in the way LWMN was blessed to be able to take in new residents, bid a fond farewell to

those who are able to move on as successful citizens, and in the way LWMN was able to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the ministry itself. We shared how LWMN provided the funds needed to help with the upkeep of our ministry homes, as well as purchase a new resident home. God was honored, as one of the Alumni Residents shared how LWMN and the Christian discipleship he received at LWMN changed his life. We heard how his mentor walked along-side this journey, and even had feedback from his mother—a role dramatically portrayed by the sister of one of the Alumni Residents. How encouraged we were that all of you were there to share in the evening. We treasure you—your prayers, attendance, and support. Thank you to all who volunteered and helped us with the evening.

Did you miss it? We are pleased to announce that we will again celebrate God's goodness to LWMN at the Annual Fundraiser Banquet on Tuesday, March 24, 2020. We were so pleased with the venue, and will again hold the banquet at English Hills Event Center. In addition, you can still support us financially, prayerfully, and voluntarily. Feel free to contact us when you are ready to become involved.

When asked, this is how some who attended the evening shared about their experience.



The Annual Fundraising Banquet was awesome from the food, speakers and music. I was overwhelmed by Paul's testimony and by Kurt's sister's re-enactment. It was heart-felt. I was in tears, along with many others. Everyone was moved with the spiritual aspect of the evening, and were quiet and reflective when they heard the reenactment. Over all, it was a blessed night for me and many others.

I very much enjoyed the Living Water Ministry Banquet. I got to see everyone who is a part of the ministry, all together in one room, and fellowship with them. There were new people, whom I had not known and now I consider part of "the family". I got a blessing from God this evening, as I saw His work through this ministry. Pastor Jim and Miss Linda are very Christ-like leaders that help transform men into the godly men God created them to be. I love and thank the Ministry for the love and compassion they have given.

I am always surprised, and humbled to see the number and variety of people who attend this event. The fact that so many people care about us—who often feel like lepers—is truly humbling. I also truly enjoy talking with and catching up with my family, both my biological family and my Living Water extended family. It has a way of renewing my faith in people and confirming my faith in God.

"How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears." 2 Samuel 7:22 (NIV). This is the verse of the day in my devotions the day after the Banquet. Pastor Jim put it this way, "God hit a home run." This reminds me of Carl Gunn, the Living Water Ministry founder, who wrote his own Bible study for his ministry inside the Muskegon Correctional Facility entitled, "The Home Run Club." Carl had a desire to provide housing for parolees. The night of the Banquet, I believe Carl would have been humbly blessed to see the lives Christ has transformed through LWMN to include the residents, family, friends, mentors, church, community, and beyond.



My first response of the 2019 LWMN Banquet is that this one, out of the four I have attended, was really the most enjoyable and touching banquet that I have had the privilege to attend and to be part of. It really says something when you can have people laughing, and then see them crying, during the time spent with them. Most of the men and women that I have spoken with about their experience during this event, have all expressed that it was one of the best fundraisers they have ever attended. Praise God!!



Everyone from start to finish did a fantastic and wonderful job. All praise to Him, who made all things possible, the One and Only Jesus, Amen.

I felt there was a lot of love at the LWMN Annual Banquet, and surprisingly, there were a lot of people who saw us, former prisoners, as people too. I felt their eyes were opened and they have a better understanding of us; we are not the same men who entered prison. We have fought to be better people, trying hard to do right, and to be model citizens. People now have open minds and are willing to give us a second chance. This is good, because it is people like those at the Banquet who will benefit from their choice in giving us a second chance.

"For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:33, 11:1 (NIV)

MORE BANQUET REFLECTIONS

I had a good time at the banquet, bringing my father, my two brothers with their wives, my two mentors with their wives together.



I talked with everyone at my table, and they all enjoyed it, especially being impressed with the quality and quantity of the food.

I also was impressed with the number of people who attended. I wish there had been time for everyone to stand and introduce themselves and their connection to Living Water Ministry. It was very well organized and elegant. I cannot wait until next year.



Pastor Jim Bright and his wife Linda greet guests

Speakers Paul Darr & Dave Stek



What a night! I was very moved to see such a turnout of support. Friends, family, long-time supporters, and those curious about the ministry were treated to a lot of love, gratitude, laughter and tears, stories, music, and of course, a great meal. It was easy to see God's hand at work in the evening's events. Without a doubt, our Lord was the center focus of the banquet. It helped me appreciate all LWMN is doing in my life and the lives of dozens of men returning to the community.

What I recall, and that which has been the greatest effect, was meeting our contributors. It was exciting to hear of who they are, as they support us to become the people God meant us to be. I had a brief relapse into some old behavior and came to realize the madness of it all. So, I am accepting of the accountability here at LWMN.

Remembering those who have befriended me at the banquet, and those of my church who have also come through for me, encourages and strengthens my sobriety in this "if it feels good, do it" world. God gave us that encouragement system. In the past, I had hijacked it. Thanks to you and other supporters, I have earned "if you do good, you also shall feel good". That is a gift from God.

THIS MONTHS FEATURED EDITORIALS

THE LOVE OF GOD

During this time of year, we recount the fact that God gave His only begotten Son to die for the sins of mankind. Jesus said that man was not taking His life, but that He was laying it down for the world. In light of what God the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit did for me, I decided to give up my life to follow Jesus Christ. Everyday, in some way or fashion, I have to deny myself and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a wide array of things I have given up, like drinking and getting high. There is no room for these vices in my body any longer—and I am free.

Resident writer, J. C.

NO MORE NUMBER ONE

Although I often fail or get "caught up in life", and do not think about it, when I am able to try to do things that I believe Jesus would want, this usually involves not being selfish or thinking about myself. In our society, we are often taught to look out for number one, first and foremost, but Jesus put everyone else before Himself, even those who hated Him. For me, this involves not following human or worldly desires and thinking "what would Jesus find valuable".

Resident writer, D. T.

My thoughts were not on the banquet. Just before leaving for the banquet, I received a call saying my petition to find my birth family was going through, and I would have the opportunity to locate them. WOW! I do not know how I feel about that.

The banquet was really cool. I shared my news with many people and they were really supportive and said that they would pray for me—especially the two most important people, Pastor Jim and Miss Linda.

As the people got up and made their speeches telling how much LWMN does for their residents, and the community contacts they have made, the only thing I could think was "and they picked me!" It was a great banquet. Pastor Jim and Miss Linda talked about where LWMN has been, where it is now, and some plans for the future. I was part of that going forward, with a family and a future. That was totally awesome!

"I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward everyone according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve." Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV)

ALLOWABLE BUT NOT BENEFICIAL

There are several things I have been working on giving up for the Lord. They are allowable but not beneficial in my walk with Christ. *Pride*—not having to be right all the time or to have the last word. *Selfishness*—it is not always about what I want or feel I need. *Lack of Patience*—the desire to move on quickly with the things that move life back to a good, normal. Examples of this for me are owning a car, a home, and publishing books. *Unforgiveness*—wishing and hoping for reconciliation with all family and forgiveness for those who still condemn me. *Self-will*—staying humble, focused on God, seeking His will in my every decision and choice.

Resident writer, D. W.

WHAT HAVE I SACRIFICED FOR MY LORD

I have sacrificed my time watching television to assist with LWMN home projects. I realize that God has given me the ability to learn and to use my talents to fix the exterior (buildings), while the mentors and ministers work on the inside (the spiritual). In giving of my time and talent, I am allowing God to guide me in fellowship with the ministry. He knows that I need the support of the residents, and that I will continue to learn patience, by giving my time to God. God will guide my life where He needs me.

Alumni resident writer, R. L.

SACRIFICIAL LIVING

How are you living sacrificially for the Lord? This is a very tough question for me. As I pondered how I would answer this, I had to really look deep down inside myself, and try to understand why I do the things I choose to do. For example, I choose to no longer cuss. I have learned that people who use cuss words sound less intelligent. I also know that my Father would never want to hear me talk that way. Jesus says in Matthew 12:36-37 (NIV) “*men will have to give account on the day of judgment of every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*” I choose not to use cuss words, so that I may appear to look good to my Father in Heaven. This, in turn, makes me look good to my peers. It is easy to elevate myself so that I look better to those around me, which builds up my self-esteem. This makes me think, did I do it for me, or for my Father? As a child of God, I know the right answer, but if I do not do my daily devotions to humble myself, then pride builds within me, and I find myself doing this for myself, not my Lord.

Resident writer, D. W.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”, and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27 (NIV)

SACRIFICE

My body and mind are God’s to be used for His purposes only, not mine. I am to be a good steward (caretaker) of that which He designed and age to me, and not use this gift for my own selfish behaviors and purposes. I have sacrificed selfish and unhealthy desires of the mind, and the desires of wanting to be a lover, boyfriend, husband, or father. I gave up being selfish, self-destructive, and thinking only of myself. I sacrificed self-abuse, evil thoughts, and controlling others. I gave up bullying, patronizing, insulting, putting others down, and cursing at people and God. I sacrificed hate for those I do not like or chose not to have dealings with. I have renewed my mind, as my spiritual act of worship.

Resident writer, D. M.

WHAT I GAVE UP

For Christ, I gave up the shyness and the embarrassment of talking and acknowledging Him to my family and co-workers. It has always been hard to express my true beliefs and values which involve Christ. I used to feel awkward, like I am offending others when I talk about Jesus and what He did on the cross for all mankind. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I am now proud of my beliefs and not afraid to talk about them. I do get negative feedback sometimes, but sharing Christ is well worth it, especially when seeds of faith are planted.

Resident writer, P. M.



*“We have this treasure in jars of clay.”
Banquet illustration
by Resident Artist, C. C.*

CONTACT US:

Living Water Ministry Network
PO Box 566
Comstock Park, MI 49321

Email: pastorjim@livingwaterpmn.org

Website: www.livingwaterpmn.org

Please consider making a generous gift to help support and encourage the men God has entrusted to LWMN. Please make donation checks payable to: Living Water Ministry Network (LWMN) or visit the web site. Your contributions are tax deductible to this 501(c)3 non-profit ministry organization. Sign-up, as well, to be part of our prayer team.