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## Romans 12:1-2 & Galatians 2:20

### Paul Ralph Romig Memorial Service Message

*Pastor Jonathan M. Romig*

Six months ago, my dad updated his testimony, the story of how he came to faith in Jesus Christ. Dad did this as part of becoming an Elder at Rocky, but I think one of the reasons God led him to update his testimony was to help me retell his testimony today. It seems so providential. Today I want to tell you my dad's story with some of his favorite Scripture passages and a couple of personal memories. I hope by the end you'll know my dad a little bit better, but even more so, I hope you'll know the one he trusted, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

*Dear Heavenly Father, I know I'm not the only one who has lost someone. We've all lost someone we love, or we will one day feel this heartache. That can make our hearts feel heavy. You tell us to grieve as those who have hope. Help us grieve today. Help us mourn. But also give us hope. Help us rejoice that my dad is with Jesus, and anyone who knows Jesus will get all eternity to rejoice together with my dad and their loved ones who are in Christ too. We look forward to that day. Please guide this message in memory of my dad for your glory and praise. Amen.*

My dad had a life verse. A life verse is a passage of scripture you keep coming back to over and over again through your life because something about it just speaks to your heart. Here's the thing about my dad's life verse. Dad's life verse required his whole life. Dad's life verse demanded his life. Here it is:

#### **Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)**

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.

This is a strange passage. The Apostle Paul, my dad's Biblical namesake, is writing to the church in Rome, and he tells them to give their bodies as a "living sacrifice!" That's weird! A sacrifice is something you burn up as an offering to God, maybe fruit or grain or an animal. But here, the Apostle Paul says to be a "living sacrifice"—to be alive, yet continually offer yourself to God. What does Paul tell believers to give completely to God? Their mind and their bodies, their whole selves! The way they think and live and do their life. Why would anyone ever offer their whole life to God every single day, saying, "Take and lead me, Lord, however you wish?! I'm completely yours."

Because of God's mercy! "... in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice." Before God calls you to offer yourself completely to him, he offers himself completely to you. He offers you his mercy and grace. You may be asking, "Why would Paul Romig ever claim this as his life verse?" Why would he ever want to offer his whole life to God? Because God first offered his mercy and grace to him.

I want to tell you how my dad experienced God's mercy because my dad didn't always believe. In fact, my dad took great pride in not believing. My dad used to be an elementary school principal in a wealthy and successful school system outside of Washington D.C. He had it all, but then God began to unravel his grip on life. He lost his job in a very painful and personal manner. But as my dad put it, "I pulled myself up and got back in control." He believed his life was his own, and he would do it his way.

But do you know what God's secret weapon was for getting ahold of my dad's attention? A teenager named Christy. My sister was sixteen, and I hear she had a bit of an independent streak. My dad sought control of

his life, but God was unraveling his reality. Can you relate to that? Do you hold onto something so tight? But God has other plans? What if God's plans are good and full of mercy and grace?

One of the things that has been so encouraging to hear is how much people admired my dad. People saw he was a good husband and father. But he's had some patches that God used to get ahold of his attention. In his 30s, my parent's marriage was on the rocks, and my dad grew so desperate he asked a family friend for counsel, and he said sure he'd help, but they were going to use the Bible to lead their conversations.

So my dad began hearing the truth and talking about his problems, but it didn't immediately change him. Sometimes it takes time to get the fire lit, to get the offering burning, to become a living sacrifice. My dad was still a skeptic. He didn't believe. My mom and Christy started going to a Bible study together, and my dad went bird watching. Maybe the church would fix their problems, but he was good.

Finally, my dad's dad (grandpa) got lung cancer. My dad flew out to drive his parents to and from the hospital. He began asking those bigger questions, like "What is happening?" And finally, he picked up the Bible and began to read. Maybe you're asking, "Why is this happening to the ones I love or me?" A good place to start is the Bible. If you scan the [QR code in the program](#), you can find a link to a Bible-reading app. If just one person starts reading the Bible more because of my dad, I know he'd be thankful.

My dad found out my grandpa had lung cancer, and thirty days later, he died. Then more and more things kept happening that showed my dad he was not in control. My dad liked to call these incidents "God hitting me in the head with a 2x4." I always thought that was a bit graphic, but my mom says it now too. But you know, those 2x4s were the wood for the altar, the wood of a cross. Those 2x4s were mercy and grace.

God was beckoning, calling, leading my dad to become a living sacrifice. He was showing him he couldn't do it on his own. Do you know that? Do you know you can't do it on your own? It's actually God's mercy to show you you can't. You can manage your life your way, or your Designer who knows you at the deepest parts of your soul can lead you into life everlasting.

One Sunday morning, dad was walking in the woods behind our house, enjoying nature and a sense of the divine. He didn't believe in Jesus. He was an agnostic. He sort of believed there was a god but wasn't sure who or what "it" was. But then someone asked his heart a question. "Paul, if a friend asked you to go to a church picnic, would you go?"

"Yes. I guess I would."

"Is Ellen your friend?"

It's a trap! God got my dad to go to church, and he began taking Christy, Timothy, Matthew, and Nathanael. What finally lit the spark on that altar was more trouble parenting. But I wasn't born yet, so it wasn't me! He'd also been mentored by another believer. And so, on March 28, 1987, at the age of 42, my dad finally surrendered. The Holy Spirit lit the altar, and the next day at church, my dad stood up and shared with the whole congregation how he had put his trust in Jesus as his Savior and his Lord. He stopped trying to control his own life, and God made him a living sacrifice.

It's shortly after this that he read Romans 12:1-2, and it became his life verse. He didn't know what he could offer God, so he offered himself, which is really what God wanted all along. That's what God wants of you too. He wants to know you, to love you, to have you in every way. Maybe God might be lighting your altar today. It takes a whole new way of thinking. Dad liked the idea of "renewing his mind" through God's words in the Bible. He knew to trust Jesus, he had to think differently. If he was going to be a Christian, he was going to be a Christian. There was no plan B. The living sacrifice was aflame.

In my dad's brief version of his testimony (he had several versions), I found two Bible verses, the Romans 12:1-2 text, but also one that he called a "key verse" in his spiritual growth. If Romans 12:1-2 was an encouragement for my dad to offer himself as a living sacrifice, this verse was a reminder that in himself, in his own strength, he could not do it. Only Christ in him could become a living sacrifice.

**Galatians 2:20 (NIV)**

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Here's a mystery. We become living sacrifices because we've actually been spiritually sacrificed with Christ, and now, he's the one doing the living through us. Let me say that another way. We give our whole lives to God because God has given Christ's whole life to us. Jesus loves us so much he gives his life for us and to us. Now Christ's life, not our own, does the heavy lifting. Sons love to have strong fathers. A couple of years ago, I watched my dad deadlift 315 pounds at my gym (I was like, I gotta do that!). But even my dad wasn't strong enough to live life like God calls us to. Only Christ in him, only the Holy Spirit working through him, could do it.

My dad was an educator, and although he stopped working as an elementary school teacher and principal, he still liked to give pop-quizzes. One time he asked me, "What saves you, Jonathan?" I had the sense that he was fishing for a very particular answer, but I answered, "Jesus' death on the cross for my sins?" You would think that would be the correct Sunday school answer, but here's what my dad said. He said we're saved by the life of Christ in us. Then he quoted this verse.

**Romans 5:10 (NIV)**

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

In our sin and disobedience, we are God's enemies. But God came to heal the broken relationship through the death of his Son. But he doesn't stop there because Christ rose again and offers us his own life in us. Jesus can heal our relationship with God through his own death, but we are saved by the life of Christ in us. Somehow, mysteriously, supernaturally, we've died with Christ, and now we live with him, and he lives in us, and everything has changed. I got to see what that meant up close and personal. My dad made many mistakes, but he always clung to Christ. He clung to Christ in him, through marriage, and parenting, and pastoring, and retirement, through covid, all the way to the end.

When dad went back into the hospital the second time, I texted him that I loved him and was glad he was getting cared for in the hospital. He texted back, "You're greatly loved!" I want to take a moment and say to my mom, Christy, Timothy, Matthew, Nathanael, your wives, and Pop's grandchildren and great-grandchildren. You are greatly loved!

In that same text, my dad added, "...not improving... prayers are greatly appreciated" (my dad believed in the power of prayer!), and then he said this, "God is with me & I am His to do either way... I am blessed 😊" (upside-down smiley face emoji). Even in perhaps his lowest moment of covid my dad was alive in Christ. And now, he is more alive and more loved and more joyful and happy than any of us can imagine.

The last time I saw my dad, I read most of John 6 to him, which talks about the one-day resurrection of all who trust in Jesus. I'd been reading and re-reading it because I was worried my dad might die, but now he was getting better, but I read it anyways. Part of me thinks maybe I was helping my dad get ready to meet the Lord. I read this verse a second time to him and told him about the hope I found in it. This is Jesus speaking:

**John 6:40 (NIV)**

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Jesus is referencing a story in the Hebrew Scriptures when God's people were wandering in the wilderness and began to blaspheme God (Numbers 21:4-9). As judgment, God sent venomous snakes among the people, and they began to die. There was no cure, there was no vaccine, just poison, and death. But God provided a cure and an odd one at that. God told Moses to forge a bronze snake and set it up on a pole. Some ambulances have a similar symbol on their sides, a snake on a pole. Then God promised that if anyone bitten would just look at the bronze snake, you would be cured. Wouldn't that be nice, just look at a bronze snake and be cured of the virus? What if you could look to Jesus and be cured of something greater?

God has offered a greater healing—"everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." If you will look to the Son and believe in him, place your whole life on him, Jesus won't let you down. He'll forgive you and make you new. On that final day, Jesus will raise you up. Jesus will give you the most joy and happiness with him you've ever known.

Whether it's death from covid or old age, death is coming for us all, maybe next week, maybe next year, but death doesn't have to be the end. Christ has conquered the grave through his resurrection, and he promises that any who believe in him will one day rise again. At the cross, Jesus defeated sin and death and even covid. And if you will just look upon that cross and believe in the one who hung there for you, Jesus will forgive you of your sins and raise you up on that last day.

The night before my dad died, I had a dream about the resurrection in the early hours of the morning. I saw a group of people being taken up into the sky to greet the Lord. I didn't see Jesus, but I knew it was a dim imagination of that final day. On that final day, the trumpet will sound, the clouds will part, and the dead in Christ will be raised to meet the Lord in the air. Covid and death will be no more, and we will get to enjoy all eternity with Jesus, with those who love him, and we'll get to enjoy my dad again too. Hope in the resurrection. Hope in Christ. Let's pray.

*Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at his father's memorial service.*

*In loving memory of Paul Ralph Romig ([obituary](#) & [service](#)).*