

## **The Power of Personal Sacrifice**

A friendship is a mutual relationship requiring give and take from both parties. If one person is doing all the taking and the other all the giving, it is hardly a healthy relationship. However, in the making of healthy relationships, one person usually has to be the giver long before the other yields to the power of the giver's personal sacrifice. That is how it is regarding God's relationship with each of us.

### **The Big Time Giver**

*"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."*  
*Romans 11:35-36*

We could talk for eternity (and we will) about how God not only created us, He gave us an entire universe and one very special planet called Earth that's perfectly suited for human existence. But nothing compares with God's personal sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. God the Father not only sent His Son to the rebel planet but watched Jesus lay His life down before egocentric sinners.

*"Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."*  
*John 15:13*

Love is measured by the phrase "lay down his life." To lay down your life is to yield to another, making yourself entirely vulnerable to the will of that being or régime. It is an enormous risk. However, it is the very act that makes you more lovable.

*"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to take it up again."* *John 10:17*

It is hard to imagine the Son, Jesus Christ, becoming more lovable to God the Father. The Son was already and forever perfect. But the Son's act of laying down His life in submission to the Father for the purpose of making many eternal friends made the Son even more endearing to the Father and the potential friends.

Just as compelling is the fact that the Son has the power to lay down His life and then take it up again. His life is not ripped from Him. There is no scene with Jesus kicking, screaming and reacting against His Father's will. He has the authority to *not* lay His life down; He can put an end to the apparently aimless abuse. He can shortcut the process by pulling out prematurely. He can say "Enough!" long before He ever says "It is finished." (John 19:30)

Pastors, you ask: "Why don't I have many or *any* deep friendships?" The depth of your friendships will be measured by your willingness to "lay down your life" and make yourself vulnerable. Perhaps you have laid yourself down only to be taken advantage of

numerous times. Now you are closed and saying “Never again!” But you are dying inside, and the only way out is to open yourself up again.

Pastors, you ask: “People no longer find me lovable, or they never did!” To the degree that you willingly yield your life for others as a vulnerable friend, you are endearing yourself to God and people, regardless of your age, race or capabilities. Please review my opening statement: “In the making of healthy relationships, one person usually has to be the giver long before the other yields to the power of the giver’s personal sacrifice.” Not everyone will become a healthy giver in relationships. However, given the opportunity, some people will respond to your vulnerability, resulting in mutual friendships that will last forever.

Pastors, are you afraid of losing control in your personal and pastoral relationships? To the degree that you lay down your life, God takes control. Letting go of your rights, privileges, demands, requests, agendas and life itself puts you in a position for God to control through you and your circumstances. That’s the ultimate control that works miracles as those who fight for control begin to feel the weight of responsibility for having it their way and the potential devastation of their own will.

When I was a young man still living at home, my father and I were in a tug-of-war of wills regarding my independence and responsibility. I saw the benefits of independence. He was trying to protect me from the weight of responsibility that would come with my fight for independence. Debate got as heated as two introverted Swedes can fan a fire. At the end of the day, Dad quietly entered my room, sat down and told me that I could have it as I wished and I could do as I pleased. Suddenly I felt the great wave of responsibility Dad saw all along. Previous to his letting go was a conflict of stubborn wills that reason could not resolve.

**The Power of Personal Sacrifice** is the ultimate Power of Friendship. The moment Dad laid down his will and wishes for my life, I began to wake up. I halted my hasty plans, and Dad remained one of my best friends the rest of His life. Dad passed away exactly 10 years ago to the date I am writing this - November 28. From my perspective he continues to grow in wisdom even after his death. God blessed me with a father who knew when and where to lay down his own will so that his son would learn a valuable lesson about responsibility and friendship. He understood **the Powers of Friendship** and demonstrated personal sacrifice throughout his life.

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