

Contagious Sacrificial Submission

Judges 11:29-40

By [Dr. Joel Beeke](#)

Well it's very good to have the opportunity to bring you God's Word again and to be with my dear friends, your pastors, Dr. Ligon Duncan and Dr. Derek Thomas. I'd like you to turn with me please to Judges 11, Judges 11. We want to read from verses 29 through 40.

Judges 11, verse 29:

Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh and passed over Mizpah of Gilead and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed over into the children of Ammon. And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord and said, "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. So Jephthah passed over into the children of Ammon to fight against them and the Lord delivered them into His hands and He smote them from Aroer, even til thou come unto Minnith, even twenty cities, and into the plain of the vineyards with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

And Jephthah came to Mizpah and unto his house and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances and she was his only child, beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass that when he saw her, he wrent his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low and thou art one of them that trouble me, for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back." And she said unto him, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, for as much as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon." And she said unto her father, "Let this thing be done for me. Let me alone two months that I may go up and down upon the mountains and bewail by virginity, I and my fellows." And he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months. And she went with her companions and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. And it came to pass at the end of two months as she returned unto her father who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed, and she knew

no man. And it was a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite, four days in a year.”

May God bless the reading of His sacred Word. Let's seek His face in prayer.

Great God of heaven we truly need a prayer of illumination on this chapter that seems so disturbing to our fleshly senses. Please give us wisdom and guidance and benediction as we seek to proclaim Thy Word tonight, and do teach us the holy and sacred art of sacrificial submission that we might walk and be like Jephthah's daughter. We ask Thy blessing in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well when some people smile you can't help but smile — their smile is contagious. A true Christian ought to want to be a contagious Christian. A contagious Christian is actually someone who is so godly, so consistent, that people around him cannot but not be impacted and inspired. Even unbelievers can be impressed with the godly walk of believers, not that that always issues a conversion — the Holy Spirit alone can convert sinners — but the Spirit often uses the walk of life of a Christian as a means for the conversion of sinners. Probably every believer here tonight can raise their hand and say, “I know of one or two or maybe three people who've had a profound impact in my life in first becoming a Christian.” So if we're healthy spiritually, we all want to be contagious Christians.

To be a contagious Christian means first of all we have to be a Christian. Secondly it means we've got to be using the spiritual disciplines that God has provided for us to grow in grace so that we have something to be contagious about. And third it means developing an evangelistic heart for other people and seeing every unconverted person as an open mission field and feeling a burden for those around us who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. So may I ask you by way of introduction tonight, are you a contagious Christian? Do you want to be a contagious Christian? Do you exercise those good works of which the Heidelberg Catechism says that one of their purposes is that, “by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.” Are you asking the Holy Spirit, daily, that you might be able to impact others for good by your talk, by your walk, that your Christianity might rub off on others not by your own osmosis, but by the impact and the influence of the Holy Spirit, taking what He's given you so that you would be salt on the earth and light on the hill.

Well, how can we become contagious Christians by the grace of the Holy Spirit? That's what I want to look at with you tonight from the theme of Jephthah's daughter. Jephthah's daughter was a very contagious person. You notice at the end of the chapter, it says, “It was a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gildeadite four days in a year.” What an impact this young woman had on other young women in Israel. Wouldn't it be wonderful, you converted teenagers, you young men, if you

impacted other young men the way, or you young women, if you impacted other young women the way this young woman impacted her peers. This is really positive peer pressure not only, but it's positive contagious, Spirit-worked, God-honoring influence for good.

Well, let's consider this theme tonight by looking at three thoughts. First the difficult call for submission because you see Jephthah's daughter influenced many people by her sacrificial submission. That's our theme tonight — *Contagious Sacrificial Submission*. We'll see first then the difficult call to submission, second the wonderful exercise of submission, and third the inspiring contagiousness of that submission.

I. The difficult call to submission.

God's plans often differ from ours and when that happens we're faced with a choice, aren't we? Are we going to stubbornly proceed along the path we want to go or are we going to bow under God's ways in our lives? And sometimes those choices can be difficult, even in ordinary mundane things. Maybe you would love to play football with your friends on Thursday night, but God's calling you to another ministry on Thursday night. What are you going to do? Or maybe you'd love to have a career in law, but God is calling you now into motherhood — what path are you going to take? But beyond career plans and daily activities, maybe you'd planned to spend the rest of your life with a certain partner, but God takes away that partner. How are you going to respond? You see, when God calls us to something we haven't planned, we must submit to His will, recognizing it takes priority over His will, but how we submit to that will has so much to say about whether we will be contagious Christians. Yes or no. And so sacrificial submission is one of the toughest tasks of the Christian life and it's precisely that task that Jephthah's daughter exhibits to a remarkably mature degree. She sets aside her own plans, her own hopes, her own dreams for the glory of God. And the daughters of Israel are so impressed, they commemorate her for her submission.

Now the problem is, we can't really consider Jephthah's daughter without considering Jephthah and his vow. So we want to look just briefly at the historical background of this situation. This is not friends, just a merely tragic story about a foolish vow that cost the life of an innocent girl as so many have made it out to be. God has brought the Israelites through the wilderness and to the Promised Land, but they did not complete the conquest of the people as they were charged to do and now they were living with the consequences. The people were being corrupted by the worship of strange gods and God brought them into judgment. Then they would repent, God would restore them, and then they would backslide again and go back into idolatry and God would send enemies again to attack them and His judgments would again lead them to repentance and on and on the cycle and seven times over in the book of Judges. And again and again God

raised up one particular leader to be at the vanguard to bring deliverance to His people.

And Jephthah is one of those judges. God raises Jephthah to fight against the oppressors. Now at first glance, you and I probably wouldn't have chosen Jephthah. He wasn't the kind of man you would expect even God to pick. He was the illegitimate son of a Gileadite and a prostitute. His half brothers had kicked him out of their father's house and he was forced to live with a band of outcasts in the land of Tobeh. Isn't that the way God often works? He makes unlikely choices. Paul says He chooses the foolish things of the world, the weak things, the base things, the things despised, the things which are not, to do His mighty works. Well the elders of Gilead come to Jephthah to ask him to lead them against the Ammonites who were amassed to fight the Israelites. And after some negotiations, Jephthah agrees to do so and he sends messengers of the king to the king of the Ammonites and the king refuses to listen, so Jephthah regretfully is forced to go to battle against the Ammonites. And knowing his odds are very dim and the situation is very grim, he comes to God with a vow. And he says in verses 30 and 31 that, "If God will deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, it shall be that whatsoever comes forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." How could Jephthah make such a foolish vow? That's what we're prone to say. Didn't he have the foresight to think that someone he loved might emerge from his house?

Before jumping to a conclusion, let's take a closer look and I think we'll discover that Jephthah really doesn't make a rash vow and really doesn't offer up his daughter physically for a burnt offering. I know that runs contrary to some of the old commentaries. Some commentators say that Jephthah lived in rough times and was undoubtedly influenced by pagan ideas which included human sacrifices and bribing gods with vows to obtain favors from them and thus he's a rather despicable figure who descends into the morass of paganism in his actions here, both in bribing God and then in sacrificing his own, his very own, his only daughter. And therefore he's someone to be despised. But if you look closer at this story, I think there's actually eight things that when taken together as a passage, repudiate this interpretation. Let me give them to you quickly — all eight of them.

Number one, Jephthah's not a rash man. He's not a rash man. Swearing that you will sacrifice whatever comes out of your house sounds rash, but Jephthah had already proved to the elders of Israel and the king of the Ammonites that he was a cautious man. He didn't just jump at the request of the elders. He talked with them, he negotiated terms, and then he didn't just jump into war, but he talked back and forth with the king of the Ammonites. He was a diplomatic man not a rash man.

Number two, Jephthah was a man familiar with the Scriptures. Earlier in the

chapter we see that as he negotiated, he brings Scripture to bear on this situation. Surely he must have known Leviticus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 12:29-32 that prohibited anyone in Israel from offering human sacrifices especially one's children, for God is, "It is an abomination unto the Lord." In addition, Judges 11 is set in the context of reformation. Israel, including Jephthah at this point, is not going awry, not slipping back into backsliding, but they're repenting — they're turning to the living God, not away from the living God.

Thirdly, when Jephthah made his vow, the Bible says, "The Spirit of the Lord was upon him." Would the Spirit inspire him to do something so clearly contradictory to the Spirit's own revealed Scriptures? Don't we believe that the Spirit never contradicts His own Word? So it seems very difficult to believe that Israel would have followed Jephthah as a leader when his actions so contradicted the very Word of God that the same Spirit entrusted to them.

Fourth, we need to look closely at verse 31 — "If Thou shalt, without fail, deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's *and* I will offer it up for a burnt offering." Now that does sound pretty grim, but there are two possibilities here. The first is the word "and" which also can be translated "or," in which case the text would read — "Shall surely be the Lord's *or* I will offer it up for a burnt offering." In other words, Jephthah was promising as it were if a person comes out of my house, that person will be dedicated to the Lord, will be the Lord's or if an animal comes out of my house, I will sacrifice it to the Lord. So if that translation is correct, you see Jephthah is not proposing sacrificing a human being, rather dedicating any human being that would come out of his house to the service of God.

But there's a second option. The second option is the translation of the word here used as "burnt offering." In Hebrew that doesn't always mean blood sacrifice. It can also mean total dedication. In that case you see, Jephthah's vow would be, "Whatever comes out of my house shall surely be the Lord's *and* I will offer it for a complete dedication to the Lord." Now either possibility is a viable option, but there's one more translation issue and that's the last verse. That says, "The daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah." The word translated here as "lament" is not translated as "lament" anywhere else in the Bible. It's actually understood elsewhere as "rehearse" or "commemorate." The daughters of Israel did not lament Jephthah's daughter's death, they commemorate her dedication to the service of God which involved her wholehearted submission.

Fifth, Jephthah had plenty of time after defeating the Ammonites and greeting his daughter to ponder what he would do next. He gave his daughter two months to bewail her virginity. Don't you think if Jephthah really intended to kill his daughter that priests from Shiloh would have come to him during that time, or someone

would have warned him during that time of the divine prohibition of human sacrifice?

Sixth, even if Jephthah's vow was rash, Leviticus 5, verses 4 and 5 offered him the possibility of repenting of such a vow. And Leviticus 47 offered him the possibility of redeeming his daughter by paying a ransom price, but we don't read any implication that Jesus — Jephthah rather — even contemplated either one of these options.

Seventh, that is why you see when Jephthah's daughter went to mourn for two months she didn't mourn her dead, she mourned her perpetual virginity. The closing verses say that twice in a row. She goes to mourn her virginity, her dedication to the Lord.

And finally, eighth, and perhaps the strongest of all, notice that Jephthah is never reprimanded for what he does. In fact, he's actually commended in the Bible. Samuel, 1 Samuel 12:11, names Jephthah as one who kept Israel safe. He honors Jephthah. Would Samuel have commended Jephthah if Jephthah had sacrificed his own daughter? Wasn't Samuel the one who said, "To obey is better than to sacrifice" to king Saul and condemned Saul on that basis? But most powerfully of all, if Jephthah is so despicable, then why did the author to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:32, include him in the famous "Hall of Fame" of the Old Testament faith heroes? Jephthah did fulfill his vow, but his vow was to dedicate the rest of his daughter's life as a virgin to the Lord.

And lest you think that that vow is something rather trivial, so be reminded that in Israel, if you didn't have children as a woman, it was as if the curse of God was upon you. That was a huge burden to bear and a huge burden for Jephthah to bear because every Israelite wanted to be of that line of which the Messiah would be born. And he had only one daughter, and if she was going to be a virgin, not only could that line not produce the Messiah, but — and that was also a problem for Jephthah — his own family line would be entirely cut off, so it was a great sacrifice for Jephthah as well because that too in Israel was something that was to be regarded as God's disfavor when your family line was cut off and you had no successors, male or female. So this was a difficult call to submission, perpetual virginity. And Jephthah's daughter stands out on the pages of Scripture for responding affirmatively to this tremendous call to sacrifice so she would never be blessed with motherhood, never be blessed with a God-fearing husband, never be blessed as a possible mother, grandmother or great-grandmother of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah to come. She bows under God's will and she surrenders to her father's vow.

II. The wonderful exercise of submission

I wonder my friends, if you've ever taken something you've really wanted badly in

your life and surrendered it to the Lord, and for the Lord's sake, you were willing to forego it. I wonder if you know what sacrificial submission means personally? But just how do we submit to the Lord? What's involved in this wonderful submission? That's my second thought. I'd like to present it to you this way through the lens of Jephthah's daughter's response, I believe that submission is a five step process. We might picture it as an ascending ladder of five steps. When we decrease in our submission to God, we're going down that ladder, we're moving further away from God. But when we bow under the Lord, we're actually climbing this ladder of submission and growing closer to the Lord. But what are these steps?

Step one, acknowledge the Lord, acknowledge the Lord. The first step of submission is always to say, "It is the Lord." No matter what the Lord does in our lives. Both Jephthah and his daughter immediately recognize that their affliction is from the hand of God. When his daughter walked out of his door to meet him, Jephthah was very grieved, but he could not say, "I take back my vow." He recognizes that God is in this. He says, "I opened my mouth to the Lord my daughter, and I cannot go back." He was saying, "That was spoken to God, so God is speaking in this. God is active in my affliction. God is involved in this affliction." Jephthah's daughter immediately echoes her father. In verse 36 she says, "Thou hast opened thy mouth father unto the Lord." It is the Lord. Awareness of God is the first step to true submission.

Living *coram deo* as the reformers put it — living in the presence of God, in the face of God, in my everyday life, is the first step of living a lifestyle of submission to God. So true submission doesn't blame the devil, it doesn't blame fate, it doesn't blame man, it doesn't blame accident, but it acknowledges the Lord as the primary source of all things including affliction. True submission says, "I was silent because Thou didst it."

Do you remember when 9-11 happened when Larry King had a program on, I think the next night, and asked a rabbi, two ministers, and John MacArthur, "Where was God in all of this?" And the first three said, "Well, God wasn't anywhere." John MacArthur said, "Well if God wasn't anywhere, what hope do we have in the midst of this tragedy?" He said, "God has everything to do with this. God is always involved. God is always here." — as Francis Schaeffer called his book *The God Who's Always There*. And King actually proceeded, and rightly so, to challenge the other three that the deity they profess must be impotent if he couldn't control such a tragedy. So how can you submit to an affliction if God has nothing to do with your affliction? Such submission would be unofficial and worthless. It would mean nothing. You see you can't go to God for help in such times because He has no answer for your sorrow and your difficulty because He has no control over it to begin with. So the very best thing you can then do, and sadly many Christians act this way when they get afflicted, they say, "Well, there's nothing I can do but grin and bear it." And you say, "Well, can you give it over to the Lord?" "Well, yeah, but what else can I do?" And they shrug their

shoulders as if that's not a very good thing to give it over to the Lord. But true submission begins here to say, "God is here. This is the hand of God. It is the Lord."

Maybe you've read the interesting little story of a boy named Robert, age 6, who came to visit his grandfather who was an atheist. And his grandfather had above his bed as he was dying, a sign that said, "God is nowhere." And he asked his boy, what a grandfather he was, "Can you read that sign?" and the boy was just learning to read. And the boy looked at the word "nowhere" and it was just too big for him and he broke it in half and he said, "God is now here." And God used it. God used it for that man's conversion. But you see, that's the point — God is always now here. Martin Luther said, "Letting God be God is more than half of all true religion." Are you letting God be God in your life? Is that the first thing you say when you get affliction? "It is the Lord?"

Second step is justify the Lord, justify the Lord. It's on thing to say, "It's the Lord," but it's another thing to say, "This is right. The Lord makes no mistakes." In verse 35, Jephthah says, "I could not go back" implying, "It wouldn't be right for me to go back on this vow. The Lord is righteous in all His ways." And the daughter says basically the same thing — "Do unto me" look at verse 36, "Do unto me according to that which proceeds out of thy mouth." In other words, "This is right father, right for you and righteous before God." She's also admitting you see that she's a sinner. She deserves to be dedicated to the Lord. She deserves virginity. She deserves this difficult trial. Whatever happens to her is under the righteous judgment of God. Oh this is a step up you see. And this second step is really a step that really, even Christians don't ever seem to reach. When they get afflicted, you're a pastor, you go visit them in the hospital, they hear they have cancer or some child gets hurt in an accident and they say, "Why me?" You catch yourself saying that too, don't you? "Why me? Why? It's so confusing. Why would the Lord do this to me? I'm trying to be a good member of the church, I'm trying to walk in His ways, I'm trying to be godly." But you see if you have a little insight into your own heart and your own worth and what you deserve, you would rather say, "Why not me? Why hasn't the Lord done much more to me? Why has He been so good to me?"

This past Monday our long distance seminary marketer and developer, Chris Hannah, didn't show up for work. He was supposed to go with me to a little conference and I called him and he said, "Did you know? I'm in the hospital. My wife got in a serious accident and we don't know if she's going to make it. She's broken about twenty bones, internal bleeding." I went up to see him, hugged him. He looked me straight in the eyes. He said, "She's alive. The Lord is good and the Lord is righteous." That's what he said. And he paused and the tears flowed and he said, "Even if He takes her, He's good." I don't know if I could have said that if that was my wife, but that's spiritual maturity. It is righteous. It is righteous. When Eli loses both of his sons, he says, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seemeth Him good." When Absalom drives David from the throne, David says,

“Behold here am I. Let him do to me as seemeth good unto Him.” When Shimei curses, let him curse. It is righteous. I don't deserve anything.

When I was twelve years old I got really upset with my mother one time because my mother was so optimistic it was almost nauseous. And I'd try to complain and try to get some pity from her and she'd always say, “Well it could be worse.” Finally I said to her, “You know mom, you can always say that about anything, ‘It could be worse.’” She said, “That's right, it could be worse, because son, all we deserve is death and hell and you haven't suffered either one of those yet.” Have you ever realized that?

Recently I was on an elevator going from floor one to floor seven in Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids and you know people are very quiet on elevators. And I try to strike up conversations because people are in need when they're in the hospital. So a woman stepped on with me on floor one and I said, “Nice weather today, isn't it?” And she said, “Oh yes.” “Good thing we're not in control of the weather.” “That's right,” she said. I said, “The Lord is good to us isn't He?” “Oh,” she said, “that's right.” I was thinking about how to evangelize her next and she turned to me and she said, “My mama always told me, ‘Anything honey above ground is the mercy of the Lord.’” Why, she's evangelizing me! Anything above ground — that's it! The Lord is righteous! That's what this woman said — that's what this daughter said. If it was even more than her perpetual virginity, even if it was to sacrifice her on the altar, “It is righteous father. I don't deserve anything.” That's a beautiful place to be, but it's only the second step.

The third step is to approve the Lord, to approve the Lord. To say ___ is right, but to say, “It is well. The Lord's will is best.” — this young girl actually took this position as well. She was willing to have her father's vow fulfilled even if that meant she would bear the curse of perpetual virginity. She says, verse 36, “For as much as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon” in other words, “If it's the Lord's will to exchange my perpetual virginity for the victory you've received, father I approve. If that's the Lord's will, it's good, it's best. His will is always best. He knows better for me, what is good for me, than I do for myself.” Now that's contagious. When you see believers in the midst of affliction “amen-ing” the ways of the Lord and saying it is well, even the world is impressed and that's when the world is watching you the closest my friend — when you're afflicted. When you're afflicted, that's our best opportunity to influence the world. When Job lost ten of his children he didn't say, “Lord, I accept it that nine have been taken, but couldn't you have left me at least one?” But he said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be” — imagine that — “Blessed be” with all your children dead “the name of the Lord. Now later on it sat in Job's flesh a bit, but initially, initially he fully approved of God's way with his children even in death. This is profound, contagious submission, and yet the Bible's full of it, Church history's full of it. Ignatius called the chains that bound him and would lead him to martyrdom for being a Christian his “sweet pearls” and reckoned suffering for the Lord Jesus “an honor.” God

says, "It's not only a gift that I grant you to believe in My name, in Jesus' name, but also that I grant you to suffer for My name." It's a gift of God to suffer affliction for Christ's sake. Have you ever realized that? Have you ever been able to amen God's ways when they went directly against your desires?

Step four, cling to the Lord, cling to the Lord. "If I perish, I perish, but I will cling to God's mercy." That goes yet beyond approving God, but it's precisely what Jephthah's daughter was saying in verse 37 — "May I go up and down upon the mountains to bewail" notice not my death "but to bewail my virginity, I and my fellows." Notice she was burdened. True submission is not saying, "Well I'm not bothered by the problem." If you're not bothered by it, there's no submission involved.

Years ago there was a lady in my congregation who lost her husband and five months later she came to me and she said, "The Lord's been so good to me. He's given me so much submission I've never missed my husband." And I'm thinking, wait a minute. Something's wrong. True submission is not not feeling the burden. True submission is feeling the burden and then giving it to God and then clinging to Him and then saying with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." That's true submission.

Recently I was in a London park and there was a young woman there with a dog and she had this ball and she would throw the ball at the dog and hit him, "Smack!" on the side. I thought, wow, she must not have meant to do that. The dog's going to be angry. The dog wasn't angry. The dog picked up the ball and brought it back to her. Over and over it went again — "Bam!" He picked it up and would bring it back to her. That's the way a true Christian should be. When God hits us with the balls of affliction, we should bring them back to Him. "Thou He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." So there is a bewailing, but it's a submissive bewailing.

But then comes step five, honor the Lord, honor the Lord, by saying, "His glory is greater than me and my salvation" and that's where this daughter excels beyond everything else. She was so submissive that she would surrender anything than have God's name injured on her account. God's glory meant more to her than her own life. That is profound submission, contagious submission. She was saying as it were, "Father, do whatever you vowed, for the glory of God is at stake father. My future is nothing compared to the glory of God. I give up all. I give up my reputation for God's reputation." You see, Jephthah's daughter so identified with the cause of her father which was also the cause of the covenant keeping God of Israel, that she was spiritually one with her father and spiritually one with God. She rejoiced in her father's safe return. The cause of God's people was so close to her heart, she was willing to approve whatever sacrifice the Lord asked of her so long as the cause of God triumphed. So her submission went beyond Jephthah's. Jephthah wrent his clothes and was shaken when he saw his daughter, but she rejoiced and remained strong in faith because the Lord had

remembered His covenant and vindicated the cause of His people. Though thou she shed many tears when her father was gone battling the Ammonites, but now that he was home, she was radiant with joy. God's honor made her forget herself. And that is supreme submission.

Like Jonathan Edwards said, "The greatest moments of my life have not been those that concerned my own salvation, but those when I have been carried and to commune with God and beheld His beauty and desired His glory and forgot myself. I rejoiced and yearned to be empty and annihilated of self in order that I might be filled with the glory of God in Christ alone." Beautiful, self denial.

We're so poor at self denial today. We're so rich and increased with goods and think we have need of nothing that we don't realize that we need self denial. John Calvin said, "Self denial is the foundational ingredient of the Christian walk of life." And we scarcely deny ourselves in anything. Sometimes for us it's even too much to give the Lord even one day of seven. "Self denial is a sacrificial dimension of true piety," Calvin said. "It means realizing we don't belong to ourselves but we belong to the Lord, and His will and His glory means more to us than our will and our glory." And Calvin lived that out. We've got a long ways to go to get to that fifth step.

A member of my church that passed away a few month ago was going into serious surgery a few months before she passed away and I was the last one to see her. And the last thing I asked her before she was rolled away was, "How are things going inside?" I meant spiritually. And she grabbed my hand and this is what she said, with a firm grip looking me straight into the eyes, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or whether we die, we live and die unto the Lord." Oh, sweet, self denying submission. Could it be my friend that God has given you the trials He's given you just for this purpose, that you might learn to be a contagious, sacrificial submitter in this world? Where would you be without affliction? We'd all be spoiled brats. That's what we'd be. We need submission. We need affliction. And we need to learn to submit under affliction.

Jephthah's daughter has a lot to teach us. You see, we often want to hold a few things back from the Lord. We're willing to give up this, maybe, and that, maybe. But does it have to be our only daughter? "I'll go anywhere Lord, except to that place. I'll do anything Lord, except does it have to be that?"

The old Scottish preacher Douglass McMillan once told me a story of a member of his church who said, "I'm willing to give everything to the Lord for my entire life. I'm willing to submit no matter what He does to me, except one thing I couldn't accept if He did that." And McMillan said, "What's that?" "Well, she said, my dad had cancer and I just couldn't cope if my husband got cancer." And then he said, "What do you suppose the Lord did? He gave her husband cancer. And how did she do? She did just fine because she learned to submit, even that, to the Lord."

Do you really want to be a contagious Christian? Now, don't ask for afflictions, but also don't ask to have no afflictions. Leave the amount of afflictions to God's inscrutable providence, but ask that whatever afflictions God deems fitting to put upon you in His inscrutable providence you will respond to them with these steps of submission.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).