

What would you sacrifice for?

Would you sacrifice to be thin? I personally would not have given up an ice cream sundae last night, made by our youth, in order to be thin!

What is worth sacrificing for?

Some distinguished musicians sacrifice seven weeks each summer to live at a chamber music camp in rural Marlboro, Vermont to work with young, promising musicians. They give up their own schedule to live in the woods, immersing themselves in what they love, pouring themselves into the next generation. It's a sacrifice that pays off. Most of today's most accomplished chamber and orchestra musicians participated in the Marlboro festival.¹

For what would you sacrifice to be successful? A special hobby? A sport? Your career?

Debbie², a friend who lives in California, said this:

"I had been freelancing as an art director. I had felt God calling me to follow Him, to give up my career. But I was not interested. I was ambitious and had lots of credit card debt (the five figure kind). I needed a job. So I negotiated with God. "If you get me a job and get rid of my debt, then I will do whatever it is you are calling me to do."

So God did. In 2½ years I was promoted and my salary almost doubled, allowing me to pay off my debt. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before! God had answered my prayer, but I forgot my promise to Him. I continued to pursue my job with abandon. Worshipped the frantic pace, travel, and long hours. I loved it with all of my heart.

As I sat in my office one day, God spoke to me. "*What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?*"

I ignored it. I had already quit my daily Bible study and prayer time, small groups, and Sunday School class. I still went to church where it was the only time I even bothered to look at a Bible."

For Debbie, success was worth the sacrifice.

Jesus says heaven is worth sacrificing for. Listen to the story: READ Mt 13:44-46.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!"

¹Harry Eyres, "The Intimacy of Inspiration," Financial Times, Life & Arts, August 7-8, 2010, p. 16.

²Used with permission.

The kingdom of heaven is not only worth a major sacrifice, it is like stumbling on the most unexpected prize.

It's like looking at an old shabby house which is for sale and you find a Renoir in the attic that no one noticed. You buy it as quickly as possible before anyone else can.

Or, the kingdom of heaven is like going to a remote place like Luckenbach, Texas and you find a rare classic Century Sabre 180 speedboat, the '66 Corvette of the boating world. It's fully restored. Its price tag takes your breath away, but you don't care. You have got to have it. In the meantime, your wife finds a one carat, flawless diamond ring made in 1890. Its price tag will take your entire 401k but you are going to get it for her because you want that boat!

This passage is about a surprise discovery so fantastic, so beautiful and precious, so incredibly rich and desirable you would give up everything to have it.

It's called heaven and we are going there!

Paul wrote about heaven in his letter to the Corinthian church, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9) — and Paul was taken to heaven once so he should know (2 Cor 12:2-4)!

Heaven is special, and Jesus is the way to get there.

God Himself said, "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. (Isaiah 65:17-18)

Heaven is that new city and God is making it special.

Isaiah said, *the mountain of the LORD's house will be the highest of all-- the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.* (see Isa 2:1-5, 12, 17-19, 22)

Jesus said it is so valuable that we should JUMP FOR JOY. It is so lovely it's worth selling everything to gain it.

But we can be in church and miss it. Listen to the next section. READ v. 47-50.

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So God's word is cast out freely, like a big net, to welcome everyone in. Judgment does not happen here on this earth — and it's out of our hands. Scripture says, rather, our job is to "love

one another.” Judgment, then, is reserved for the day of reckoning. Isaiah says on that day, *“human pride will be humbled, and human arrogance will be brought down”* (Is 2:17). God alone will be exalted. Idols will be gone and peace will reign.

So, for now, the church is full of all kinds of people, both good and bad. The net is not just full of good fish only. But know that the Day of Judgment is coming.

So how in the world do you make sure you are a good fish and you have that bright future of heaven ahead of you?

Let’s go back to my friend’s story.

“I had a baby and quit work, but I was mourning the loss of who I was, since my career and my financial independence were gone. Stresses built. I was lonely and bored adjusting to motherhood. I was miserable. I began again to pray earnestly, seeking God. But He was silent. I had accepted the Lord at 18. I had been on the journey for quite some time, but He seemed very far away. After months of waiting, I began to realize that my fast-paced, exciting, stimulating career had really become my god.

One night I said, “Lord, I no longer want to try and control my life. I abandon my life to You; my dreams, hopes, ambition; my fears and worries; take them all!!” A tremendous sense of peace came over me. Ten years later, I had finally surrendered my life to His call.

I fell in love with the Gospel. It was breathtaking to me. I was in awe of it.” I couldn’t believe that God loved us so much to give us His Son. Maybe it was because I had been in the darkness for ten years that His light shined so brightly to me. He has energized me with a passion for ministry and He brought me into His adventure of faith, filled with surprises, meeting the innermost desires of my heart, and revealing to me who He is. He has led me into doing things that I never imagined I would be doing.”

When I knew this very talented woman she was using her skills to do God’s work for her church, and you can hear the joy it brought her. She didn’t lose what she loved, but she began investing in the Kingdom of heaven. In doing that she has grasped hold of something far superior.

Jesus says invest in the treasure. Does that mean you quit your job? No. But it means you don’t compromise your faith priority for other things, even though it may look unimportant at times or unvaluable, like a plain, simple field. Invest. It will pay off for you

Are you investing in heaven?

Play “NEW WORLD COMING” by Mama Cass. When you get discouraged, let this song play in your head to remind you it’s true.

There was a little girl named Stephanie, who went to the store with her dad. She saw a string of pearls. They were \$5.00 and she only had a quarter. She worked really hard and did extra chores until she saved \$5.00. Her dad took her back to the store and she bought those precious pearls.

She wore them everywhere, even to bed. One night her dad said to her, "Please give me the pearls." She just couldn't do it. Each night he said, "Don't you love me? Do you love those pearls more than me?" Finally, after a long time she realized she really did love her dad, and she gave him the pearls. He then pulled out of his pocket a string of real pearls and gave them to her.³

Sometimes God seems hard to find, but I promise you God is here, and God loves you. Seek Him. Give what you love to God and watch what He can do with it. Persist in your faith and you will be rewarded.

Jesus says, *Do you understand all these things?"* The disciples answered *"Yes, we do."* Then he added, *"Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old."*

Jesus says, abandon yourself to the kingdom of heaven and you won't be disappointed. You'll see its magnitude. God's gift has been in the works a long time; it is told in both the Old Testament and the New.

It's a sure thing, for those who embrace it.

Do you understand all these things? May all of us say a resounding

AMEN.

³Stephanies Pearls, <http://www.karipearls.com/Stephanies-pearls.html>, accessed 8/18/2010.