



spiritual infant

DISCIPLE ME

THE ONE ABOUT LIVING SACRIFICES

ICEBREAKER: OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Sometimes, two words don't seem like they belong together - like "jumbo shrimp," "deafening silence," or "seriously funny." Take a few minutes to come up with a list of five other phrases or examples that seem like opposites but still make sense when you think about them.

READ: ROMANS 12:1-2

An oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines two contradictory or opposing ideas to create an interesting or thought-provoking effect. Usually, when you find an oxymoron, you find two terms placed side by side that work together to form a unique meaning or highlight some kind of paradox. When you examine the combination of these words, they shouldn't make sense, and yet they do. We all know what they mean, and in many ways, they have their own unique meaning.

In Romans 12:1-2, we find one of those rare occurrences of two very different ideas being put together to communicate a very unique and complex idea. Let's read it together and see if we can find the two contradictory words that are put together to create something entirely new. The Apostle Paul writes:

¹ 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.

Take a moment and see if you can find the oxymoron hidden in Romans 12:1-2.

STUDY: OXYMORONS

In this passage, Paul does something unusual. He takes two words that don't belong together - "living" and "sacrifice." In Paul's day, a sacrifice was the act of offering an animal on an altar, which means that by definition, a sacrifice *dies*. It was the sacrifice's death that was the sign of devotion - it represented giving your all to God.

The word Paul used to say "living" was a word used throughout the New Testament to describe life that comes from God, not just physical breath. So, Paul fuses these two ideas together - life and death - into one phrase, a "living sacrifice".

For Paul, followers of Jesus are to be both *alive* and *sacrificed* - fully surrendered but still breathing, walking, and living for God. It's an intentional paradox- an *oxymoron* that Paul "invents" to describe something almost beyond explanation. No one had ever used this phrase before, but Paul takes these two seemingly contradictory ideas and puts them together, inventing a new word to describe what it looks like to follow Jesus. And the picture of the paradox he paints is that we are called to die daily to ourselves while we live each day for God.

DISCUSS:

- Why do you think Paul chose to use a paradox to describe what it means to follow Jesus? How have you experienced this as you've been trying to follow Jesus?
- In practical terms, what are some of the ways that you have to "die to yourself" in everyday life?
- Why is it difficult to let go of control when following God?
- How might living this way – as a "living sacrifice" – impact the people around you?

STUDY: DO NOT CONFORM ... BE TRANSFORMED

In verse 2, Paul shifts from *what we offer* to *how we live*. He says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The two key Greek ideas here help paint the picture: the first, "do not conform," refers to *shaping yourself to fit a mold*. It's where we get the idea of being "pressed into a pattern." Here, Paul is saying, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its shape."

The other idea is that of being "**transformed**" – and the Greek word used is the same that gives us our word *metamorphosis*. It describes an inner change that works its way outward, much like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Paul uses this idea to explain how God changes us from the inside out through the renewing of our minds.

- What are some of the "patterns of the world" that try to shape your thinking, values, or priorities?
- How might you begin to renew your mind on a regular basis?
- Can you think of a way God's been changing the way you think or what you care about lately?

CHALLENGE: PATTERN BREAKER

- Romans 12:2 says, "Don't conform to the pattern of this world." This week, identify one pattern that distracts or centers you on yourself (social media, negativity, control, etc.). Take a 3-day "fast" from it and use that time for something that renews your mind - prayer, Scripture, worship, or a walk with God. During this time, pay attention to the change that God is actively doing in you.