

IN THE MARGINS: How to lay down your life without dying

By Tony Martin

Editor

There's a verse in the Bible that's been on my heart lately, one that I'm sure you've heard before: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, ESV). It's a powerful statement, one that conjures images of ultimate sacrifice, of giving up your life for someone else. And while this kind of sacrificial love is awe-inspiring, I think it's worth considering that laying down your life for a friend doesn't always mean literally dying. Sometimes, it means something even more challenging – living in a way that puts others first.

Let me share a story with you that illustrates this idea. It's not about heroics on a battlefield or a dramatic rescue. It's about an ordinary person who made an extraordinary choice to lay down their life in a different way.

Sarah and Emily had been best friends since childhood. They shared everything—secrets, dreams, even their struggles. As they grew older, their paths diverged. Sarah became a successful businesswoman, her life filled with meetings, deadlines, and the constant buzz of a fast-paced career. Emily, on the other hand, chose a quieter life, focusing on raising her family and being involved in her community.

One day, Sarah received a call that Emily's husband had been diagnosed with a severe illness. The news was devastating. Emily, who had always been the strong one, was suddenly overwhelmed with the weight of caring for her husband while also trying to keep life as normal as possible for her children. It was too much for one person to bear alone.

Without hesitation, Sarah made a decision that would change both of their lives. She took a leave of absence from her job, packed her bags, and moved in with Emily's family. She didn't just visit for a week or two; she stayed for months. She helped with the cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the kids. She drove Emily's husband to his doctor's appointments and sat with him through treatments. She was there for the tough conversations, the sleepless nights, and the moments when Emily felt like she couldn't go on.

In doing so, Sarah laid down her life for her friend. She didn't die, but she did give up her own life – the life she knew, the life that was comfortable and predictable – for the sake of someone she loved. She sacrificed her time, her career ambitions, and her personal plans. She did this because she understood that real love sometimes means setting aside your own needs and desires to serve someone else.

This kind of sacrificial love is what Jesus was talking about in John 15:13. It's a love that goes beyond words, beyond well-wishes, and into the realm of action. It's easy to say we love someone, but are we willing to make the tough choices, the ones that cost us something, to show that love?

In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul writes, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others." This is the essence of laying down your life for a friend. It's not about losing your life, but rather, about losing yourself – your pride, your plans, your comfort – so that someone else can be lifted up.

What Sarah did for Emily is something that each of us can do in our own way. It doesn't require a grand gesture, but rather, a series of small, intentional decisions to prioritize someone else's well-being over our own. Maybe it's giving up your free time to help a friend in need. Maybe it's choosing

to listen when you'd rather speak. Maybe it's forgiving a wrong even when you have every right to hold a grudge.

Jesus set the ultimate example of laying down His life for us, but He also showed us, through His daily interactions with people, that love often looks like meeting the needs of others before our own. It's in the little things – washing His disciples' feet, feeding the hungry, healing the sick – that Jesus demonstrated what it means to lay down your life without dying.

So, let's take this to heart. Let's ask ourselves how we can lay down our lives for our friends – not in some dramatic, once-in-a-lifetime way, but in the everyday choices we make to love, serve, and put others first. Because in doing so, we reflect the heart of Jesus, who showed us that true love is sacrificial, humble, and deeply, deeply personal.

Until next time, let's keep loving well.