WEEK FIVE – Action Plan #2: Gratefulness

• Gratefulness – the primary quality of a trusting disciple

“The foremost quality of a trusting disciple is gratefulness. Gratitude arises from the lived perception, evaluation, and acceptance of all of life as grace – as an undeserved and unearned gift from the Father’s hand. Such recognition is itself a gift of grace, and acceptance of the gift is implicitly an acknowledgement of the Giver.” – Brennan Manning, Ruthless Trust

The Lord strengthens and protects me; I trust in him with all my heart. I am rescued and my heart is full of joy; I will sing to him in gratitude. – Psalms 28:7 NET

Gratefulness is the practice of the presence of God in all circumstances

• In everything give thanks! – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to everyone else. Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 NLT

…thank God no matter what happens… – MSG

- I can understand this during the good times
- But what about the bad times?
- How in the world are we supposed to do this…
  … in the middle of a lousy marriage?
  … when your kids are in rebellion?
… after the doctor tells you you’ve got cancer?
… after months of looking for work?
… when you’re out of money?
… when you’re in the middle of depression?
… after the death of a child?

• In the good times...
  - It glorifies God
    - It gives Him the credit
    - It acknowledges His power
  - It acknowledges our inadequacy
    - Gratefulness takes humility
    - We refuse to take credit

  Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. – James 1:17 NIV

• In the bad times...
  - It is an act of faith
    - We have to believe that God has a plan we can’t see
    - We have to believe that His wisdom is beyond our own
  - It is an acknowledgement of dependence
    - We depend on Him instead of our senses
    - We have to lean on Him and not our understanding

  Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths. Don’t be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn your back on evil. Then you will gain renewed health and vitality. – Proverbs 3:5-8 NLT

  - What are we supposed to be grateful for?
    … the hurt?
    … the heartache?
    … the loss?
    … the confusion?
    … the unanswered questions?

  - Show gratitude …
    … because God is working behind the scenes and in spite of the circumstances
    … because He has a plan for your life
    … because of the His character
    … because of the promise of eternal life
    … because of the presence of Jesus Christ
    … because He has given you supernatural strength to endure
To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives – the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections – that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for. Let’s not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see it in the guiding hand of a loving God. – Henri Nouwen, Bread For the Journey

• The importance of gratefulness

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father. – Colossians 3:15-17 NLT

- What is the real purpose behind gratefulness?
  - It’s not to satisfy some need in God
    - God doesn’t NEED to be praised
    - God doesn’t need to be validated

- It’s because we need it to be spiritually healthy
  - Gratitude is a “thermometer” that indicates the state of your spiritual health
  - The presence or absence of gratitude in your dealings with God is one of the most reliable indicators of your spiritual health
  - It is the natural result of understanding and receiving God’s grace
  - When you have a healthy understanding of grace, you will be grateful

All honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is by his boundless mercy that God has given us the privilege of being born again. Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a
priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. – 1 Peter 1:3-6 NLT

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? – Romans 12:1 NLT

Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done. – Colossians 2:7 NLT

- Gratitude is a “medicine” that promotes your spiritual health
- It is NOT a feeling that dictates your choices
- It is a choice that affects your feelings
- He is not prescribing for us how we must feel
- He is calling on us to choose to rejoice and thank God on the basis of what is true – regardless of how happy or thankful we may feel
- It involves our feelings and experiences, but it is not rooted in them
- It is rooted in God’s truth and our choice to express faith in the truth, often in spite of what we feel

• Gratitude: a key step of faith …
... that unleashes God’s peace to guard your heart and mind

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7
… that unleashes God's power to deliver you and impact others through you

*Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.* – Acts 16:25

… that increases your capacity to experience the love that God is *always* pouring into your life
- We may understand grace but be in a state of spiritual stagnancy
- Because we aren't cultivating a grateful posture toward God . . .

### Cultivating a grateful attitude

- In some sense, gratitude is a discipline
- It is a habit that must be consciously developed and deliberately cultivated
- There is no mechanical formula
- But don’t sit back and wait for God to do it

*Prioritize thanksgiving in your prayer life (Col. 4:2)*
- Don’t let it get crowded out by petition, let alone whining and complaining
- Always include it, and sometimes focus on it alone.
  “What should I thank God for?”
  - Focus on all aspects of your salvation
  - Personalize it
  - Take note of “small” blessings

*Ask God to sensitize you to internal complaint*
When you realize it, promptly turn away from it and replace it with thanks in the related areas

*Utilize spiritual songs*
They often have power lift my eyes and heart when nothing else does

*Thank people who bless you in even the smallest ways*
It will complete your enjoyment of the blessing, and it will increase your capacity to thank God

*Reflect on and serve those less fortunate than you*
This will remind you of how gracious God has been to you
It will remind you how far He has brought you and how much he has blessed you

*Hang around grateful people*
They will convict you of your ingratitude and inspire you to become like them
One of the key signs that you trust God is whether or not you are grateful to God – and not just for the good things that happen in your life. If God is in control and God can be trusted with our lives, then we should be able to express gratitude to Him for whatever He allows into our lives. Notice the gratitude is toward Him and not for the particular circumstance. In other words, we don’t have to be grateful for cancer, but we can express gratitude to God in the midst of it because He is going to use it for our good and His glory. But just how grateful are we? How grateful are you? That’s the question we want to explore and try to answer this week. Because the motivation we need for service for God and obedience to Him comes from gratitude.

1. READ DAYS 29-35 IN “SIGNS OF LIFE” BY DAVID JEREMIAH
The readings for this week center around the topic of “Open Hands: Living a Generous Life.” You’ll find these seven days worth of topics both convicting and inspiring. We are to follow the example of Jesus and live lives that are marked by radical generosity and an open-handed attitude toward others.

2. FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE
This week we have three articles related to the topic of gratefulness. One is by Charles Swindoll. In all three cases you should find some great insights into the life of gratitude that should characterize every one of us as believers.
• Being Grateful in Good Times and In Bad by Bruce Goettsche
• How to Avoid Being a Walking Contradiction—a Joyless Christian by Charles Swindoll
• The Road to Renewal by Bob Deffinbaugh

3. MEDITATE ON PSALMS 135-138
Take a few minutes this week to read and meditate on these four incredible Psalms. Each is an expression of gratitude and praise to God. As you read them, look for specific ways in which the psalmist expresses his appreciation and gratitude to God. What does he have to say about God? What do you see about God that you could be grateful for? Close you time in prayer. Simply pray these Psalms back to God and, as you do, make them your own.

4. LISTEN TO OUR RESOURCE CDs
This week we are providing a four-part series on gratitude from Michael Phillips. He borrows from the writings of the great Puritan writer, Richard Baxter, in order to give some practical insights into the topic of gratitude. These are straightforward messages on a much-needed topic.

5. JOIN US ON THE QUEST
Join us on The Quest. Over the next five weekdays we will be reading in the book of Job, chapters 4-13. Just read two chapters a day. This is a great story about real life.
Our congregation has experienced a devastating tragedy this week. Any time someone's life is taken in their youth it grieves us deeply. Those of us who knew Ryan find ourselves numb. It was only last week that he was in our early worship service with his girlfriend and the friends he brought with him. Over these last few days we have battled feelings of confusion, anger, disillusionment, and a sadness that sucks the life out of us. We certainly don't find ourselves feeling very grateful.

Yet the Bible is clear, even though it is difficult to hear. Paul says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thess. 5:16-18). The words are hard but we need to wrestle with them. This is a tough verse for many people,

• for the person recently divorced
• for the person who had a miscarriage of a baby they wanted badly
• for the person who's body is devastated by the treatments they are receiving
• for the person who feels they are barely "existing" in the Nursing home
• for the person who is overwhelmed by financial demands
• for the person who has to helplessly see their child suffer
• for the person who lives with a cloud of depression over them
• for the person who recently stood at the fresh dug grave of someone they love
• for the person who feels suffocated by their loneliness

In each of these cases, the idea of "giving thanks" is very difficult. In fact, it's not just difficult. It seems impossible. Let's look at what Paul is saying and see if we can understand what his words mean.

**Why God Commands us to Give Thanks in every circumstance**

First, God wants us to give thanks in the good times because thanksgiving promotes God's glory and develops humility in us. We all have a tendency to usurp the credit for the good things that God does. We must give thanks in the good times because it reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from above. We call a child that takes without giving thanks, a spoiled child.

We are to give thanks in the good times because giving thanks makes us appreciate what we have been given. A person who is always complaining and never grateful is a person who does not know the richness of life. When we take the time to count our blessings, when we make it a point to focus on the wonderful things we have been given, we appreciate life more.

Second, God wants us to give thanks in the difficult times because it is an act of faith. When things are tough it takes faith to thank God for our circumstances. We must really believe that God has a plan we do not see. We must really believe that His wisdom is beyond our own. Giving thanks in difficult times requires something more than superficial faith.

God wants us to give thanks in the difficult times because He wants us to learn to walk by faith and not by sight. We can't always understand what happens in life. If we depend on our senses, life will be like a roller coaster. If we learn to depend on God, life will be steady. We can know peace even in the confusing times.

**What Can We Thank God for in Tragic Times?**

Let's be honest. When tragic times hit, there doesn't seem to be much to be thankful for. Are we to give thanks for the heartache? Are we to give thanks for the devastation? Are we supposed to be glad that our world is caving in? No. It's o.k. to hurt. It's o.k. to confess our pain and even our anger. God is not asking
us to pretend. He's not asking us to say that painful things are good. What He wants is for us to confess that HE is good. There are many things to give thanks for in the midst of heartache.

We give thanks for a God who is working beyond the circumstances. This is certainly a declaration of faith. In the midst of devastating times we usually don't see anything God could possibly be doing in our circumstances. It seems shallow to quote verses about God working for the good. All the evidence tells us that the situation is NOT good. At least not from our perspective.

Does a football player feel grateful for hard workouts. No, it seems like cruel and unusual punishment. But is it good . . . yes, it is. Do we feel grateful when it comes time to exercise in the morning? Not usually. It seems like a dumb thing to do when we would rather sleep. But it is good. Do we feel grateful when money is taken out of our paycheck for retirement. No. We grumble. But is it good . . . when it comes time to retire we will be glad for the circumstances we grumbled about. Life is full of these situations.

What good could God be bringing out of a tragic accident? I don't know. What good can God bring from cancer? I don't know. What possible work can God be doing that would make a tragedy like Columbine seem to make sense? I don't know. All I know is what He tells us. He has not abandoned His throne. He is still in control. He knows what He is doing. Someday, we will see His plan and we will rejoice and give thanks. For now, we can only give thanks for the promise.

We give thanks because we affirm, trust, and yes, even celebrate, the character of God . . . even when the circumstances make no sense. We give thanks that God is good. He is not evil. He is not arbitrary. God has a reason for everything He does . . . whether we understand it, or not. We give thanks that the world is not as chaotic as it often seems.

David said we should give thanks because, "the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100:5) The Lord is good. What an important statement this is. But God is good. His love never wavers. We may waver in our love for Him but He never wavers in His love for us. Max Lucado has written, “How wide is God's love? Wide enough for the whole world. Are you included in the world? Then you are included in God's love.” It's nice to be included. You aren't always. Universities exclude you if you aren't smart enough. Businesses exclude you if you aren't qualified enough, and sadly, some churches exclude you if you aren't good enough.

But though they may exclude you, Christ includes you. When asked to describe the width of his love, he stretched one hand to the right and one to the left and had them nailed in that position so you would know he died loving you.

But isn't there a limit? Surely there has to be an end to this love. You'd think so, wouldn't you? But David the adulterer never found it. Paul the murderer never found it. Peter the liar never found it. When it came to life, they hit bottom. But when it came to God's love, they never did. They, like you, found their names on God's list of love. [He Chose the Nails p. 115]

David tells us that God's faithfulness extends to all generations. When others fail us, He does not. When others desert us, He stands with us. When we declare our anger, He continues to declare His love. God is consistent. He is good. He is loving. Even when we don't understand the circumstances of life we should give thanks for the God who's character is without question. This character is what we rely on.

We give thanks for a sure Hope beyond the grave. How do people survive who see this life as all that there is? The Bible tells us that when we die, we go to be with the Lord. We are given a home prepared by God's loving hands. We are given bodies that will never decay, malfunction or embarrass us. We are reunited with loved ones who have died before us. And we will be with Jesus. Heaven is described by taking the most precious things of this life: gold, silver, precious stones . . . and making them the common things of Heaven. It is a reminder that this life is nothing in comparison to the splendor of the world to come. Heaven
is depicted as a place of joy, singing, celebration. It is a place where wrongs are made right, where good is rewarded.

In the midst of many tragic times death is lurking somewhere in the picture. The pain is either caused by a death of someone we know or by the threat of death. Knowing that there is life beyond the grave softens the heartache. Knowing that this life is not all there is a blessing we should thank God for.

**We give thanks for the Savior who made this hope possible.** We should give thanks for God's plan to save us. We should give thanks for the baby in the manger, the teacher on the hillside, the Savior on the cross, the resurrected Lord, and the coming King. We give thanks for Jesus in every circumstance because He is our reason for hope. It is faith in Him that has made us new. It is faith in His provision that brings us eternal life.

**We give thanks for a supernatural strength to get through devastation.** We give thanks for a God who really does understand our pain. We are told that Jesus was "acquainted with all our grief". He lived this life. He knew what it was like to be rejected. He knew what it was like to face temptation of every kind. He knew what it was like to lose people He loved. Most people believe that Jesus'father died while he was young. Jesus knew what it was like to be misunderstood. He knew what it was like to hurt. And Jesus knows us. There is no one who understands us like He does.

We give thanks for the Spirit who prays for us with groans too deep for words. We give thanks for the God who sticks closer than a brother. He listens when we need to vent. He understands when words are absent. He gives strength when we have none of our own. He is the one who carries us when we have no strength of our own.

**Why We Often Neglect to Give Thanks in the Good Times**

We've looked plenty at the hard times. But some of you don't feel that sense of devastation in your life. For some of you life is going really well. Everything seems to be falling into place. Sometimes these are some of the most dangerous times of life.

When times go well it is easy to take things for granted. The simple pleasures are overlooked. Blessing is expected rather than received with gratitude. Have you ever thought about how many things we take for granted every single day?

Why do we do this? Here's some ideas,

- Sometimes we neglect to give thanks because we feel we have earned what we have. We have worked hard and things have worked out. We seem to feel that our blessings are the result of our goodness. We don't need to give thanks because we have "earned everything we have." I don't think I need to point out what a dangerous situation this is.
- Sometimes we neglect to give thanks because we are too greedy yearning for more. We are too busy looking at what we would like to have rather than thanking God for what we do have. As a child I remember always feeling somewhat impoverished at Christmas. I'd look at the Sears Christmas Catalog and see all the stuff I didn't have. In the process I neglected to be grateful for the many things I did have: the material stuff, two parents who loved me, a warm home, great sisters, good food at [almost] every meal, the opportunity for a good education, a Christian upbringing, a large extended family . . . and so very much more.
- Sometimes we neglect to give thanks because we have taken what we have for granted. When was the last time you gave thanks for the simple things, like those mentioned above. When was the last time you really said "thank-you" for God's grace, His forgiveness, His Spirit who guides, directs and empowers you? When was the last time you thanked God for the Bible and it's ability to get to the heart of any problem? When was the last time you gave thanks for the many teachers, authors and influential people God has brought into your lives? When was the last time you thanked God for His church and the people who stand at your side? R.C. Sproul sings it, "We've Grown Accustomed to His Grace". Giving thanks keeps us from taking the blessings of life for granted.
When we don't thank God for the good times, we lose our ability to recognize that they ARE good times. We shouldn't need a tragedy to wake us up to the things that should be cherished. James tells us that "every good and perfect gift is from above." We need to work to give more than superficial thanks to God in the good times just like we have to in the bad.

CONCLUSIONS

Yes, we are to give thanks in ALL circumstances. And to help you do that, may I suggest some simple ideas?

1. Sometime when you are alone slowly look around your home and NOTICE the things you have to be thankful for. Look at the pictures and thank Him for the memories that the pictures represent. Notice the possessions and thank Him for the ways He has provided for you. Notice the things others have given as gifts, and thank Him for the blessing of friendship. Notice the things that remind us of those who have already gone on to their eternal reward . . . and thank God for the way you were enriched by those lives. See the television, the computer, the stereo and thank God for the joy those machines have brought you. Thank Him that you are living in such a time as this. Look at the stains on the carpet or the furniture and remember the things that caused them. Notice the wall where you marked the height of your children and give thanks for them. Notice the things left lying around and give thanks that signs of life surround you.

2. In some quiet night sit in the dark and list as many things as you can in God's character that you can be thankful for. Remember where you were when He changed your life. Remember the times of crisis you thought you could not survive but did, by His strength. Recall some of the life changing lessons you have learned or some of the Bible passages that have become your foundation for living. Dare to think about the place that He is preparing for you and thank Him in advance for the riches He gives.

3. Make it a point to say thanks to those you cherish. Be specific. Maybe you'll need to write it down. Maybe you'll need to make a phone call. Maybe you'll need to go out to a gravesite . . . but do make it a point to be grateful. It will mean a great deal to you . . . and it may mean even more to those who receive your words.

4. Before you sit down to Thanksgiving dinner, look around the table. Really see the faces that are there. Don't focus on the food . . . focus on those you share the meal with. Be old fashioned, go around the table and express your gratitude [Maybe you'll want to do this before the food is put out]. Go ahead and say a prayer. Thank God for the food and for your family.

5. And if this is a hard Thanksgiving. Take the time to talk about the Lord. Remind yourself and those around you that He is good, his love endures forever, and His faithfulness will never cease. Remind yourself of when days were better. Tell stories of the past. Remind with fondness and maybe with tears. . . . and then look forward to the future day when the tears will be dried, the pain will be gone, and the smile of Jesus will bring a joy this world has never known.
How to Avoid Being a Walking Contradiction—a Joyless Christian
by Charles Swindoll

Your choice of attitude is, without question, the single most important choice you make every day. Life is made up of about 10 percent of what happens to us and about 90 percent of how we respond to it. Often what happens to us is completely out of our control, sometimes shockingly surprising, and on occasion completely demoralizing. Nevertheless, how we respond to it is of utmost importance.

This, of course, begins in the home, where we relate most closely to people we love. And it’s often even there we fail at the greatest level with our spouse, with our children, with our parents. Even living in neighborhoods, as some of us do, toward those who are closest to us in proximity.

One of the finest quotes I ever read came from Viktor Frankl, who endured more than one of the horrible Nazi war camps and spent several months at Auschwitz, so near death. When he survived all of that, he wrote, “The experiences of camp life show that we have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. We can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical distress. We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that anything can be taken from us but one thing. The last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

I remember when I was president of Dallas Seminary, not one time did a faculty member come to me to talk about some help that he or she would need in working with a student whose grades were lacking. Time and again, however, we would talk about students whose attitudes were rotten, sour, and impacting the class, as well as the faculty member himself or herself. We have a little radio ministry called Insight for Living, where people call in on a toll-free number. We have about 20–30 lines that are open to the public to call in. It so happens that our older daughter works as the one who directs that part of the ministry. She said to me with a sigh several months ago, “Dad, do you realize the most difficult people that we deal with on the phones are ministers?” The general public is watching, whether we like it or not, and our attitude is what they remember far more than what we may preach or write or sing or say.

**Thankful? Contagiously So!**

I want to direct our attention to a few verses in Philippians, which is a letter that is full of great attitudes. When I read the letter to the Philippians, I come away amazed when I remember that this is not written by a man sitting on the beach, relaxing in an afternoon of sunshine and fun; this is not written by a man who’s enjoying life in the penthouse with plenty.

This is written by a man who’s under arrest! This is a man who responded to life beautifully, though he has endured the dregs of it.

Paul wrote this letter while chained to a Roman soldier, and it is filled with great, contagious attitudes! There isn’t even a word of self-pity. Philippians 1:3 expresses an attitude of gratitude: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.” Even his prayers have an attitude of joy in verse 4, offering prayer with joy. And there is confidence in verse 6, “I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it.” Paul is not even talking about himself! There is not even a parenthesis of “feel sorry for me.”

And then there is thoughtfulness in verse 7, “It is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart—that’s both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partners or partakers of grace with me.”

Verse 12 conveys his optimistic attitude toward his circumstances:
“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.” Because Paul was under arrest, it provided an opportunity for the gospel to permeate Caesar’s household as he led one soldier after another to Christ.

**Practice Perpetual Optimism**

Having spent a few years in the military, I can tell you that promotions come to those with great attitudes. Demotions often come, or people stay at the same rank, because of poor attitudes.

General Colin Powell released some time ago 18 of what he calls “leadership secrets.” Number 12 says, “Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.” He says, “The ripple effect of a leader’s enthusiasm and optimism is awesome. So is the impact of cynicism and pessimism. Leaders who whine and blame engender those same behaviors among their colleagues. I’m not talking about stoically accepting organizational stupidity and performance incompetence with a ‘What? Me worry?’ smile. I’m talking about a gung-ho attitude that says, ‘We can change things here! We can achieve awesome goals! We can be the best!’ Spare me the grim litany of the realist. Give me the unrealistic aspirations of the optimist any day.”

In verse 18, Paul says, “I will rejoice.” Notice that it is a determination on his part to rejoice. Things around me don’t cause me to rejoice; I make the choice to rejoice. Samuel Johnson said years ago, “When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” Perhaps in that concentrated moment, Paul said, “For however long I have to live, I rejoice through it.” Life is a gift—a wonderful, wonderful gift.

In 2:3, an attitude of humility emerges quickly. “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.” Verse 4 says, “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

How important it is to know that in ministry, which is committed to that concept.

Then, in verses 5–7, Paul uses the classic illustration, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself.”

**Feel “Up” by Stooping Down**

I watched with interest a documentary on the gifted contralto Marian Anderson. Not too many years before her death, she was interviewed by a reporter who asked her about the greatest moment of her life. Her singing career had included many big moments from which to choose.

After a long pause, Marian Anderson said quietly that the greatest moment of her life was the day she went home and told her mama that she wouldn’t have to take in washing any more. *That’s humility.*

We find a wonderful reminder of an attitude of humility in verse 14, where Paul says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” Aren’t those great words? I was going through a period of self pity, and finally it emerged in front of some of our folks at *Insight for Living*. One of my good friends looked over at me and said, “Hey, cry me a river, Chuck. We’ve all got it tough.” That was a great answer; I needed to hear that.

So it’s tough. Welcome to the ministry! It’s tough—that’s why attitude is what it’s all about. Those who stay positive and enthusiastic in the midst of the toughness are people folks crowd around.

Chapter 3 is full of joy. “My brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Paul warns them of those who could steal their joy and turn their heads. In 4:4, he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I repeat, rejoice,” and “Be anxious for nothing” (v. 6).

Stop all of the worrying, stop all of the grumbling and complaining. In prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, turn your concerns over to Him who can handle them. Sometimes those heartbreaking events that level us are just perfectly designed to redefine our lives and give us a whole new direction.

**“There’s Great Value in Disaster.”**

In 1914, when Thomas Edison was 67, his laboratory and factory burst into flames and burned to the ground.
Much of his life’s work was destroyed in the fire, and he lost a tremendous amount of money. The damage was estimated then at what would be about $100 million today. Edison’s son, Charles, who was then 24, wrote of finding his father standing out in the chilly air of the winter night, watching the fire with his mouth open. He saw his son. And his son said of him, “My heart ached for him—67 years old—everything going up in flames. And then I heard my dad shout, ‘Charles! Where’s your mother? Go get her and tell her to bring her friends! They’ll never see a fire like this one again!’”

The next morning, Edison walked through the rubble and debris left by the fire and said, “Son, there’s great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burnt up. Thank God we can start all over again.” Three weeks later, he unveiled the first phonograph.

Stop worrying! Instead of worrying, replace it with prayer. Do it! And the peace that passes understanding will march guard duty around your heart and protect it and grow you into a different kind of woman or man than you ever would otherwise be.

The climax hits us in 4:8. For it ends, “Let your mind dwell on these things”—and he names six of them. “Whatever is true [valid, reliable, and honest], whatever is honorable [the term meaning to revere, giving others that which they deserve and what is worthy of respect], whatever is right [upright and just], whatever is pure [undefiled, not smutty, shabby, or soiled], whatever is lovely [amiable, pleasing—the best rendering is winsome], whatever is of good repute [it means gracious, admirable], let your mind dwell on these things.”

The choice is yours.

**The Joy of Jesus**

I have a good friend who wrote a book called *You Gotta Keep Dancing*. In the book, he talks about overcoming life’s situations so that no matter what occurs, you can, through the power of the living God, turn a corner and, learning from that, live a deeper, better, and different kind of life.

It so happened that an 82-year-old man, who had served as a pastor for more than 50 years, in his later years began to battle with skin cancer. He underwent 15 operations on his skin, including his face, leaving him disfigured. Along with the pain that he endured, it made him terribly self-conscious. He found himself becoming more and more of a recluse until he read this little book in which the author encourages the reader not to let any situation take charge of one’s attitude of joy.

Now I quote the response, “After reading a while, the elderly pastor said he put the book down and said, ‘The man is crazy. I cannot choose joy.’” So he gave up on the idea; then he later read in John 15:11 that joy is a gift. Jesus said, “I want to give My joy so that your joy may be complete.” A gift, he thought. A gift. He didn’t know what to do. So he got on his knees; he didn’t know what to say. So he stumbled with, “Well, then, Lord, give it to me!”

Suddenly, as he describes it, this incredible hunk of joy overwhelmed him, landed on him. He said, “I was overwhelmed—it was like the joy talked about in Peter—a joy unspeakable and full of glory. I didn’t know what to say, so I said, ‘Turn it on, Lord! Turn it on!’” And before he knew it, he was dancing around the house! He said, “After all, the book is called *You Gotta Keep Dancing.*”

He felt so joyful, he actually felt born again—again! And this astonishing change happened at the age of 82. He just had to get out of the house and tell somebody! So he went down to the local fast food restaurant and got a hamburger, and the woman at the counter saw how happy he was and said, “How are you doing today?”

And he said, “I’m wonderful!”

“Is it your birthday?” she asked.

“No, honey, it’s better than that!”

“Is it your anniversary?”

“Better than that! It’s the joy of Jesus!”
May we all, in our own way, find the joy of Jesus—a gift we receive, a choice we make—in our future ministries and the circumstances we face at this very hour.

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The Road to Renewal
(Romans 12:1-2)
By Bob Deffinbaugh

Introduction

Sometimes I get disappointed, even upset, when something turns out to be less than represented. For instance, the local A & W Root Beer drive-in used to serve our root beer in large, iced glasses. The root beer was delicious, but the glass was empty after drinking only two-thirds of the root beer. The glass simply did not hold as much as it should have because of the false bottom.

I have also been disappointed at the local farmers’ market. Vendors display their tomatoes in neatly piled little boxes virtually overflowing with tomatoes. One discovers that all the tomatoes are on top with one tomato underneath propping up the rest. I feel cheated every time I buy their tomatoes.

We need not feel short-changed when studying the text of our lesson. Though there are only two verses in our text, the more we investigate, the more we find Paul is saying in these few words. I remember teaching on these two verses over twenty years ago, one of the first texts I taught after coming to Dallas to attend seminary. In thinking on this text over the years, I have realized that I only began to scratch the surface in that first lesson. Twenty years from now, I am sure I will feel the same about this lesson.

Romans 12:1-2 is the transition to the last major segment of this Epistle to the Romans. The doctrinal foundation for the Christian life has been laid down in the first 11 chapters. Now in chapters 12-15 Paul will spell out some of the ways our faith and doctrine should be demonstrated in our daily lives. These transitional verses introduce us to the attitudes and actions which should set the Christian apart from the world in which he lives.

It is vitally important that we know and understand the doctrines Paul has taught in the first 11 chapters of Romans. But we must recognize they are truths God intends for us to put into practice. We must not file these truths away in the back drawer of our minds; we must live them out in our daily walk in the Spirit. These two verses are a call to commitment, a commitment to be worked out by a whole new way of thinking and behaving. Heed well these words. More importantly, be obedient to them. Let us now look for the commitment called for in these verses, and do as Paul urges to the glory of God and to our good.

A Call to Commitment
(12:1) I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

As we seek to understand Paul’s words, consider these important observations to serve as a guide in our study.

(1) Note that those who are addressed are Christians. Paul addresses his words to the “brethren,” those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, those who have experienced justification by faith.

(2) Paul’s words are a call to action; they are directed toward application. These words challenge the Christian to make a decisive commitment—to take action.

(3) Paul’s call to action is built on the foundation of his teaching in chapters 1-11. The word “therefore” is most significant. The action Paul calls for in the first verse of chapter 12 is the application of Paul’s teaching in chapters 1-11. But it goes even deeper than this. Chapters 1-11 describe the means whereby the actions called for in chapters 12-15 can be carried out. Chapters 1-11 also provide the motivation for doing so. Not until chapter 12 are we equipped and prepared for the application of chapters 1-11.
(4) **Paul’s words are those of urging, of exhortation.** These words are not a demand but an exhortation. It is clear that every Christian should do that which Paul calls for in our text. But why the Christian acts accordingly **is of utmost importance to God.** God does not judge men on outward appearance but on the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7; Luke 16:15; 1 Corinthians 4:5). **God is thus very concerned that our actions stem from righteous attitudes and motives.** Some obey God out of guilt and others out of greed or self-interest. As we shall soon see, God wants more.

(5) **Grace is both the means and the motivation for heeding Paul’s exhortation.** Paul’s appeal is based on the “mercies of God,” mercies which have been described in much greater detail in chapters 1-11. Now Paul urges us to **act on those mercies.** God’s mercy is evident in **His eternal plan to save men from their sins, to declare them righteous, and to assure them of the hope of glory.** God’s mercy is evident in that **He employs man’s disobedience as the occasion for His grace.** God’s mercy is seen in **divine election which enables Him to bless men apart from their unworthiness and sin.** God’s mercy is **personified in the person of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for sinners.** God’s mercy is **evident in the life of the Christian in whom His Spirit dwells and through whom He is working out His purposes.** All of God’s blessings are the result of **His grace and the manifestation of His mercy.** In His mercy, God has provided for guilty sinners to be delivered from their sins and destined for His glory. The **mercies of God enable us to serve God and motivate us to serve out of gratitude.**

(6) **The goal of the Christian’s action is pleasing God.** Paul calls for a “living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.” The Christian’s goal should be to please God. Many want to push God as far as they can, stopping just short of making Him angry. They are like our children who press us to the very limit but stop short when they see our anger. **Pleasing God goes much farther than this. It avoids anything that might not please Him. It searches for ways to please Him.**

When I was growing up, I had a golden retriever I had raised from a pup. Occasionally I ran my dog against other breeds. A word of disapproval was the only rebuke my golden retriever needed; this devastated him enough to bring him to the desired obedience. Other breeds needed considerably more persuasion, and they were known as “hard-headed.” Often the owner would thump the dog on the head just to get his attention. God wants us to be like the golden retriever—eager to please Him and sensitive to His approval or disapproval.

(7) **Paul’s call to action is a call to worship.** Paul’s worship, based upon the mind of God and the mercy of God, began in chapter 11 and is recorded in verses 33-36. Paul calls the Christian to a commitment and to action in chapter 12. To understand, we must see that the service Paul urges us to engage in is the “**service of worship.**”

**The worship Paul calls for is a rational worship** as indicated in the marginal note in the New American Standard Bible. It is unfortunate that this rendering was not the first choice of the translators, because I believe it to be the primary thrust of the term. This meaning is entirely consistent with the context in which the Christian’s mind has been a prominent subject of discussion. The puffed up mind of the Gentile believer was to be humbled by the grace of God and the infinitely wise mind of God in chapter 11. The Christian’s transformation, discussed in verse 2 of chapter 12, is the result of the “**renewing of the mind.**” Thinking is the primary activity in verse 3. In fact, all of chapter 12 has to do with the new mindset of the Christian, as a result of the grace of God. As Christian doctrine was taught in chapters 1-11, it was addressed to the mind. Now Paul calls upon the Christian to **exercise** his mind to conclude that the worship of sacrificial service is the only proper response. Serving God is the logical thing to do. Disobeying God is illogical and irrational, but then so is sin. Never is the Christian called upon to set his mind aside; rather he is to employ his mind, based upon the truth which God has revealed.

**The worship Paul calls for is sacrificial.** The Old Testament describes several types of offerings. The sacrifice Paul calls for is **not a sin offering,** for Christ’s death has paid for our sins once for all. The sacrifice called for is **a sacrifice of praise.** In gratitude for God’s grace, the believer gives up his life and gives it over to God. **The sacrifice belongs to God, to be used to His glory as an act of praise and devotion.**
The worship Paul calls for is expressed by our service. Our sacrifice is to be a “living sacrifice.”

Death is involved. We can only live for God as a living sacrifice because we have first died and been raised to new life in Jesus Christ:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me (Galatians 2:20).

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God (Romans 6:12-13).

The Christian’s life is that life which God has given by His grace. Our response of gratitude must be to give our life back to God as a sacrifice of praise. We do so not by laying on an altar as a dead sacrifice, but by living out our lives selflessly for God. It is a living sacrifice expressed in service. Worship here is seen as a lifestyle.

Paul is calling for a specific decision and commitment, leading to a life of service. The exhortation to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice” is expressed in a way that calls for a decision, a specific commitment. Divine revelation requires our response. After 11 chapters of teaching, Paul calls upon us to respond to the mercies of God and to do so by giving our lives to Him as a sacrifice of praise.

As we look at Paul’s words in verse 1, we view them from the perspective of the Old Testament sacrifices. We do so rightly. But when Paul addresses Gentile believers, speaking to them about worship, we must remember what “worship” meant to these former-pagans. Paul’s words here not only compare the Christian’s commitment to serve God to the Old Testament sacrifices, they contrast it with their former lifestyle. Note the contrast evident at the outset of Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians about spiritual gifts and service:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-3).

Pagan worship was often mindless. In many cases it might be associated with drunkenness and immorality. Such was the case in Corinth, and this heathen heritage was brought into the worship of the church with strong words of rebuke from Paul (see 1 Corinthians 10 and 11). The “worship” of the heathen very much involved the body. Immorality was often part of the heathen worship ritual. Christian worship involved the body too but in exactly the opposite way. The body was not to be employed for self-gratification but in self-sacrifice. The heathen’s worship was pagan and unholy. The sacrifice of the Christian was to be “holy” and “acceptable to God.” The worship of the Christian was to be rational, the reasoned response of a grateful soul to the grace of God. Heathen worship was more a matter of magic where one sought to manipulate the “gods” to bring about one’s good. The worship of God is to be focused on the One who shows mercy and bestows grace on unworthy sinners. God blesses us not because we do everything right, but in spite of our failures.

A Call to Change

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1 and 2 address the Christian personally and individually. Verse 1 calls upon the Christian to actively choose to become a living sacrifice as an act of worship. In verse 2, Paul speaks of the Christian’s obligation in passive terms. First, the Christian is called upon to serve God. Then, in verse 2, the Christian is called upon to change. More accurately, the Christian is called upon to be changed. The Christian life is not to be lived out as we once lived. The change Paul calls for is one that is brought about in the life of the
believer. Let us consider this change as we take note of several characteristics of this text.

First, note that the words of verse 2 are closely linked with what Paul has just said in verse 1. The “and” of verse 2 links this verse with verse 1. Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God should result in the transformation of our lives as called for in verse 2. The offering of ourselves to God is a choice which determines whom we will serve and whom we will follow.

Second, the commitment to offer our lives to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving is intended to result in a process of change, of transformation. When the gospel is proclaimed, repentance is required. Repentance is a turning around, a change in thinking and behaving. The commitment to serve God as a sacrificial offering is also a commitment to change. This change involves the mind and what will shape our thinking. The Gentile mind is darkened and distorted. It must change:

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Ephesians 4:17-24).

The commitment to become a living sacrifice is a commitment to change. It is a commitment to a radical change, a reversal of our thinking and values, of our motives and methods. It is not a minor repair but a tearing down and complete rebuilding. This change is evidenced in the instructions Paul gives in the rest of Romans.

Third, becoming a living sacrifice is the commitment to BEING changed. It is not we who change ourselves. In the final analysis, our thinking will be shaped by something or someone outside ourselves. In our sin and unbelief, we like to think of ourselves as “free thinkers.” In reality, we are only thinking like Satan and like the fallen world system in which we live. Our culture constantly seeks to shape us. Like teenage children, we think we are expressing our individuality and independence when we differ with God. In reality, we are merely following the world, the flesh, and the devil in rebellion and unbelief. When we give our lives to God, we give ourselves over to His influence and control. When we turn to God in obedience, we turn away from the world’s shaping influence on us. Its influence should diminish, and God’s infinite wisdom, contained in Scripture and conveyed by His Spirit, should begin to transform our thinking and our actions. Giving our lives to God as a living sacrifice is the decision to be shaped and influenced by God and not by our fallen world.

The end result of our sacrificial offering, and of the transformation which results from the renewing of our minds, is proving out the will of God. We should explore just what this means.

We must first determine what Paul means here by the “will of God.” In Christian circles today, the expression normally refers to the “will of God for my life,” “the will which God has for my life.” Knowing God’s will is a popular topic of discussion.

There may be an element of truth in saying that when we surrender our wills and our lives to God, God will then make it clear to us what He wants us to do. Giving ourselves to God as living sacrifices may very well be a prerequisite to knowing God’s will for our life. Nevertheless, I do not think this is the primary thrust of Paul’s words.

The “will of God” to which Paul refers is described as “good,” “perfect,” and “acceptable.” We are tempted to view these terms from a human perspective. The will of God is “good” for me, it is “perfect” for me, it is “acceptable” to me. From all that Paul has already taught in Romans, I believe we would
have to say this: The “will of God” is the “good” which He has purposed (Romans 8:28), which is “acceptable” to Him, and which is “perfect.” That which is “perfect” is that which is complete. The “will of God” here then encompasses His comprehensive and all-inclusive will for His creation, for time and eternity. If this be the case, the “will of God” is not “the will of God for my life” or “what God wants me to do in specific circumstances,” but the all-encompassing will of God for His creation. The will of God here has a much wider scope than just me and my choices.

Further, the emphasis here is not so much on “discovering” or “knowing” God’s will as it is in doing God’s will or demonstrating His will. Paul tells us that we will prove what the “will of God” is rather than learn what it is. In other words, we can be assured we will achieve God’s will and that we will be instruments in His hands to play a part in the accomplishing of His great and mysterious purposes. The term prove not only means to prove out, to demonstrate, but to approve (see Luke 14:19; Romans 14:22; 1 Corinthians 16:3; Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). If I understand Paul correctly, he is saying that when we have given ourselves to God as a thank offering and have been transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will not only recognize that God’s will is being worked out in our lives, we will rejoice in this reality. Pharaoh achieved God’s purposes for his life, but he neither recognized it nor rejoiced in it (see Romans 9:17-18, 22-24). Disobedient Israel does not recognize that God’s will is being accomplished through their disobedience, and neither do they rejoice in it. Those who have given themselves to God, and whose minds are increasingly in tune with the mind of God, recognize that He is at work and rejoice in it.

Conclusion

The more I have considered these words of Paul here in Romans 12, the more I see that he has outlined God’s way of reversing the process of mental and moral decay outlined in Romans 1. Read through these verses from Romans 1, and consider them with me in the light of Romans 12, verses 1 and 2:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:18-32).

In Romans 1, Paul indicted those to whom God had revealed Himself by means of creation. God revealed something of His character and attributes by the creation which is before us. Men should be able to look at creation and see not only that it was created by a Creator, but that this Creator has a divine nature and eternal power. These invisible attributes are visibly demonstrated in His creation (Romans 1:19-20).

This revelation of God’s nature and power requires man’s response. The only proper response is that of man’s worship and adoration. But instead of falling down before God in worship, men either rejected this revelation or exchanged it for that “knowledge” which suited their own sinful inclinations and desires (Romans 1:18, 21, 23). Instead of worshipping God, men chose to worship the creation. In the final
analysis, men began to worship their own images, to worship themselves. Men put God down and elevated themselves to His place of honor and glory and praise (see Romans 1:21-25).

God responded to man’s sin by giving them over to their sin. He gave their minds over to depraved and distorted thinking. They began to think themselves wise, but in reality they were becoming fools. They became futile in their speculative thinking and darkened in their ability to see and to perceive the truth (Romans 1:21, 28).

He also gave men over to their sinful passions. God gave fallen men and women over to their lusts, so that they not only lived in excesses, they even began to practice perversion, that which was unnatural and unholy (Romans 1:26-27). In both mind and body, God gave men over to their sin, to its distortions and perversions.

How could this downward spiral be stopped? How could these adverse effects of sin be reversed? Only through the grace of God, manifested in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in the sinner’s place. He offers men not only forgiveness but also restoration and renewal.

The process by which that renewal takes place is outlined in Romans 12:1 and 2. Beyond the limited scope of the revelation of God in nature (Romans 1:18ff.), and the more extensive revelation of God through the Law (Romans 2), God has now revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 1:1-3). He has revealed not only our sin but His righteousness. He has offered to all who will believe forgiveness of sins and eternal life. To those whom He has chosen, and who have believed the gospel, He has poured out His mercies.

These mercies are the subject of chapters 1-11 of Romans. On the basis of this great revelation of the kindness and severity of God, Paul has called upon believers in the Lord Jesus to respond in a way appropriate to the revelation we have received. We are to respond in worship. We are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God. We are to honor and serve Him. We are to live holy and obedient lives. Those who respond in worship as Paul has urged will enter into the life-long process of renewal and restoration. The grip of this age will loosen, and the process of transformation will begin by the renewing of our minds. As a result, both our bodies and our minds will begin to be conformed to Christ and His image.

The steps Paul urges the believer to take in our text are the steps to renewal and restoration, steps required to reverse the devastation of sin.

Much more could be said about this text, but there is one thing Paul urges us to do. The point of this passage is to urge each Christian to offer himself to God as a thank offering, based upon the mercy and the grace of God which has been poured out on those who believe. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation? Have you experienced the mercies of God? If so, then have you offered your life to Him, as a sacrifice, for His glory and praise? Just as men are called upon to make a decision concerning salvation, Paul calls on believers to make the decision to worship God by offering our lives to Him, and by this to please Him who has loved us and given Himself for us. I urge you to do this today, because of His manifold mercies.

Here is the road to renewal. We must respond to the grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. We must first respond by faith in Jesus as our Savior, our Righteousness. We should also respond to Him in grateful worship, expressed in service. We should fall before Him in grateful, loving service, like the woman who washed the feet of Jesus in Luke 7.

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee’s house, and reclined at the table. And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet He would know
who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.” “A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven.” And those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?” And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:36-50).

The woman, caught up in the mercy of her Lord, no longer cared what others thought; she was preoccupied with her Savior, expressing her love in that service afforded to her, washing His feet. She is simply demonstrating what Paul is calling every Christian to do.

Here is the road to renewal, both personal and corporate. **May we, as individuals and as churches, offer ourselves to the Saviour as an act of grateful worship.**

39 The term is employed elsewhere only in 1 Peter 2:2 where its meaning is less clear. 40 When Paul says in Romans 6:13, “do not go on presenting . . . ,” the verb is in the present tense. In Romans 12:2, Paul uses the aorist tense. The inference in our text is that we are called to a specific commitment. That commitment leads to a lifestyle. 41 Note that these two expressions, “conformed” and “transformed,” are both imperatives. They are present imperatives, thus indicating a process. They are passive verbs, indicating that we are being changed by someone or something outside of ourselves. 42 See also Ephesians 4 where the radical nature of this change is indicated. It is the change from death to life, from darkness to light, from self-seeking to selfless service. 43 In most instances, when the term “acceptable” is used in the New Testament, it refers to that which is acceptable to God (see 2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:18; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 3:20; Hebrews 13:21).

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