Living Transformed

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Unshakeable: Romans 12:1–2

I don’t know about you, but it seems like everybody has a side hustle these days.

You’ve got your main job, your 9 to 5, and then there’s that thing on the side. Maybe you drive Uber a few nights a week. Maybe you do hair or nails out of your basement on Saturdays, or you’ve got a small business you’re trying to get off the ground, or you’re flipping things on Marketplace.

I remember a season when I was going to school, working full-time, pastoring part-time, and trying to be a husband and a dad, all at the same time. And if I’m honest, school got whatever I had left over. Late nights after the kids were in bed. Reading assignments squeezed in between everything else. It mattered to me, but it was never the focus. It got the leftovers.

And there’s nothing wrong with a side hustle. But here’s the thing about a side hustle: it gets whatever’s left over.

It matters to you, but it’s something you fit in around everything else.

And I wonder if that’s how a lot of us treat Jesus.

Like we’ve got our real life: our career, our family, our plans, our goals. And then there’s Jesus. He gets Sunday morning. He gets a few minutes in the car when we remember to pray. He gets whatever’s left over at the end of the week.

Jesus becomes our side hustle.

And maybe we wonder why our faith doesn’t seem to make much of a difference. Why we’re not growing, why we’re not changing, why it feels like we’re just going through the motions.

Here's what Paul is going to tell us this morning: Jesus was never meant to be a side hustle. He doesn't want what's left over. In light of everything He's done for us, all the mercy He has shown us, the only reasonable response is to give Him all of us.

See, when we consider how great a mercy He has given to us, the only proper response is to give Him all of us.

Look with me at Romans 12.

Romans 12 marks an intentional shift in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Everything up to this point has been mostly doctrine, the shift in chapter 12 is that Paul begins to get really practical.

In light of everything that we have said, the question then becomes how shall we live in response?

How do we live in response to the gospel? How do we live out the gospel in everyday life?

It's response time to everything that has been revealed up to this point in Romans.

We notice how Paul is urges us there in verse 1.

"I appeal to you therefore, by the mercies of God."

One of the key words there is therefore… in some translations, it's the word that starts this chapter, therefore.

You've probably heard bible teachers say, that when you see a therefore, you have to ask what it's there for, because it's there for a reason… it's a connecting word.

In conclusion or what are we to make therefore of everything that has been said.

In light of the mercies of God, what is our response?

When you consider the mercy that God shown to us.

That God pursued us, revealed Himself to us, even though we had rejected Him and broke His law and commandments, even though we have replaced Him with idols to worship, even though we were deserving of judgment and wrath, that God showed us mercy, by providing a way back to Him, to be right with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

That by faith and faith alone we are found righteous and justified in God's eyes, that in God's mercy we have been united with Christ in His death and raised with Christ to new life, that God has given us His Holy Spirit and adopted us as His children and He works all things for our good, so that nothing, nothing shall separate us from His love.

That God chose us for Himself before the foundation of the World, even though we are wild olive branches He has grafted us into His family tree.

What is our response to this? How do we respond to so great a mercy?

That's what Paul is getting at here, this is the hinge on which this section starts to swing.

In light of the mercies of God, what is our response?

Here's what Paul says, our response to God's mercy is to give Him all of us.

He tell us that mercy calls for all of us.

MERCY CALLS FOR ALL OF US

That is not part of us, but all of us, all of who we are.

Look again at verse 1 with me.

Romans 12:1 ESV

[1] ***I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.***

Notice those words there, present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Paul is using Old Testament language of Leviticus when the priests would offer up sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites.

And the idea here that Paul wants us to get is just as the Israelites offered sacrifices as worship unto God, the only proper response to the mercy that God has shown to us is to offer ourselves in sacrificial worship.

But the wording here tells us this this is a different kind of sacrifice. In the Old Testament they would offer dead animals in sacrifice, but did you notice that word Paul uses there, living. Living sacrifice.

What do we offer up to a God who has shown us so great a mercy? We offer Him our lives on the altar. Not in order that we would die, but in the way we live. That is, I live my life for Him.

I give my life back to Him. Lord have your way. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The only proper response to so great a mercy is to say Lord this life is no longer my own, but I live for you.

Have your way in my life, Oh God.

Have me go where you want me to go, let me say what it is you want me to say, let me do what you want me to do.

I lay my life down for you, I live for you.

In the Old Testament there were different kind of sacrifices you made but there was sacrifices of consecration.

Consecration offerings were offerings that were set apart for the purposes of God. That's how you and I should think of our lives. That my life has been set apart for the purposes of God.

God has a purpose for your life, every part of your life. God has a purpose for you in the people of your life and the school you go to, He has a purpose for you in

the occupation you find yourself in, He has a purpose for your marriage, for you as a mother and father, God has a purpose for you in your singleness.

Your life has been set apart for the purposes of God.

And Paul get's real practical about this, notice he says not just our lives, but he says present your bodies. That's interesting isn't it? God cares about what we do with our bodies.

That make sense if what Paul says elsewhere is true and it is, that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Those who belong to Jesus have His presence, the Holy Spirit living within us. Our bodies are the place He dwells, and so yeah, it's not just our lives we offer up to Him, but our bodies.

It's why Paul says what he says so often in Romans, like in chapter 6, do you remember what he said?

Romans 6:12–15 ESV

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God… as instruments for righteousness.

This calling; this choice that we make to present our bodies to God as instruments for His righteousness and His glory.

And this takes more effort than maybe we think. There are things that our bodies desire, things that our bodies do, but in everything are we using them as instruments for righteousness or unrighteousness?

One of the things I love to do is get my workout in first thing in the morning. Wake up, do my devotions, and start lifting. And I wish I could stand up here and say every morning I wake up and I'm ready to go, ready to get at it. But if I'm honest there are mornings where my body just does not agree with my mind.

It's tired, it's weak, it just wants to lay around and go back to bed. And there are days that my body wins, but most of the time, even though my body is pulling me in one direction, I force it to do what I know is good for it. If I let my body dictate when I exercise, it probably wouldn't happen often. No, I have to bring my body into submission.

See, that's what Paul is saying, not just our lives, but so much of our life is what we do with our bodies. God cares about your body, because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Mercy calls us to offer all of ourselves, our lives and our bodies, to be holy and acceptable to God.

We are called to offer our lives as a holy and acceptable sacrifice to God. And many will say, like if that's the standard, I'm not sure I can live up to it. If that's what God requires, I'm not sure I measure up.

And I would say neither do I. But we can't forget the rest of Romans, where does our holiness come from, where does our righteousness come from, who is it that makes me acceptable to God?

Christ has already paid for that, I am holy because He is holy, I am acceptable because He was the acceptable sacrifice. The calling for you and I is to not forsake what Christ has done, to live in that holiness that Christ has paid for.

This isn't about earning, this isn't about paying God back, otherwise we'd be forsaking all that Paul has said up to this point, this is all about responding.

I get that because of how he ends that sentence, he says this is your spiritual worship.

In light of the mercy that God has shown you, present your bodies, your life as a sacrifice to the Lord, that which is holy and acceptable, this is your spiritual worship.

That word Spiritual, it comes from the Greek word Logikos, it's where we get our word logic from. Its almost as though Paul is saying this is your logical worship, the KJV translates that as this is your reasonable response.

I think both are right, it could go either way, something can be both a logical response and a spiritual response. In essence, Paul is saying that this just makes sense, this is how you worship in response to all the Lord has done for you.

Is there any other way to respond to the one who has given you life, than to offer Him your life in worship?

This is your reasonable response in worship. It's not about earning God's love, that's not what this is about. This is not about paying Him back, we could never, ever in one million lifetimes repay Him what He has given us.

It's about responding to all that He has done for us in worship.

That tells us, by the way then, that worship is so much more than what we do here on Sunday morning. Worship isn't just the songs we sing – I know we call that worship. That's a small part of it, and worship isn't Sunday morning. Worship is how we live our lives for Christ.

We worship Him as we live in obedience. We worship Him as we offer our lives to Him, we worship Him as we grow in holiness, we worship Him in what we do with our bodies. All of life is worship.

This is so important. It changes how we understand what it means to follow Jesus, doesn't it? Like maybe you think that becoming a follower of Jesus is just a part-time role. Maybe what you think following Jesus means is that I can add Jesus onto my already busy life, just another thing to do.

Maybe you think that following Jesus has everything to do with what you can gain from Him. You are sadly mistaken. Following Jesus takes all of you, it encompasses every area of your life, every crack, every crevice.

Following Jesus is not just about what you gain, it's about what you and I have to give, and in response to all that He has given us, all the mercy He has shown us and continues to show us, we offer Him our lives in worship, we offer all of us.

But if we are going to offer our lives in worship, something is going to have to happen first. We're going to need to change the way we think.

And that's the work that mercy does in our lives, that's the work of transformation.

Mercy changes the way we think.

MERCY CHANGES HOW WE THINK

Read verse 2 there.

Romans 12:2 ESV

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind…

Two words there, conformed and transformed.

The idea that Paul wants us to wrestle with is that our lives are being influenced by something.

He gives us that word conform and conform really has the idea of being changed, formed by outside influences. It's why Paul says do not be conformed to the world.

When he says the world there, he's talking mostly about what we would call the culture of the world, or system of the world.

There is a culture that goes with this world, and we take that in, often without us even giving it much thought.

We take it in through the movies that we watch, the music we listen to, the podcasts we stream, the books we read, the influential people that we let into

our lives, those whose voice has influence, people we look up to, the friends we surround ourselves with.

There are voices speaking into your life, a narrative that is being shaped and it's impacting the way you view the world around you, the way you understand life, and your purpose. And there is a danger Paul is saying in allowing ourselves to be molded after the culture of this world.

Make no mistake about this culture that we live in, the narrative of this culture is contrary to God's Kingdom.

It's why John says in 1 John 2:15-17...

1 John 2:15–17 ESV

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

There is a culture that is driven by feeding the desires of the flesh and having eyes that long to have everything we see, and to live a life that is the envy of others in position and wealth and ambition.

But what drives the culture of the world, cannot be the motivation that drives us, we cannot be molded into the culture of the world around us, God has called us to something infinitely greater.

Do not be conformed, molded after the world, but be transformed, and that word transformed is about being changed from the inside out.

See, God's Holy Spirit is doing a work, a transforming work inside of us, inside of you. He is changing you, molding you, shaping you into the image and nature of Christ more and more everyday.

That walking in holiness and living our lives in sacrifice, is not something that comes naturally, it's a work that God's Holy Spirit is doing in each of us.

And that work is hindered by how much you and I allow this world around us to shape us.

The work that God is doing within us to transform us and the culture of the world around us are at odds with each other, they're competing for our attention, our surrender.

And Paul tells us where that battle is waged and won.

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Your mind, your thought life. There is a deep connection between how we think and how we live. What you continually set your mind to, your thoughts to, that is the thing you will pursue.

Think back for instance when you first fell in love.

Do you remember how much that person took over your thought life? You'd wake up thinking about them. You'd be sitting in class or at work and your mind would drift right back to them. You'd replay conversations. You'd check your phone a hundred times to see if they'd texted.

And it didn't just change what you thought about. It changed how you lived. You'd drive across the city just to see them for an hour. You'd stay up way too late talking. You'd suddenly care what you were wearing. You'd spend money you didn't really have.

What we love sets our minds, and what sets our minds shapes our lives.

That's the connection Paul is making. There's a deep connection between what we desire in our hearts and what we set our minds on, and what we set our minds on is what we end up pursuing.

So what is constantly at the forefront of your mind?

Like, just pause and think about what you think about.

In fact, probably the greatest test of this is where does your mind go when you have nothing to think about? How often this week have you thought on the truth of God and His Word.

I think this is one of the great struggles of our society today, we lack people who really think deeply. Because we have so many distractions, don't we? In societies in the past, what did you do at night, while you were travelling for long periods of time? Well, you would have nothing to do but think.

But now we have so many things to pass the time away, that we don't have to think any more, we can scroll until we fall asleep, we can binge watch until our brains are numb, we can listen to music and pointless podcasts. We don't have to think any more, we have devices that do the thinking for us.

But for generations, the Christian life was a life of thought, of thinking deeply about the ways and the will of God. If our eyes and our attention are constantly focused on the things of the world, when, oh child of God, do you think on the things of God?

How can we be transformed by the renewing of our mind, when our mind is constantly occupied?

Mercy calls for all of us, it changes how we think and when our thinking is renewed here's what happens.

We are able to discern the will of God more clearly.

MERCY SHOWS US GOD'S WILL IS GOOD

Mercy shows us God's will is good.

Romans 12:2 ESV

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

One of the questions I get often from people is, how do I know God's will for my life? How can I discern what God's will is.

See, Paul is saying something to us here, he's telling us how it is that we discern what God's will is.

That when you and I surrender ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices, when we begin to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, he says then you will be able to discern what the will of God is.

When you are committed to living your life in surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ, God's will becomes clearer.

Well, how does that work? Generally, when people are asking what is God's will for my life, they're asking what is God's individual will for my life, what is God's purpose for my life.

I believe that God has a purpose for every person's life. The great question of this life is what is my purpose? In Christ you find your purpose.

Admittedly there is some mystery to what God's will is, but if I could estimate the percentage of the mystery, I would say 95% of God's will has been revealed to you.

God has revealed what His will is for you, right here in His Word. He has not left us in mystery, He has not left us guessing.

If you want to know what God's will is for you, it's right here, read His Word. In fact, there are instances when God is clear, this is the will of God for you.

For instance, Jesus is clear in John 6:40...

John 6:40 ESV

40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

God's will is not a mystery, His will is that everyone who looks to Christ in faith and believe in Him shall be saved and raised up on the last day.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 ESV

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 ESV

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

I could go on, but you see the point…

God has revealed His will for you right here in His Word. He has not left us guessing.

The 5% that is a mystery to us is when it comes to things like God where are you calling me move, what school should I apply to, who should I marry, what career are you calling me to?

But the problem is that we spend more energy trying to figure out the 5% that is a mystery than we do reading and living the 95% that is clear.

But you cannot discern that 5% clearly if you are not seeking after the 95%, that's what Paul is saying.

Jesus put it differently, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength… focus on that and God's will becomes clearer.

Seek First the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you.

He has not left that a mystery.

Until you and I set our hearts to living out God's revealed will, we will always struggle to discern what His hidden will is.

You cannot say I want to know what God's will is for my life while you're still out getting drunk and high every weekend and running with the crowd.

You cannot say I want to know God's will for my life while you're still having sex outside of marriage and giving yourself to other sexual immorality.

You cannot say I want to know what God's will is for my life while continuing to make a dishonest living, of making financial gains by dishonest means.

We cannot say that we want to know what God's will is for our life when we haven't cracked open His Word all week or spent more than five minutes in prayer about it.

Until we submit to His revealed will, we will always struggle to discern His hidden will.

Paul says present your bodies, your lives to God as a living sacrifice. Stop conforming to the thinking of the world, and surrender to the transforming of your mind and then you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Why do we struggle to submit to that 95%? It's because the world, in some shape or form, has convinced us that God's will is restrictive, or too harsh, or outdated.

We've given in to the lie that we can find life in other places besides God's will for us. We seek satisfaction in things that are temporary, fleeting, and passing away.

But part of mercy transforming and renewing our thinking is for us to see that just the opposite is true.

Look at how Paul describes God's will at the end of verse 2. It's *good*, *acceptable*, and *perfect*.

Good: it's for our good, not against it. Acceptable: it's pleasing to God, and the longer we walk in it, it becomes pleasing to us too. Perfect: it's complete, lacking nothing. It isn't the lesser life. It's the full one.

Remember what John told us? The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. The world offers us what doesn't last. God offers us what does.

That's why the psalmist could say, "I delight to do your will, O my God." Not "I put up with it," not "I tolerate it," but "I delight in it."

That's what a renewed mind starts to see.

Mercy doesn't just save us, mercy transforms us… it changes who we are, how we think, how we live.

The question is how… how we respond to so great a mercy that God has shown to us in His Son, Jesus Christ?

The answer. The only proper response is to give Him all of us.

We respond to God's mercy in faith, by presenting our lives and our bodies as living sacrifices. My life is no longer my own. Oh Lord, do with me what you will.

We respond by surrendering ourselves to have our thinking changed, transformed. To no longer be conformed to the pattern, the mold of this world, but set our minds and hearts on God's way and will.

We respond by discerning that God's will for our life is good and acceptable and perfect.

Jesus was never meant to be our side hustle. He doesn't want our leftovers. He gave us all of Himself, and mercy like that calls for all of us.

So maybe the question for us this morning is: what part of our lives are we still holding back? What area have we kept for ourselves? Maybe it's our time, our money, our relationships, what we do with our bodies, what we fill our minds with.

And maybe you're here this morning and you've never received that mercy for yourself. The response doesn't start with you giving your life to God. It starts with receiving what God has already given you in Jesus: forgiveness, new life, a place in His family. You can receive that mercy today, and everything else flows from there.

Let's pray.