

ISH
Limitless
Romans 12:1-2

Today, we begin a brand new series called ISH. You know what ISH is, right? ISH is what we say when we want to be vague, indefinite, and open-ended. I will be there around 10 ISH. That means that I will be there as close to 10 o'clock as I can without pushing myself or stopping what I am doing that I really enjoy! When I am out fishing or hunting and I tell my wife that I will be home around noon ISH, she plans on not seeing me until sometime before dark! ISH gives me wiggle room. There is a new sitcom out on television called BLACK*ISH. It is about a father who feels that his family has become so affected by the global culture that they no longer know what their black culture is even supposed to be. They are only black ISH. ISH then, is about the gradual LOSS of your true self. It can also be about laziness and loss in our spiritual lives. ISH allows me to dilute and even lose the distinctive differences that set a life of faith apart from everything else. ISH gives me the freedom to stay on MY terms rather than God's. ISH may be what we think we need or deserve when it comes to our schedules and our standards, but it will devastate our spiritual life.

I don't want to live a **Christian ISH life**. I don't want to live confined to the swamp of my own personal preferences and opinions and abilities. I want to live on the solid ground of God's truth about life and about me. I want to KNOW who I AM in Christ, and I want to experience the FULL EFFECT of what that identity means! How about you? Are you happy to just 'kind of' follow Jesus, or do you want more? Are you content with where you are spiritually, or do you want to develop a life-changing, world-shaking relationship with the One who saved you? If so, do you know how to actually accomplish that goal? That is exactly what we are going to learn in this series that is based upon Romans chapter 12. I want to spend the next several weeks looking at the details of a life that is much more than ISH.

In this series, I want to give each of you two challenges. First, I want you to memorize Romans 12:1-2. Scripture memory is something that will serve you well in your life, and these verses will be food for your soul as you meditate on them. You will see why as we unfold them in this message. Next, I want to challenge you to read two chapters of Romans each week for the next 8 weeks. This is important because everything that Paul tells us in Romans 12 is built upon the foundational truths that he teaches us in Romans 1-11. These chapters help us to understand why faith and grace are so important to us, and how they work in our lives. Romans 12 then teaches us how to put them into practice. Let's begin! **Romans 12:1 NIV**

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship.

Are you truly grateful for all that God has done for you? Is your heart overwhelmed with gratitude for the undeserved mercy that he has shown you in your life? The

entire letter of Romans has been saturated with truth about the richness of God's abundant mercies that he has shown to all men. God has not done TO us what we DESERVE, but he has done FOR us more than we could ever have DESIRED! He is so good to us even when we have been so rotten to him. How could we ever thank him? Paul lets us know. He informs us that our relationship with God must always be defined and motivated by the mercies of God. Because his mercy is undeserved, we do not need to try and EARN it. Because those mercies are from the endless supply of his loving-kindness, we do not need to fear that he will at some point become exasperated with us and cast us away! His faithful mercies are NEW every morning. This is why Paul finishes Romans 11 with these beautiful words:

Romans 11:32-36 GNT

32 For God has made all people prisoners of disobedience, so that he might show mercy to them all. **33** How great are God's riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways? **34** As the scripture says, "Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice? **35** Who has ever given him anything, so that he had to pay it back?" **36** For all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and for him. To God be the glory forever! Amen.

You can trust God! He has already done amazing things for you, and now he wants to demonstrate that IN you. But it requires that you make a decisive move.

Present your body to God.

If you are going to rise above ISH, then you are going to have to offer your BODY to God. He can only demonstrate what he has done in your spirit by the way it impacts your flesh! Now you have the opportunity to bring glory to God in your BODY. This means that God doesn't just want you to start doing meaningless ritual acts. He is not interested in weekend, religious exercises. He wants your sanctified flesh to start expressing the depth of what he has done in your redeemed spirit! **When you offer your body to God, you allow him to use it as the CANVAS on which he will paint his masterpiece. Actually, it will simply reveal the masterpiece that he has already made through his work of salvation in you. This verse is not about getting saved; it is about becoming holy.** The word "PRESENT" means "to yield one's self to; to surrender; to put at the disposal of another." This is a powerful word. Paul also uses this word in a way that means this is to be a ONCE-FOR-ALL-TIME offering. It is not something that you have to keep doing over and over, but it is something that you do "once and for all!" It is similar to what a prospective groom and bride do for one another on their wedding day. They make a once-for-all commitment of themselves to one another. And make no mistake; they are committing their bodies to one another exclusively.

The commitment of your body to God will change the way you use your body. It no longer belongs to you, and your commitment illustrates that you are aware of this great truth. You are no longer free to use your body any way you want. You cannot

abuse it or parade it to satisfy your own lusts or the lusts of others. This is why Paul said this earlier in his letter to the church at Rome: **Romans 6:13 NIV**

13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.

Why would you do this? There is only one reason: Because you BELIEVE that God will do something far better for and in your life and body than you could ever do. Do you believe this? If not, you will never change. This is because your BEHAVIOR will never rise above your BELIEF. Christian ISH people never give their bodies to God. That is too constricting to them. Obedience only happens when we go beyond ISH and believe the one who is giving us the command to surrender. I even discovered that the word for disobedience is a word that means, “to refuse to be persuaded.” That is amazing! I want to challenge you to YIELD your body to God. Process this in your spirit this week as you meditate on God’s Word, and then see if you are willing to commit your body to God completely as a living sacrifice. I will never forget when that moment came for me as a young man. It has made all the difference.

So, how can we possibly do this? What will help us get to the point that we will actually experience what God has promised? The next verse speaks directly to that point. **Romans 12:2 NIV**

2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

This is such a powerful verse! Do you want to experience God’s perfect will and realize that it is excellent and pleasing – not only to him – but to you as well? Paul teaches us how in this verse. He gives us one negative (“Stop being conformed to this world’s patterns”) and one positive idea accompanied by a command to help us activate it in our lives. This command is something that we have been talking about in various ways all year long. We are going to rehearse it again today.

Be transformed by renewing your mind.

Your mind needs a spiritual overhaul. It has been trained for many years by a disobedient flesh and a nasty nature, but now it is time for your new Master to take over the reins of your brain. This is the absolute KEY to living a life above ISH. You cannot continue to think the way that you have been thinking and expect to live a different life. We have been talking about this for weeks, but it is a truth that cannot be overemphasized. There are so many scriptures that point to this fact. We looked at several of them in our series on Philippians. Let me give you a few more to chew on from earlier in Romans. **Romans 7:22-23 NLT**

22 I love God's law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

Romans 8:5-6 NLT

5 Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. 6 So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

Wrong thinking leads to disastrous living. When God brings us to life by his Spirit, then he begins the spiritual work of changing our minds. This is something that the Holy Spirit himself does with us and within us as we follow Christ. This is why the only other place that the N.T. uses this word "RENEWING" is in **Titus 3:5 NIV**

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

The renewing of the mind is something that God's Spirit can only do within us as we COOPERATE with him. He does not just do this for us. Instead, he acts upon the environments and information sources that we choose to expose ourselves to in our daily lives. Are you faithfully storing up Christ-honoring truth in your heart and mind on a daily basis, or are you just filling up on fleshly "junk food?" The only way you will be transformed in your outward life is by focusing on the One who alone is worthy of our worship. **2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV**

18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

You become what you behold! If you are gazing at the Lord throughout the day, then you will find that you are becoming more like him in every way as the days pass by. God wants you to focus on him. He wants you to consider his nature and character and beauty. This is why David said in **Psalm 27**: "One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple!" He also wrote, "As for me I shall behold thy face in righteousness. I will be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!" Oh, that we would have the passion of David to know and behold God in this consistent way. If we did, then we would experience the genuine miracle of transformation, because we have what he only longed for.

You see, the word that Paul uses here (Transformed) is used in one other place in Scripture. It is found in the gospel of Luke when Jesus took three of his disciples up on a mountain with him where he was TRANSFIGURED. To the astonishment of these three disciples, Jesus's appearance was changed from that of a simple carpenter and rabbi to that of the glorious God that he truly was. His face and clothing shined brighter than the sun, and those 3 disciples fell down on their faces to worship him. In truth, he was only manifesting what was always true of him, but they did not know the depth of that truth until that moment.

I wonder: Would you really like to see what you look like right now in the spiritual realm? Most of us would probably cringe in horror at the thought of such a thing. But if you are a redeemed child of God, then you need to know a secret. You would not be horrified at the sight of how you look in the spirit world. You would be overcome with joy! You see, you are not a wretched thing of filth and failure before God. You are pure and spotless in his sight. You are covered in the righteousness of Christ, and you are beautiful to God. Your spirit has a LIMITLESS CAPACITY for serving and pleasing God right now! You are far more than you know, and it is high time you learn it! This is what is ALREADY true of you. This is why Paul commands us to STOP being CONFORMED outwardly to the fashions and patterns of this world. We are not to be slaves to the attitudes and actions of a world gone mad. Too many Christians are living an ISH lifestyle because they have bought into an old lie: "You cannot change." I beg to differ! God specializes in changing us. He made us before we were broken, and he can restore us to his image in a way that will blow our minds. But the battle for believing this is in our minds. Fight that battle. Purify your mind with God's truth. Let God's Spirit transform you in every detail of life. Begin by memorizing and meditating on these verses and then really studying the truths that you read in Romans 1-2 this week. I want to end this message by reading Romans 12:1-2 from the Message paraphrase. I think that it sums up my talk today beautifully. **Romans 12:1-2 The Message**

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

We have so much good stuff to cover in the days ahead, but each week your growth will depend upon what you DO with what you have HEARD. Let's pray.