



Last week, Justin reminded us of the importance of remembering what God has done for us in the past. I'm wondering how many of us took the time this week to sit down and seriously look over all of our lives and say this is where we saw God work, this is what we saw God do this is what we um needed at a particular time this is where we struggled this is where I saw his help this is where there was a temptation. He helped me through it. How many of us have taken the time to reflect and reset for this new year? This year is not about resolution; it is not about offering a brief phrase. It is about taking the time to remember.

Sometimes we say, "I'll even be better. But this is a complete reset of our thinking about how we live, how we act, what we do, and what we say. It's time for us to honestly evaluate our lives, considering what the word of God says about how we are to live.

I had the opportunity years ago to read a book entitled *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon. I wonder if anybody has ever read that book before.

It's an incredible book; it's a challenging book. For some reason, I started listening to it again this week. I think it was God's timing, as we talk about resetting our lives. I began listening to it, recalling some details and what God did through this book. You must understand that this book was written back in 1896 by a man named Charles Sheldon.

I know some of you are thinking, "How can a book over 100 years old be so practical for us today?" Still, I think sometimes we even say that about the Bible: how can the Bible, written over 2000 years ago, be practical for us today, yet it provides an incredible lifestyle and purpose for our lives once we read the word of God. The same is true of this challenging book by Charles Sheldon, which calls believers to live out their faith in everyday life by asking a simple question: What would Jesus do?

In His Steps (1896) by Charles M. Sheldon is a Christian novel written to challenge believers to live out their faith in everyday life by asking a single, searching question: "What would Jesus do?"

Please understand this morning, it is not about who we are, the way we look, the way we dress, the way we smile, the way we frown, or even the way we act.

Today, January 4, 2026, it is not about who we are but about who we are becoming.



Renew January 4, 2026, The Foundation Church Norwalk, OH 44857

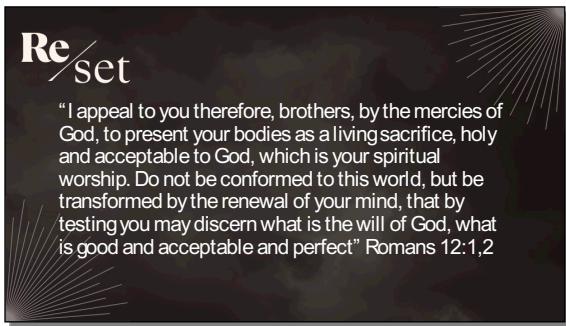
That is the title of this sermon, Renew: who we are becoming. There needs to be a change in each of us. We dare not stay the same as we were in 2025. Yes, we learned some valuable lessons about life, love, laughter, and living. But even at my age, there are so many more lessons to learn about who God wants us to become. What does it look like?

Today, I would like to challenge myself and you into a state of Renewal. Renewal is the process of restoring something to a new, fresh, or compelling state.

Today, let's pretend you're there and say it's time to renew myself and reflect on where I am physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Where would you start? What would be the first step? Physically, we may say we need to exercise and eat differently. Emotionally, we may need to find time to relax and recharge.

And spiritually, well, that is where I want us to start. Since this is a church, Christ's body, it is a great way to begin. The spiritual aspect of our lives is where we spend the least amount of time rebuilding and renewing. So let me give you an idea where to start today, and let's see where it takes us. Shall we?

Turn to Romans 12:1,2. This is where we will start today.



Let's Pray.

Heavenly Father, in view of Your great mercy, we come before You with grateful hearts. You have given us life, forgiveness, and hope through Jesus Christ, and we offer ourselves back to You. Take our bodies, our minds, our time, and our desires, and make them a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to You, our faithful and proper worship.

Lord, guard us from being shaped by the patterns of this world. Where we have allowed culture, comfort, or compromise to mold our thinking, renew us. Transform us by the renewing of our minds through Your Word and Your Spirit, so that we may see clearly what is good, pleasing, and perfect in Your will.

Teach us to live differently set apart, obedient, and faithful. Let our lives reflect Your mercy in the way we think, speak, and act. Empower us to walk in discernment, humility, and courage as we follow You. We surrender ourselves again today, trusting that Your will is always good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Before we get into our text, I think we need to ask this question Why Is Romans 12:1-2 So Important. The answer is this plain and simple. **Context matters.**

Paul has spent 11 chapters explaining what God has done—sin, grace, justification, adoption, the Spirit, and mercy.

In Romans 12, he pivots from belief to behavior, from doctrine to devotion.

Romans 12:1-2 is a turning-point passage in the book of Romans and one of the clearest summaries of what Christian discipleship looks like in everyday life. Here's how you might highlight its importance and relevance.

"In view of God's mercies..."

Everything that follows is a response, not a requirement.

Christian living is not about earning God's favor but responding to God's mercy.

Mercy is one of God's most repeated attributes in Scripture.

It spans His Covenant faithfulness in the OT. And his promise of Salvation and transformation in the NT

God's mercy is: Enduring (Psalm 136)

Psa 136:1-26 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. (2) Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. (3) Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; (26) Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Lamentations 3: 22-25 says this

Lam 3:22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

Lam 3:23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lam 3:24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Lam 3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

And, of course, the passage we just read refers to Holy living and to His mercy as the basis for living holy. (Romans 12:1)

God invites us to step into the new year with renewed minds, renewed purpose, and renewed obedience—not just changing what we do, but who we are becoming.

Not "What will you do this year?" but "Who are you becoming?"

Romans 12 marks a turning point in Paul's letter:

Romans 1–11: What God has done for us

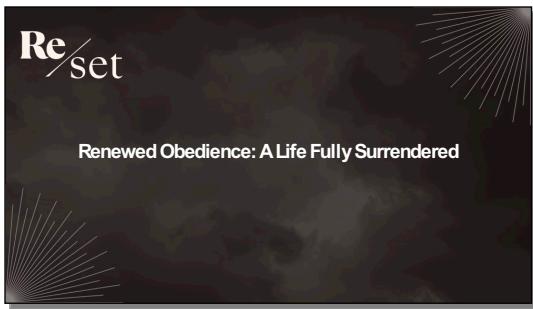
Romans 12–16: How we live in response

Renewal is not self-improvement; it is Spirit-led transformation.

Here is a Main idea for you to ponder today.



All that we will look at today and learn today is about responding to God and his mercy. If it wasn't for his mercy we would not be here today. So, in responding to his mercy, we see first that it is Renewed Obedience A Life fully surrendered. Go back and look at verse 1



Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice..."

In some translations the word appeal is I beseech, or I urge

One scholar put it this way. “The transitional phrase in view of God’s mercy (12:1) links the previous section on divine sovereignty and the present unit on Christian behavior, for on this alone hangs the “therefore” of the exhortation, “I urge you, brothers.”¹

There are three aspects of this renewed obedience

1. The Motivation: God's Mercy

Paul doesn't say, "Try harder."

He says, "In view of God's mercy..."

Obedience flows from gratitude, not guilt.

Supporting Scriptures:

Lamentations 3:22–23 – His mercies are new every morning

Ephesians 2:8–10 – Saved by grace, created for good works

2. The Call: A Living Sacrifice

Old Testament sacrifices were:

Dead One-time

Illustration:

The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. Every day we must choose to surrender again.

3. The Scope: Your Whole Life

"Bodies" ≡ your whole self.

Time Habits Relationships Words Desires

¹ Royce Gordon Gruenler, “[Romans](#),” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 950.

Application Questions:

What area of my life is still "off-limits" to God?

Am I offering God my leftovers or my whole life?

Faith Lived in Public Life

"Following Jesus does not mean a life without sacrifice, but a life surrendered to a higher purpose."

Purpose over comfort

In His Steps, the novel, shows believers wrestling with their jobs, reputations, money, and influence.

Romans 12 Connection:

"...which is your spiritual worship?" (v.1)

Worship is not confined to church; it is lived out in work, ethics, and relationships.

No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical; it must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies. Similarly, authentic Christian discipleship will include both the negative 'mortification' of our body's misdeeds (8:13) and the positive 'presentation' of its members to God.²

Which leads us further in the passage to this next aspect of the mercies of God



Romans 12:2a

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

1. The Warning: Don't Drift into Conformity

"Conformed" implies external pressure.

The world constantly shapes us through: Media

Culture Social expectations

Drift is subtle and often unnoticed.

Supporting Scriptures:

1 John 2:15–17 – Do not love the world

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 322.

1Jn 2:15 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.

1Jn 2:16 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.

1Jn 2:17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Colossians 2:8 – Beware of empty philosophy

Col 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Illustration:

Like a river, if you stop paddling, you don't stay still; you drift downstream.

2. The Promise: Transformation from the Inside Out

"Transformed" (Greek: metamorphosis)

The same word used of Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2)

Mat 17:1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

Mat 17:2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

God doesn't just adjust behavior—He reshapes thinking.

Supporting Scriptures:

2Co 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Eph 4:22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

Eph 4:23 and to be renewed in the Spirit of your minds,

Eph 4:24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

3. The Means: Renewing the Mind

Renewal happens through:

God's Word (Psalm 119:105)

Psa 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

God's Spirit (John 14:26)

Joh 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

God's people (Hebrews 10:24–25)

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Heb 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Application:

What voices are shaping my thinking?

What am I consistently feeding my mind?

Which leads to aspect three...



Romans 12:2b

"...that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

There are five aspects of this Renewed purpose.

1. God's Will Is Discovered Through Obedience

We often want to know God's will before surrendering.

Romans 12 reverses that order:

Surrender → Renewal → Discernment

Supporting Scriptures:

Proverbs 3:5–6 – He will make your paths straight

Pro 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Pro 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Psalm 37:4,5 – Delight yourself in the Lord

Psa 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psa 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.

2. God's Will Is Good, Acceptable, and Perfect

"Good" – beneficial, life-giving

"Acceptable" – pleasing to God

"Perfect" – complete, lacking nothing

Illustration:

Like assembling furniture: when you follow the manufacturer's design, everything fits. When you don't, you're left with extra pieces and incredible frustration.

3. Purpose Flows from Becoming, Not Just Doing

God is more concerned with who you are becoming than what you are accomplishing.

Right living flows from renewed being.

Supporting Scriptures:

Mic 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

4. Resistance to Cultural Pressure

"The majority of people are content to do what everyone else is doing."

Theme: Conformity vs. conviction

Sheldon critiques Christianity shaped by convenience and social norms.

Romans 12 Connection:

"Do not be conformed to this world..." (v.2)

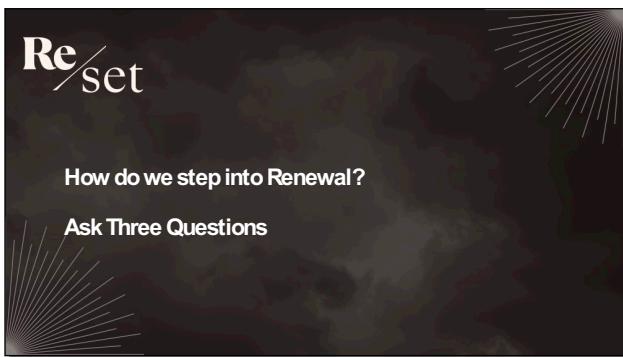
Discipleship requires resisting cultural patterns when they conflict with Christ.

5. Obedience Reveals God's Will

"When a man honestly asks what Jesus would do, and then does it, he will never lack direction."

"...that by testing you may discern what is the will of God..." (v.2)
God's will is discovered not just by knowing Scripture, but by living it out.

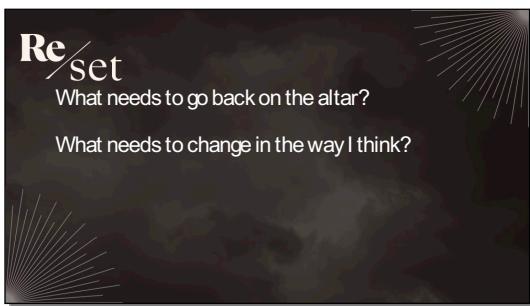
So let me ask you some questions today about Renewal.





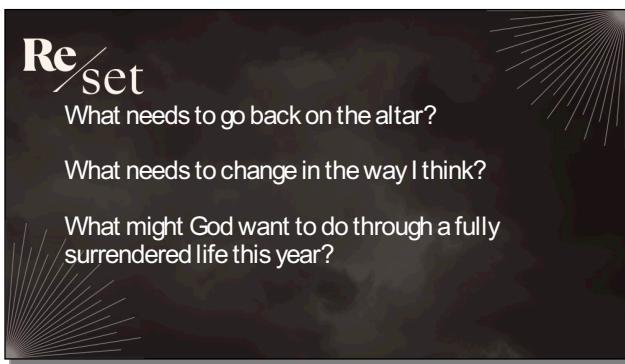
Let's be honest today with us at least. What is there in our lives that we know we have not place in the proper place to serve God better? I asked what needs to go back on the altar, maybe I should include what needs to be placed on the altar for the very first time. What part of your living is not given over to God. Do you ever why you are so frustrated with your life. Why the people around you drive you crazy? Why relationships seem to fickle and shallow. Maybe it is you. Maybe it is because you are so self-serving or so placating to others or so disingenuous that all you have are the superficial relationships. Afraid to be real with others and of course real to God. Let's not be fooled today. God knows what is going on and is it time to be real with yourself. Time to stop playing games.

Which leads to the next question...



Let me encourage you to think about it this morning? What needs to change in the way you think? Let me state the obvious. YOU AND I CANNOT CHANGE OUR THINKING BY OURSELVES, WE NEED TO SUBMIT TO SOMETHING, SOMEONE GREATER THAN OURSELVES.

Maybe today you like the way you are thinking. You like it when it goes places that involve fantasy, or hurting someone else, or thinking in ways that you know are not God honoring. There is some sort of pleasure in it. Let me be frank with you today. Sin is fun. Sin brings a temporary happiness. But sin also has a cost. You and I pay a price when we sin. It may not be right away that we feel or see the consequences of your sin, but the book of Numbers chapter 23 says, "be sure your sins will find you out,". So what needs to change in the way you are thinking???? Which leads to the third question...



Have you ever considered this question? Does it strike fear in you? You may be thinking what will I lose instead of what will I gain? What relationships will need to change? What do I need to do for this to happen?

Will I be willing to truly live for the Lord? Am I desirous of what it would look like to be surrendered to Him?

Can I ask the question- What would Jesus Do?

