

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

WEEK # 2

IGNITE!

Re-Discovering the
Christian

Passionate
Life

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer 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.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:1-5 (NIV)

It's been said that the only people who like change are babies. That is true on many levels. Change is difficult and tiring as there is a constant adaptation needed to each and every change. A part of us would love to just sit back and relax. That is one of the biggest draws of television. Rather than struggling for understanding and the shifts of relationships between people, jobs, and the world around us, we can just sit down and not think. With the remote we can sit in our own recliners and cruise the hundreds of channels we have available to us and just not think. But when we do that we begin to allow the ideas and thoughts of others to flow into and over us.

Coping with change is difficult; new routines, methods, habits, even languages reshape our lives constantly. Then we read these verses and discover that God doesn't give us a break from change as well. In fact these verses promise a greater degree of change; they promise transformation. And with it comes the idea of learning to cope with significant changes that move us from the lives of crawling on our bellies to soaring on the wings of the divine. No rest and more to learn. But the bottom line is God is the One remolding, reshaping, and recreating a new us.

What is an area of your life that God is working to transform right now? How would you describe the process you are in?

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

“Let”

It's a powerful word used in the Bible with an incredible frequency. Let, allow, permit... it is incredible how many times the scripture instructs us to “let” God do something in our lives. “Let your light so shine.” “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” “Let us keep in step with the Spirit.” These are just a few of the examples where God tells us to allow Him to do something. Our problem is the insatiable desire to control, to shape, to become like God, as Satan put it to Eve and Adam. Will you let God transform you?

Dropping our rigid ideas of what our lives are and are meant to be takes real faith and trust in the goodness of God. Accepting the promise that God does have what is best for us at the very core of everything He does, and that everything He does is good, requires us to let go of some of our dreams and plans for the plans into which He will lead us.

Do you trust God as fully as you need to?

Think of a time that you really did trust God to take care of you and He followed through. How did He work through that situation? Why would He not work through the issue He is trying to transform right now?

How could God use the change He is moving you into now, for His glory?

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.

Romans 12:2 (MSG)

Peer pressure. As a young person I heard about the dangers of it so often it became a mindless warning. “Bad company corrupts good character.” So many of the threats young people face today are not so different from what we used to face and the avenue that they enter into our lives hasn't changed all that much as well. Our friends, peers, and people we spend time with shape our lives in many ways. It would be wonderful if it all ended as a part of your High School graduation, but it doesn't. We go from warnings of, “If your friends jumped off a cliff would you too?” to the pursuit of, “Keeping up with the Joneses.” We trade in the desire to be like everybody to the need to stay current and “informed.” We exchange the truth of God for a lie as Romans 1 puts it. A lie that the people around us believe, the media reinforces, and the father of lies delights in.

1 Peter 2:9 in the KJV directs us to be a peculiar people. The idea is a people that is unique in its relationship with God, but nowadays, that is peculiar and strange. We crave the ability to fit in yet celebrate the individualist who spits in the eye of the pressure to conform. Yet the church fits into the mold of the culture much too easily these days. From divorce to cheating on our taxes, from pornography to greed, from sexual immorality to the growing lack of integrity among leaders and believers, the church doesn't look that much different from the world today. We've become well-adjusted to the world when God would prefer we were dysfunctional in the current culture.

What are two ways you have accepted the culture more than God's directives? Why did it happen to you? What would happen if you changed that acceptance?

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

One of the most common questions asked of any church leader can be summed up with, "What is God's will for my life?" What job should I take? Who should I marry? What car should I buy? Should I buy 1-ply or 2-ply? The list of questions I have heard that find their root in that question are innumerable.

What should I do? We face that issue every day and as believers we should recognize and understand the role that our beliefs influence every decision we make. Faith is not real if it doesn't affect your daily decisions. Considering that, how do we know what God really wants?

Paul writes to the Roman church, be transformed by renewing your mind. He tells the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 2:16 that we have the mind of Christ. If that's the case why don't we know the answers to all our questions?

Your mind can't be renewed if you don't change what goes into it. As one definition of insanity puts it, "If you expect a different result, when you always do what you've always done, you're insane." We need to break the mold.

Try this for the rest of the week; don't watch TV. Crazy, right? You'll miss the news, the scores, your favorite show. I didn't say you couldn't read the newspaper, a book, or such, but instead of watching TV tonight, spend half that time reading your Bible, then the other half playing a game with your family and friends. You might be surprised at what happens. You may discover that spending time with God and with the people around you has far more value than the latest episode of fictional people. I dare you to try it. You may find your life transformed and way of thinking renewed. What a concept!

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1 (NIV)

"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice."

What in the world does that mean?

It means you lift before God, you. With all your blemishes, soul bruises, and sins, you ask God to accept you. In the Old Testament a sacrifice had to be without blemish or stain or fault, the best you had. But here, we see that God will accept the less than perfect. That's you. If you don't believe me ask your spouse or parent. You are not perfect. You're really not worthy of God. Trust me, He can do better than you or me. But when we do this it pleases God. It is what He wants. Jesus said this when he said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." (Matthew 22:37,38 NIV)

A sacrifice doesn't change its mind—once given, it surrenders its life in totality. It is gone. The level of commitment is complete. That is the level of commitment that pleases God and is what God has called every believer to do. It's not easy, due to our sinful nature that always looks out for itself, no matter the cost. It is impossible to separate out a section of our lives that God is not Lord of because everything we do, everything we say, everything we see has a spiritual dimension to it that we need to filter through the God who loves us. This is our spiritual act of worship—a totally surrendered life. In John 4 Jesus says that true believers will worship in spirit and in truth. True believers are walking, breathing, living sacrifices to God in every area of their lives.

What area of your life are you still trying to possess as your own?

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

1 Corinthians 15:10 (NIV)

Why are you the way you are? To some degree you are a product of both your environment and your genetics, but really why are you the way you are?

Paul brings a new dimension into the discussion by pointing out God's grace, His unmerited favor, is the reason behind who he was. He was raised and lived as a passionate Jewish leader and teacher, adamant in his belief that the truth of God should be protected. But his life began to be changed in a few short moments on a road as he traveled to Damascus. He had a life-transforming encounter with God.

A part of us would love to have such a dramatic encounter. A piercing light, a voice from heaven and the very image of Jesus speaking to us would really transform our lives. But his encounter is the exception to the rule. Most of us discover God in the life of a loved one or friend and meet Him in a discussion with someone as we study God's word. But it should be just as real, just as transforming. One of the greatest issues we deal with in the church around the world are believers who say they have experienced God's grace, but it has had no affect. Grace changes things. Grace will change us. If it hasn't, we haven't truly encountered it.

How has God's grace changed you?

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)

These verses, as well as the rest of the chapter, have the idea repeated that once we were, not we are. God brings change. Part of this flows out of His natural creative nature, the other out of our fallen nature. God meets us where we are and takes us where we were created to be. He moves us from death to life, hopelessness to security, helplessness to empowered by His Spirit.

Take some time to write out your journey to God and the transformations He has made in you as you traveled with Him into the power of salvation and into His life.

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