

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 12:1-8 **“What New Life Looks Like”**

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(6th Sunday After Epiphany)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

ROMANS 12:1-8 "WHAT NEW LIFE LOOKS LIKE"

12:1-15:13 (New Essay), *Paranesis* = Gospel → Life

1) vv.1-2 MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING: SURRENDERED BODY, NEW MIND.

Deliberative

Live In The Tense Overlap/ Interface Of Two Contrary Regimes

a) v.1 Holy And Living And Acceptable to God.

7 Keys To God's Will Together In The Church:

7 Rights

v.1a/v.3a, We Work Out As Family What God Has First Worked In

1a I APPEAL to you, therefore, brethren (and sisters!), **4 Cultic Terms, Solemn Shift From 1:1-11:36 To 12:1-15:13**
by the compassion (mercies) of **God** 11:22, 31-32, Jewish History+Divine Enablement In Christ // 6:12-14, 13:11-14

b to *present*¹ your bodies (pl.) as a *sacrifice*,² **6:13, 19, Philo Every Good Man 75, 1st Key = Surrender (Say Yes!)**

Right Sacrifice living, *holy*³ and **acceptable** (well-pleasing) to God, **(3 Series) WORSHIP YOU OWE AS RATIONAL BEINGS**
which is your reasonable (*logicos* = rational) *worship*.⁴ 1:25, *Right-thinking*, 1 Pt. 2:2, Heb. 13:15, Speech Offering

Body (v.1)/Mind(v.2a)/Action (v.2c), Living Sacrifice = Paradox

b) v.2a Negative Command (Passive Voice).

//v.1, Battle Is For Mind/Heart/ World View

Right Enemy *This World* = Gal.1:4, Present Evil Age = Pull Of Distorted Values

2a And do not be conformed to this world (this age), **p.v. = by culture 2nd Key = Resist World's Pressure (Say No!)**

2 Esd. 7:113, Caught Between Two Powers: Sin/Evil & God/New Age

b') v.2b Positive Command (Passive Voice).

Only The Free In Christ Can Obey This Command

Right Challenge Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:10, Not Anti-Intellectual, SELF AS NEW MIND

b but be transformed by the renewal of the mind, **p.v. = by God, 1:21, 28 3rd Key = Reshaped Mind (Study! Pray!)**

Continual, God-filled Mind: Eph. 4:23, 1 Pt. 1:14, 2:5, Col. 3:10, 2 Cor. 3:18

a') v.2c Acceptable and Perfect And Good (Communal).

(3 Qualifiers) //v.1b, Body/Mind Integration

Right Goal Right Worship = Proper Behavior In Church/Society

c that you (pl.) may prove (discern) what is the will of **God**, **Process/Quest, Transformed Minds May Discern God's Will**
what is good and **acceptable** and perfect (complete). **3 Series, To Be An Offering Of Righteous Living: All Of Life!**

The Offering The New Self Is Sacrifice, We *Discern* The Particulars Within Scripture, Enacted In Gifts

2) 12:3-8 FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE MULTI-GIFTED BODY OF CHRIST.

Density Of Mental Language: *Rational, Mind, Think*

a) v.3 Grace and Faith: Proper Self-Evaluation Of God's Gifts To Each And All.

Humility

Right Thinking v.3a/v.1a, New Mind → New Community, No Pride About Giftings

3 1 For by the **grace** (*charis*) **given to me** I BID every one of you *phronein* (4x), Gift Of Apostle, 1:5-6, Teaching

2 not to think of himself (herself) more highly that he (she) ought to think, // **Also Not Less Than!**

2' but to think/ with sensible thinking. **a-b//b'-a' 4th Key = Honest Self Evaluation**

1' each according to the measure (trust/responsibility) of **faith** which God has assigned to him (her). **p.v.**

What Call/Power Tools Has God Entrusted To Me?

b) vv.4-5 The Church As One Differentiated, Organic Body Of Christ.

Gifted Unity

Right Community *Grace* = Source, *Gift* = Community Impact, Picture + Insight

4 1 For as in one body we have many members, **5th Key = Individuality (Me) & Community (We)**

2 and all the members do not have the same function, **Living/One Mind/Complex/Unified**

5 1' so we, though many, are one body in Christ **Unity Is Not Uniformity, Multiform Grace**

2' and individually members one of another. **A Radically Interdependent Reality**

One Body, Many Gifts: 1 Cor. 12:14-26, 14:26; Eph. 4:11-17, 1 Pt. 4:10

a') vv.6-8 Grace and Faith: Seven Spiritual Gifts/ Functions.

All Receive Gifts That Matter

Right Function *Be-grace-ments, Charismatic Community!* 1 Cor. 12:12-31 At Conversion

6a Having gifts (*charis-ma-ta*) that differ according to the **grace** (*charis*) **given us**, **p.v., p.w., Functions**

let us use them: **1 Pt. 4:10, "Use them" = Tools 6th Key = Use Your Gifts Rightly For The Good Of Others**

Not Offices, Mandates For The Common Good

Word Deed **7 Gifts (Totality): Spirit's Power In Us** **Effect Or Fruit: Virtue/Character** 2+5, 4+3 (Words + Deeds)

2 Noun/Gifts + 5 Acts/Services //1 Cor. 12:1-11, 28-30, Eph. 4:1-11

b ✓ if prophecy (revealed communication), in accordance to our **faith**; 1 Cor. 12:10, 14:1, 5, 39, 1 Thess. 5:19-20

7a ✓ if service (enabling others), in our serving;/ Acts 6:2, 1 Pt. 4:10

b ✓ he who teaches (truth offered), in his (her) teaching; 1 Cor. 12:28, James 3:1, Heb. 5:12

8a ✓ she who exhorts (truth applied), in his (her) exhortation; //v.1, *consoles*, 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11, 14

b ✓ he who contributes (generosity) in liberality (wholeheartedly); Eph. 4:28, Acts 2:45; 4:34-37

c ✓ she who gives aid (presides/leads), with zeal (diligence); 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:15, 17

d ✓ he who does acts of mercy (kindness), with cheerfulness (*hilarotes* = hilarity!) Tob. 1:3, 4:7, 9:6

Gift (Spirit's Arsenal) Are Not Accessories But Necessities: Living Extensions Of Christ

A Brief Treatment Of Romans 12:1-8

With 12:1-15:13 we arrive at the last essay of Romans; it falls into four sections (A. 12:1-21, B. 13:1-14, C. 14:1-15:13, D. 15:14-27). Section A has a 4:2 surface structure (1. vv.1-2, 2. vv.3-8 // 2' vv.9-18, 1' vv.19-21). Direct address (*brethren*, v.1 // *beloved*, v.19), *God* (v.1//v.29), and *good* (v.2c//v.21), are inclusions. A double center deals with the church as a gifted body (2. vv.3-8) and the actions of love (2' vv.9-21). The last three gifts of v.8 (*generosity, giving aid, mercy*) are acts of love that serve as a bridge to vv.9-21. Spiritual gifts exercised in love is the way the good is held fast and evil rejected (v.9//v.21). Gifts (empowerments) and fruit (ethics) of the Spirit go together as in 1 Cor. where a chapter on love (13) is placed between two on gifts (12,14). Links between 2//2' include *serve//service* (v.7b//v.12a), *contribute* (v.8b//v.13), and a focus on right thinking and its alternatives (v.3//v.16). Having been set right with God through divine grace and responsive trust in Christ, the church lives as an odd colony in the midst of an evil age as God's display case! Its members resist conformity and are being transformed by renewed minds to discern the details of what God's up to, i.e. *what is good and acceptable and mature* (v.2c).

The initial component (1. vv.1-2) is framed in a 4:2 inverted parallel (a. v.1, b. v.2a // b' v.2b, a' v.2c) with *God/acceptable* (v.1//v.2c) as verbal brackets. The double center includes a negative (v.2a) and positive command (v.2b), both passive (*do not be conformed... but be transformed*) indicating being acted upon by external forces. Formal address (*I appeal*, v.1a) aims at a clear purpose (*that you may prove*, v.2c). Direct address (*brethren*, v.1) signals fresh thought. On the basis of what's come before (1:1-11:36), Paul turns to how life works in God's messy experiment, the church! A transitional particle (*Gk. oun/therefore*) indicates that what follows is integral what came before. That Paul's appeal is based on *the mercies of God* is a thematic link (11:22, 31-32). So what is our response to God's consistent *mercy* in Christ? We offer ourselves as a *living sacrifice*, one of four terms (*present, sacrifice, holy, worship*) from pagan and Jewish religious vocabularies where animal sacrifice in temples was the norm. But here the offering lives; it's a continual act of the embodied self according to three characteristics (*living, holy, acceptable* [v.1b]), later paralleled to three markers of God's will (*good, acceptable, perfect* [v.2c]). The last necessary blood sacrifice was Jesus' self-offering; his followers make a continual self-offering by other means as their *reasonable/rational worship*. Two commands at the center alert hearers to the pressures in the world as it now is (*And do not be conformed to this age*, v.2a), and to the possibility of a transformation of thinking that enables them, first to see and then live differently (*but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*, v.2c). God gives a new set of lenses and a new way of thinking.

The second component (2. vv.3-8) has a 3:1 concentric pattern (a. v.3, b. vv.4-5, a' vv.6-8) with *grace, given to me (us)*, and *faith* as inclusions (v.3//vv.6-8). Two uses of *For/gar* (v.3a, 4a) signal that vv.1-2 are now expanded with reasons. The *I bid* of v.3a parallels the *I appeal* of v.1a. The offer of a *renewed mind* which— with others— *discerns God's will* requires an honest self estimate, not puffed up but sensible, in accord with the *measure of faith* or gifting God assigns. Four uses of the verb *to think* (*phronein*) are arranged in a 4:2 chiasmic pattern (a. *high thinking*, b. *think* // b' *think*, a' *sensibly think*) for emphasis by repetition and variation (v.3). Paul then turns to the unity and diversity of the human body as a metaphor for social and political structures, e.g. *the body politic*. The many are one in Christ and depend on one another (vv.4-5). The body of Christ is an organic, interdependent communion in a tough environment. It has resources (e.g. God's mercies, rational worship, renewed minds, alternative practices, God's will, grace given, apostolic leaders, honest self-evaluation, interdependent faith) including a wide array of *endowments* (*charis-ma-ta = the many effects of grace*) in which the single grace of God, when it strikes the prism of the church, separates into an spectrum both beautiful and useful, seven of which are listed in vv.6b-8, three that are *word oriented* (*prophecy, teaching, exhortation*) and four *action oriented* (*service, giving, giving aid, acts of mercy*). With each gift a modifier is added to guide its expression. The sequences is mercy, self-offering, worship, a new mind, God's will, unity, spiritual gifts. This is life!

WHAT NEW LIFE LOOKS LIKE

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

The only way not to be squeezed into the world’s conforming mold.

R O M A N S 1 2 : 2 a

You are under *pressure*. Do you feel it? Someone’s trying to squeeze you into their mold. You’re being evangelized and persuaded. And with the ubiquity of cell phones, tablets and TVs, it’s unrelenting unless you choose to unplug and go off the grid for a day, which may be the new form of fasting and sabbath keeping in order to turn your undivided attention upward to God, inward to your own thoughts, and outward to face to face relationships with people instead of flickering screens and cascading images.

And because it’s non-stop, we do not realize the subtle distortion of values that’s going on inside us. We’re swimming in a world of sophisticated media that’s bombarding our minds and stroking our feelings for the sake of getting into our pockets for a product or a service or a candidate or a donation. We’re being reprogrammed to see everything and everyone as a commodity. It’s now customized based on your browsing history and purchasing patterns just for you. Individualized mass advertising is now upon us, based on demographics and psycho-graphics, even facial recognition. Kevin Miller helped me understand what we’re facing and why we must find ways to set up principled resistance to the engulfing pressures. He writes:

“The average American watches TV nearly 30 hours per week; this does not include other types of *screen time*. That's 65 nonstop days of television a year. By the time high school ends, students view 360,000 commercials, the average 65-year-old 2,000,000. Each was created by smart people who pack their ads with powerful images,

catchy music, clever humor, and memorable slogans. Most have a primary theme, that this product will give you true happiness and deep satisfaction.”

Miller then makes an interesting move, “Based on the worldview presented by TV commercials, here's how I'd rewrite the Beatitudes of Jesus:

“Blessed are those who fly to luxury vacation spots on tropical islands, where they lie in chaise lounge chairs, the only two people on an enormous white beach; for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who drink much beer, for they shall be surrounded by carefree, football-watching buddies and highly attractive, socially-gifted women in the first half of life; and they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who have the latest smart phone, for they shall gaze on a screen swirling with color and shall get all the information they need just when they need it; and they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those with outstanding kids. Verily I say to you, highly blessed are those with a golden Labrador retriever bounding along in slow motion and playing with the kids in the park, for they shall be the envy of real families everywhere; and they shall be satisfied.”¹

Do you see what's going on? You're being lied to in the most sophisticated fashion. With the digital revolution in full force, we're engulfed in propaganda that twists the truth all out of shape. So the question is, Amidst all the clutter and distraction, how will you clear space to know the God of Jesus, to know your own heart and mind, to know what God's hidden in you that the church and the world need. I love the idea of Frederick Beuchner, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”² What do you see that begs for loving attention? What

¹ PreachingToday.com search under Romans 12:1-8.

² www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/19982.Frederick_Buechner.

disturbs you? Where do you sense the presence of Jesus? These are clues to your calling and to the spiritual gifts that accompany it. The new evil is constant distraction, a tsunami of trivia that gives us all a case of ADHD and threatens to make people on screens more real than the one across the dinner table or next to us at work. A text is not a conversation but a data dump, and sometimes useful. But when people send me long texts and emails, I reply, “Such matters are too important to be dealt with any way except face to face with leisure to listen. Call me for an appointment.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Now though the modes differ, the issue is not new. The Apostle Paul alerted his audience to it two thousand years ago. He named the pressures and helped them set up principled resistance. Ever since Eden and the propaganda of the talking snake, there’s been a move to distract us from the important to the trivial, from a life centered in God to life centered in promises that other things can satisfy the deep cravings of the heart because God is holding out on us. “Listen to me,” the sneaky snake whispers, “I care about you more than the Boss. You’ll enjoy it, and you’ll get to be an adult, a wise one. So take a bite.”

After eleven chapters of careful reasoning about how Jesus is God’s new offer of a relationship based on trust because none of us, not even the most serious Jews like Paul himself, can keep the law because of Sin’s pervasive disability, the Apostle begins his closing argument with a formal appeal based on God’s mercy, “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, *by the mercies of God...*” Someone clever put it this way, “Wrath is when I get what I deserve; mercy is when I don’t get what I deserve, and grace is when I get what I don’t deserve.” And the twin virtues of mercy and grace are what God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is all about, what he came and lived and died and rose for, to show us the deepest heart of our Maker. The Holy One is merciful to all who follow the clues of grace to the point of trust. He wants us to come home, to leave our wandering ways and destructive paths. And when we turn towards home from however far away, mercy walks with us all the way back.

Now you have to understand that bloody animal sacrifice in impressive temples with priestly rituals was the norm in that world, the Jewish temple in

Jerusalem and in all the pagan temples across the Empire. Blood everywhere, rivers of it flowing in troughs and sluices; think the Greenwood packing plant where 3500 pigs die a day. It's what ancient religion was all about.³ Something living must die for us to have a chance of being right with the deity (singular) or the deities (plural), and the insight carries a measure of truth because the New Testament invokes sacrificial language to understand what the cross of Jesus means. Sin is just that serious; it deserves a death penalty for the ultimate crime of high treason against God.

A debate was also emerging in that world about how right human actions was what God, or the gods and goddesses, were really after, not the blood of bulls and goats, so that an ethical life was the true meaning of sacrifice, and with that Paul agreed. The self-offering of Jesus was the last necessary bloody sacrifice, as the church later said, "sufficient for the sins of the whole world."⁴

So if he offered himself up for us, what's our response to that great mercy? Well, we offer ourselves back as paradoxes, as *living sacrifices*, which – when you think of it– is a contradiction in terms. Animal sacrifices die with slit throats and spurting carotid blood caught in basins; be we are to live with and for Jesus Christ as surrendered disciples. And here Paul uses four technical terms from the vocabulary of ancient religion to make the comparison stick: *present*, *sacrifice*, *holy*, and *worship*. Their flesh, our bodies. Their life surrendered, my life presented. This is *right-thinking* or *rational* worship; this is what we rightly owe God, to count Jesus trustworthy so his mercy changes us into a new kind of human being, now re-centered in God. I live to God's glory.

And then, from the foundation of our surrender to God's mercies and

³ Michael Bird, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 413. For Jewish examples, see Sirach 3:1-5, Ps 51:17; for pagan Isocrates, *Nicoles*, 20.

⁴ The U.M. Articles of Religion, Article XX: Of the One Oblation of Christ, Finished upon the Cross, "The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone..." (*Discipline 2012*: 66).

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Jesus' self-offering, Paul turns to the operational side, verse 2: "And do not *be conformed* to this world, but *be transformed* by the renewal of the mind," and both verbs are in the passive voice, indicating action that is upon us. We are caught— as it were— in a great, invisible tug of war, the surrounding culture beckoning us to *be conformed* to its alien agenda, and the Holy Spirit offering us the opportunity to *be transformed* in the direction of Jesus Christ, to become more and more like him in our habitual responses. The world, the fallen, infected, religious and social culture pressures us into its agenda, but God invites us to a new way of thinking and living. So if we are merely a mirror image or reflection of the values of current American consumer culture, its fads and fashions, something's *bad wrong*. We're not putting up enough resistance. The river is pulling us downstream, and we don't even know it.

Several years ago Lori and I were in Seattle and visited some of the fisheries on the Columbia River. There I saw in person what I'd seen only on the screen. Salmon swimming up creeks and rivers to the spawning ground. And what a struggle! Dead fish go with the flow, but live salmon swim against the stream, even up artificial ladders to reach their destination, and to watch them leap upstream over white water is a thrill. As I marveled at the tenacity of nature, an insight began to form, not yet an epiphany but a sense there was something I needed to see, so I kept at it. It then came clear. This is what Paul meant! Christians swim against the flow, which is why following Jesus is a genuine struggle requiring constant effort. Dallas Willard writes:

"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not just have to do with forgiveness of sins alone."⁵

It's when you quit resisting, when you cease effort, when you decide it's too hard to go against the flow of the world around you, it's then that you grow discouraged as a Christian and lose your influence as a faithful minority. You are now floating with the dead fish. It happens to individuals, churches, entire denominations, and it is the battle for the soul and future of The United

⁵ www.goodreads.com/quotes/49184.

Methodist Church we now face. Will we allow the currents of culture to have more say in our life than the upward call of Jesus Christ to love and discipline? Will we set our course by Scripture and the apostolic faith or by some less-demanding standard? In an *anything goes culture*, followers of Jesus resist the pressures of conformity, and for that we may pay an increasing price of being called bigots and haters because we dare to say, with Jesus, that some actions are not good for any people and positively incompatible for Christians.

As an example, a recent Barna study⁶ confirms what we've all observed, that dating and cohabiting are increasingly synonymous in the U.S. with 65% of adults agreeing it's good to live together before marriage and 35% disagreeing, mainly for religious reasons. About 57% of all adults either currently or previously lived with a boy or girlfriend. It's a major cultural shift in the last forty years: it's convenient, cost-saving, you get to test drive the vehicle prior to purchase, and there's an off ramp if you spy a better deal or decide you're incompatible. Most of the benefits and few of the constrictions of marriage; what a deal! People as commodities; intimacy as disposable. It's now seen as a young adult *right of passage*. Fashionable, smart. That 40% of Millennials⁷ did not grow up in two parents homes is a factor; they've never seen a marriage last and are leary of making the big move.

What's not so well publicized is that children in married homes have an 11% poverty rate and those in cohabiting households a 47% rate. There are also dramatically higher rates of drug use, depression, dropping out, and abuse. It's convenient for adults, bad for kids. It also raises the divorce rate for those who eventually do marry by 40 to 60%, and it's a logical correlation. If you practice non-commitment, it becomes a character trait hard to overcome.⁸ It weakens

⁶ www.barna.com/research/trends-redefining-romance-today/

⁷ Those born between 1984-2002.

⁸ For support, see Scott M. Stanley, Galena Kline Roberts, Howard J. Markman, "Sliding Verses Deciding: Inertia and the Premarital Cohabitation Effect," *Family Relations* 55 [October 2006]: 499-509); and, from the UK, a major study by John Hayward & Guy Brandon, "Cohabitation in the 21st Century,"

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sticking power. And so the world is pressuring the church to conform to the pattern of *slide rather than decide*. The church is not prudish; we know who made the nerve endings and gave us the desire to be loved by one person. But the current trend is bad for people, and the sociology backs our moral position. So let's quit being conformed to the world's stinking thinking. It's a disaster.

This dynamic of the call to resist the pressures of culture explains why your life is a struggle, why it resembles a battlefield. To change metaphors, you live at the collision of a warm and a cold front, and that— I am told— is precisely where violent storms erupt. It's where the kingdoms clash, and the primary conflict is not where you imagine. It's not so much *out there as in here*; the battle is for your mind and your thoughts, your mental habits and world view, how you see life and what it means.⁹ And to live differently you need to think differently, and to think differently you must see differently, and to see differently God must open your eyes and illumine your mind, and that he does as we *learn to discern*— a very important phrase— what his will is here at ground level, or as Paul says, *what is good and acceptable and oriented to the right end and thus mature or perfect*. The promise is that living sacrifices who say No to the pressures of culture and Yes to God transforming their minds have a change to come to an agreement on what God wants, to actually know and do the will of God, and that is both deeply good and highly costly.¹⁰

God's shows and reveals his will, his good purposes, not to the indifferent

www.jubilee-centre.org/cohabitation-21st-century; also Sarah Womack, "Cohabiting couples are 'breaking up quicker,'" Telegraph.co.uk, 11/7/06; and on the benefits, S. Michael Craven, "In Defense of Marriage: The Unique Benefits of Traditional Marriage," www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/in-defense-of-marriage-the-unique-benefits-of-traditional-marriage-11580289.

⁹ For a simple introduction to world view and its importance, see Gregory Koukl, *The Story Of Reality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

¹⁰ On this discipline, see Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2012); Larry Warner, *Discernment: God's Will & Living Jesus: Christian Discernment as a Way of Life* (Barefoot Publishing, 2016).

but to the community of the committed,¹¹ those *living sacrifices* who together set up principled resistance to the lies and deceptions and enticing lures of a fallen culture. And if you hunger for a full, challenging, dramatic life at the edge of adventure with real purpose in the company of the risen Jesus and his other friends, this is the path, and once you take it, another is in control. Look at the difference it made in the lives of the twelve. Fishing and collecting taxes gave way to *life on the road with Jesus*, and which do you think was deeper and richer and scarier and more meaningful? Each night as they curled up on the floor of small home or out under the stars with their cloak as a blanket, they must have wondered, “What in the world is going on with him and us? It’s like living in a parallel universe with no map.”

It was the finest education and formation ever offered, lecture and lab, watching Jesus preach kingdom and then demonstrating what it looks like in multiple healings and human restorations of all sorts, customized for each because no two were the same, and when Jesus looked some poor, needy, broken person in the eyes, they knew— at least for that moment— they were his only concern. The day they met him was the day their scripts began to be rewritten, that day they began to be de-toxed from the old world and introduced to the new world of God’s kingdom, the day their transformation began.

Life with Jesus is good but not safe because he’s not tame but wild in his devotion to the Father’s will as energized by the Holy Spirit’s unlimited power. Eyes opened, ears unstopped, demons sent packing, pig-headed leaders publicly embarrassed, sins roll off the guilty with a thud, the dead are called back to life, bread and wine multiplied, the sea becomes his walking path and a borrowed tomb a resting place for a Sunday morning surprise. Jesus makes life good again, and we are his contemporary students. Paul believed and taught that surrendered, worshiping disciples who resist the conforming pressures of the culture and allow God to reprogram their thinking have the chance to be the most delightful and dangerous people alive because God’s will can be shown to

¹¹ John 7:17, “If anyone's will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” Commitment, a prior willingness to obey, is a prerequisite for revelation.

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them because they have a prior commitment to do it! Churches that take this as their model will be given new life and fresh strength; those who do church as usual wither and die.

This week I spoke to a colleague who'd just had a conversation with several United Methodist leaders in New Jersey where—in the last fifteen years—twenty-five percent of their churches have closed. Now the reasons are many, but the core issue is this: when church folk let the culture and its obsessions shape our thinking and living more than the risen Jesus and his availability, why should the world not ignore us since we're no different than they are, except that we carve out Sunday mornings for rituals and old music? Surrender, worship, resist, think new thoughts and seek God's will together. It's the path to life and to a well of mercy and grace you cannot exhaust.

This is what new life looks like, and I'm going to keep preaching it till it shows up again. The tides have gone out, but I'm told they're coming back in. But revival is not a formula or a technique or a human plan, valid as some of these may be. Revival or Visitation is a surprising up-welling of hunger for God's immediacy, prepared for in extended prayer and received as a precious gift to be tended. I saw it in the *Jesus Movement* of the early 70s and in the earlier years of the charismatic movement, but that was over four decades ago, and I confess to feeling something like an alumni remembering with nostalgia how great our team *used to be*. Our anthem has become the great Bruce Springsteen's *Glory Days*, especially the last stanza:

“Now I think I'm going down to the well tonight
and I'm going drink till I get my fill
And I hope when I get old I don't sit around thinking about it
but I probably will
Yeah, just sitting back trying to recapture
a little of the glory of, well time slips away
and leaves you with nothing mister but
boring stories of glory days

“Glory days well they'll pass you by
Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye

Glory days, glory days”¹²

And if it returns, the glory days I mean, the felt presence of the Savior showing up in changed lives and in signs and wonders, it’s not for our curiosity or entertainment; it’s for our reformation as a people who know the One, Holy, Living, Merciful Triune God who showed us his face, opened his heart and veins in Jesus Christ to cut a new trail for us to come home and to be a different kind of people who know and share the Savior with lost and dying world.

One thing I respect about my teacher Paul besides his careful arguments, is that he never leave us hanging in mid-air. And it is in the second paragraph, verses 3 through 8, that he offers insights as to what the new life looks like, and the first thing he speaks to is an accurate self-assessment.

Now the Roman culture was one of honor and shame, and so every day, everyone was acting to increase and protect their store of family honor, which was in limited supply. If I have more, it’s only because you have less, a true *zero sum* game. We count net worth by money and wealth; they counted net worth by the social currency of honor and reputation. Lots of boasting, lots of unfavorable comparisons, sensitive to every single slight. So this is the social reality against which Paul calls for his hearers *not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think* but to *think sensibly*, not based on the honor scale, the opinions others have of them, but on the basis of *the measure of faith* or *gifting* God has given them. He wants them to de-tox from the opinions of others and instead focus on God’s steady work in their lives.

Now if Paul was speaking to our culture where so many feel they don’t and can’t measure up and thus have chronic low self-esteem, he’d offer the flip side that they are *not to think of themselves more lowly than they ought to think* but also *think sensibly about themselves* based on God’s love and the very real gifts they have for the good of others. For every one person to whom I have to say, “If everything must revolve around you, you may be a narcissist, and I know you must be hard to live with,” there are ten to whom I say, “You are not

¹² www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQpW9XRiyM.

a throw away person. You matter to Christ, and you matter to us,” and for many that’s something they’ve not heard in a long time, maybe never, and when the Spirit sinks it into their hearts, good happens. Life bruises everyone, but it damages some so deeply you have to hold a mirror before them and say, “You see that face? The person it belongs to matters ultimately to Jesus Christ, and I get to be his minority report in your life.”

Paul’s second move, having giving a standard for proper self-regard, instead of the inflated ancient version or depleted modern version, is a call to community. I’m not sure that to do with folk who show up late and rush out of worship and who I never see at any fellowship meals or small groups where they have to interact with others. Some may be introverts, and that’s OK, but something’s missing, and that something is relationships, being knit together at a heart level with other Jesus followers. It’s independence; it’s isolation; it’s the dark side of American individualism. In his book on the church, aptly titled *The Body*, Chuck Colson put his finger on the issue:

“Many Christians,” he writes, “have been infected with the most virulent virus of modern American life, what sociologist Robert Bellah calls *radical individualism*. They concentrate on personal obedience to Christ as if all that matters is *Jesus and me*, but in doing so miss the point. Christianity is not a solitary belief system. Any genuine resurgence of Christianity, as history demonstrates, depends on a reawakening and renewal of that which is the essence of the faith—that is, the people of God, the new society, the body of Christ, which is made manifest in the world— the church.”¹³

Now the effectiveness of the image of the body for social and political groups is that we all have one, a body I mean, and we all know intuitively how complex and coordinated and diverse they are. Many parts, one body; many functions, one living integrated reality. So we speak of *the body politic*, and Paul often speaks of the church as *the body of Christ*, and just as you express yourself through your body, the risen Jesus express himself through his, and

¹³ Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1992), 32.

that's us! Not that he does not have an existence independent of us, which he does, but that he delights to draw us to himself and express his purposes through us, to love the world through us. We belong to him, and we belong to one another. It's never just *me and Jesus*; we have a personal relationship with him, but it's never merely private. Christian faith is a team sport as it was from the beginning; the first thing Jesus did after his baptism and wilderness testing was to call and form a community around himself. They didn't always like each other or get along, and neither will we, but the purpose was for them to discover that what they had in common with him was greater than anything else. We need him, and we need each other, and when you're his, you're my family!

So how does the risen Jesus, freed from the limits of space and time and sitting at the Father's right hand, interact with us if we are his body? You have a nervous system which takes the firings of your brain and propagates them electrically through the whole of your body to enable purpose and movement. You need to move your hand, and it moves. You are startled and look up. You feel a hunger craving and are soon standing before an open refrigerator door. How amazing is that? It happens all the time without much thought. But when a person has a brain injury, they realize for the first time how natural it was because it's now so unnatural and frustrating. Thinking may remain clear, but speech is not working. And when they go to move their arm, it no longer obeys.

So how does the Christian nervous system work? How does the risen Jesus send his energies and capacities through us? Answer: through the person of the Holy Spirit given to us and dwelling within each. God the Father sent God the Son as Jesus in the flesh to communicate with us face to face, and now that Jesus is risen and ascended, he sends the Holy Spirit— his alter ego— to communicate with and through his extended body. God the Holy Spirit continually energizes and directs the body of Christ. What an amazing idea is that! But even more when experienced! When you sense God working in you for the good of others, something comes alive. Pastor KirbyJohn Caldwell put it this way, "There are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born and the moment you realize why you were born."

The risen Jesus works through you, and his primary means is giving one or more capacities known as *spiritual gifts* or *grace gifts* or *gifts of the Holy*

Spirit, little packets of divine energy that make things happen. And they are not to be admired so much as used, a put to work as tools to get kingdom work done. As in verse 6, “Having gifts of grace that differ according to the grace given us, *let us use them....*” You have a shed full of tools, and so does God.

There are time in counseling when I know something about the person that they did not tell me; an insight comes. At other times I sense that my words carry an authority beyond my own. This is the spiritual gift of prophecy, not foretelling the future but speaking a true and timely word as energized by the Holy Spirit, and when it happens, the lights come on. Illumination arrives through me, but it did not originate in me. There are other people who gravitate to serving, not because they are servile in orientation, but because it brings them a sense of joy. That’s also a gift of the Spirit. And if when someone is teaching you are learning and getting it, the gift of teaching is in operation. And if the need is not information but motivation, God send someone with the gift of exhortation to get you moving. And some of Christ’s disciples just love to give; the question for them is not how much do I give but how much do I keep. And when they do it with joy, the very abundance of Jesus Christ is in our midst. Same with those with a spiritual knack for leadership; their presence draws cooperation and energy out of others to complete a task. And then there are those who have a heart full of mercy; they feel for others and know what to do to bring consolation and to end isolation. Thank God for the gift of mercy. And these are just a sample of seven; there are others as well, some of them as exotic as praying in the language of angels and praying for the sick with real effects. And it’s not just for some but for all. On this team all get to play. So what do you see that needs to be done? What concerns you? And where does love and joy flow through you? What kind of people and circumstances are you drawn to? All these are clues to your spiritual job description and which gifts of the Spirit are assigned to you. Take it seriously.

CONCLUSION

Surrender the whole of who you are and are not to the living Jesus Christ today. Hand him the keys and change seats. Then let me know what’s going on as he messes with you. My job is to coach you in the process of transformation. How do I know that? Because it’s precisely what Paul did in the passage before us.
