

“A Life Pleasing to God”

Romans 12:1-2

Jim Alexander

Well, as the children are being dismissed to my left, I invite you to take your Bibles, please, and turn with me to Romans chapter 12. This morning we're going to be looking at just two verses from Romans 12, the first two verses. And as you're turning, I like to, encourage you, if you're a visitor here, if you don't have a Bible of your own, the pew Bible there in front of you, you can pick it up and you can follow along with us. And we'd also like to offer that pew Bible to you as our gift to you at the end of this year, that you might begin to hear with God's Word in your hand. You know every time. If this year we get to this moment, I think we've kind of grown accustomed, haven't we, to seeing those year in review highlights that are on the news where they talk about celebrities or athletes or about any number of various events that took place in the last year that might have shaped our lives. I think we also anticipate finding on the bookshelves the latest, of those self-help books that the authors want to put out for us so we can learn how to enjoy our life better than we've ever enjoyed before, or be more successful, more prosperous. I guess it's kind of normal for us to, at the end of a year, reflect back on what took place in the previous 365 days, but also to look ahead, maybe even prayerfully looking ahead to see what God might have in store for us in the year that lies before us.

For me, this process of introspection mixed with anticipation has become a time in which God many times identifies in me what I like to call a sanctification theme for the year. Sanctification theme is just something that God is personally showing me that he wants to work on in my life. As we begin a new year and each year I, I prayerfully try to discern, Lord, what theme is that for this year, as I've been discerning and praying, God repeatedly has taken me back to these two verses, Romans 12: 1-2 and the theme that he has shown me is... ***How do I live a life that's pleasing to God?***

Would you follow along with me as I read aloud Romans 12: 1-2?

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. 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.

This is God's holy and inspired word and now by his grace and mercy may it now be preached for you. Please be seated.

The backdrop to what Paul is saying in these opening verses - He hints at his use of one single word, and that word *Therefore*. Therefore, is one of those words that is deliberately always going to connect a thought that you're about to get with the previous thought that came before it. But here Paul uses it in a much broader sense. He's not

only trying to connect one thought to one thought, he's actually about to try to help us connect what he's giving us in Romans 12 : 1-2 with everything he's already taught us in Romans 1 through Romans 11. Well, in those chapters, Paul has unpacked many of the great doctrines of the faith. He's helped us understand the problem of sin, the need for salvation. And then what does it look like to actually be being sanctified as we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ? Well, now, in light of everything that he has just taught us, he wants us to begin doing the practical application. What does it mean to know all of this? About what God has done for us? How does it make a difference in how we should now live before him?

So literally, Paul begins by pleading with the believers that he knows both the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers in this area, as well as pleading with us whether he is reaching out to the first century believers or the 21st century believers. God's word is timeless. So, as we read God's Word together and study it, we are looking at something that is right now intended for us. Literally, Paul again reaches out and he wants us to make sure that we understand we are called and this a high calling. He says I appeal to you. I beg of you, brothers, *therefore, by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice.*

Well, that challenge is well-nigh impossible if we were to try to do it on our own. And that's why Paul wisely has started the verse by pointing us first to the mercies of God. See, the mercies of God is what God has done for us, apart from what God has done for us. We have no hope of ever living a life that could be pleasing to him. So Paul helps us understand the right foundation as well as the right motivation for living a life pleasing to God. He sent us our thinking on God's mercy. Well, God's mercies, according to Paul, are what God has done for us out of his loving kindness. He has taken undeserving sinners in rebellion against him and he has showered on them justification from guilt and the penalty of sin.

He has adopted us and made us his own. He has brought us into his forever family and made us children of God. He also has poured out on us His Holy Spirit living within us. The very thing that we lack most. Holiness is the person of the Trinity that indwells us, so that we might increasingly be being made holy as we surrendered to him. He assures us of our right standing with him only through the redeeming work of His Son, and he gives us confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In other words, we will come fully into his glory for all who have faith in Jesus Christ. God has shown mercy to undeserving sinners in order to put his redeeming love on center stage.

But why is this such a big deal? Why the mercies of God? The theme of Paul's letter, even now, as he's calling us to die to ourselves and step out in obedience and live for Jesus Christ alone? Well, I believe Paul makes such a big deal of God's mercy because he knows looking at the mercies of God is the only thing that can become an incentive to holy living. If we try to do what's right in our own power will fail. But as we look to the mercies of God, what God has already done for us, first, then we know we can live

according to God's standard. Paul will never speak too much of God's mercy or God's grace. Mercy is what calls us to obey out of gratitude rather than fear.

If fear of God's other shoe dropping on us is the only thing that motivates us to obedience. Then we will find ourselves quickly running out of gas. We will have no steam to continue in the walk that we think is the Christian life. Same with works, performance, obedience. If we obey in order to get more from God or if we think by doing what God tells me, he'll bless me more we will quickly fall flat on our faces. We can even get to that point where beyond just being out of resources, exhausted, worn out, threadbare, and indifferent to what God really wants to do in our lives, we will become deluded thinking that something is true when it absolutely is not.

Now, maybe it's because Pam's dad has been living with us now for some four years. Dad loves to watch those old black and white westerns. And you know the scene, don't you? Here's this guy in the middle of this seemingly godforsaken desert. He's walking across the desert. He has no horse. He picks up the canteen, he tries to drain a drip out, and there's no water. He's soaked in sweat. He's about to fall under the oppression of the midday heat. And there it is, suddenly on the horizon. He sees it. Palm trees are swaying. The light is glimmering off the water even as he looks. And it gives him energy. And he picks up his pace, only to find that the closer he tries to get, the farther away it is, because it's only a mirage. He believed it was something that was true and real when it wasn't there at all. Well, that's how it is with fear driven, performance based obedience to God. We can delude ourselves into believing we can actually earn God's favor, or by doing more in service to God, we will gain more from God, but obeying God with hopes of gaining his blessing. Well, only, as one author put it, take the sweetness of repentance and turn it into bitterness of soul.

Paul knew this personally. I think he might have even been recounting it, even as God inspired him to write these verses. Because as he's thinking of the mercies of God, he's thinking about all the ways that as Saul in his earlier life, he had tried to work it up and please God. But he found that all his zeal for pleasing God had been misguided.

None of what he did actually mattered in eternity. What he thought he was doing to promote godliness was actually attacking Jesus Christ and those who followed him. but then Jesus interrupted Paul's life. He intercepted him on the road to Damascus. Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me? And receiving Jesus Christ into his life, he understood what the mercies of God could do to motivate him to live a godly life.

Well, I think we also need to see God's mercy and his grace for what they are. If we're going to have the right foundation and motivation for living a Christian life as God intends. So what does Paul give us as guideposts here in these two verses? He gives us, I believe, two key points to help us understand what we need in order to live godly lives pleasing to him if he gives us that first one in the opening verse where he says, I urgently appeal to you, brothers, on account of the unfathomable mercies of God that

you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Well, seeing God's mercies as the foundation for Christian living, Paul calls us to present our bodies not as a dead sacrifice, but one that's living. He wants us to understand that this is the foundation for how we live, not in something we look back at as if it was already one and done. We see Paul also looking to at the mercies of God as our motivation for Christian living. And he's gone back to language which his first century audience really readily understood. Paul goes back to the language of the temple. He talks about sacrifices, but yet to the first century Jew and Gentile, even those who are believers, the only thing they knew about sacrifices is in order to atone for sin or appease some God. If you weren't worshiping the one true living God, you had to bring an animal that was going to be killed and dead for that sacrifice to be accepted.

So Paul is trying to help us see here that he means a little something more than just what the original first century audience would have thought of. Paul actually wants us to understand he is not, in this terminology, calling us to become our own, offering for sin, for only Jesus can do that for us. The entire book of Hebrews helps us understand that only Jesus can be both the great High Priest and the sacrifice that's sufficient for paying for sin. So if this is not what Paul drives out, what does he have in mind? What does he have in mind? As he says, present your bodies a living sacrifice? Well, there are different types of offerings throughout the Old Testament system. Many times you would bring either, a bull or a goat or a dove, depending on what the need was at the time. Some offerings you actually the person bringing the offering would not only offer the animal, but to him. He and his family would then partake of that animal as part of a meal after the sacrifice had been made. But the offering I think, that Paul has in mind here is a unique one is called the whole burnt offering. He would bring a bull and offer it to the Lord, and every bit of the bull would be consumed in the offering. None of it would be eaten. There would be no meal, no feast, no sharing afterwards. But by this offering, I believe Paul wants us to see. He's calling us to give everything that we are and everything that we have entirely to God.

He wants us to bring the best that we have and give it to Jesus Christ. He wants nothing held back. Leftovers will never do. Only the best of what we can bring, and only everything that we can possibly bring, is what Paul is calling us to give. So to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God means to place our bodies completely at his disposal actively.

We're willing to obey no matter what he asks of us, and passively or thankful and everything, no matter what God chooses to do with us as we offer ourselves to him. Have you ever had that moment, that moment when you thought you understood what God was wanting you to do, what he's called you to do, only to find out the plan would become radically different?

Well, the act of offering is good. You bring it actively. You say, Lord, I want to follow you. I give you everything. But the passive offering is equally important. When God reveals what it is he is doing, are you able to be grateful and thankful? You mean, Lord, I get to do this? That's what Paul is helping us understand.

I think it's interesting that in this choice of the word bodies, Paul actually gives two implications of it. The first implication, he's talking about the physical material thing that we see every day when we get up and look in the mirror and get ready, we see our physical body. Well, our physical body is important to God. This contradicts much of the thinking of Paul's day to the first century Greco-Roman mind.

The body was bad and only the soul and the mind were good. It was broadly actually believed that cultivating the mind or soul, that could be some sort of spiritual act of worship. But anything you do with the body, since it didn't matter, didn't account to anything. Do whatever you please. You don't have to give it to any God or to God himself.

So in Paul's addressing the thinking of the original day, he's addressing the fact that there was a divorce between what people thought and what they did regarding their bodies as the ordinary practice of the day. Paul was challenging the culture of the day to realize that God wants more than what Tim Keller rightly described as a purely inward and abstract form of worship.

Living God was to be practical and complete and physical as well as spiritual. If it was to be worshiped at all. By the way, this isn't the only time that Paul addresses this issue. Our bodies are so important that the Apostle Paul tells us in first Corinthians 6, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, which is God's. What we do or don't do with our body matters because our bodies belong to God Himself. How we live, what we eat or drink or don't eat or don't drink. What we do with our minds. All of this matters to God.

But there's a second implication to this word bodies. In verse one, Paul uses this word as a seductive key. So the key is simply a figure of speech, where one part is made to represent the whole. And when Paul calls us to offer our bodies to the Lord, he's challenge us to give everything our mind, our will, our emotions, our physical bodies, our activities, every aspect of every area of life.

Paul calls us to give it to God alone. This may be why John Stott put it this way star rights are human. Depravity reveals itself through our bodies in tongues, which practice deceit and lips which spread poison in mouths which are full of cursing and gossip and bitterness, in feet which are swift to shed blood, and in eyes which look away from God, rather than to him.

But the flip side also is true. Story continues and says Christian sanctity also shows itself in the days of the body as we offer the different parts of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. Our feet will walk in his paths. Our lips will speak the truth and love. Our tongues will bring healing rather than destruction. Our hands will lift up those who have fallen.

Our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved. Our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently toward God to give us what we need. This is to be our constant daily focus. Far from bringing dead and lifeless sacrifices, those sacrifices that are offered mere merely out of self-effort and filled with vainglory, we are called to offer ourselves continuously as living sacrifices, through whom springs of living water may freely flow. But where? Where are we to offer ourselves as such a sacrifice? Well, not occasionally when you go to the temple, or even as we might tend to. Sometimes I think believing that is we only go to worship when we come on Sunday morning and Sunday night. This is not an occasional thing that Paul is talking about, but he's talking about offering ourselves consistently in every area of our everyday lives, whether we are at home or at work or at school or in the neighborhood, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. No matter who it is we are seeing. We are to be offering our lives in worship to God is called a lifestyle of worship. Would it be offering our lives to God in worship when we are alone, and when we are with others? And Paul is calling us to be surrendered to God entirely. 24 – 7 living focused over the face of God, knowing that we are in his presence always, that every one of our thoughts is known to him, even as we think the every one of our actions is known to him even before we do them.

Paul is saying a living sacrifice gives it all sacrifices such as these, according to Paul, are holy and acceptable to God, and they are what he calls our spiritual or reasonable act of worship. Well, I think we know that to be holy means to be without spot or blemish. It means to be set apart from the world and set apart to God entirely. It means to be consecrated to God. This only happens when we come to him by faith in Jesus Christ. Again, going back to why does Paul begin the verse with the mercies of God? It is only the mercies of God that put us in right standing, and makes us able to do what this verse is telling us we should do.

Increasingly, though, as we yield to him, his righteousness is ours. Increasingly, as we obey him, we find that we have His Word and His life permeating ours, our thinking or speaking our actions. We continue to be able to offer ourselves entirely to him. Jesus redeeming love is what makes us acceptable, well pleasing, or in keeping with the very character of God. It hit me this week so hard. How astounding it is that God would regard and make anything well pleasing in me to him. When all my greatest efforts are selfish and tainted by sin, and at best halfhearted and ignorant of what he deserves or demands, yet God, by his mercy, makes me acceptable to him and well pleasing. He makes me more and more like his son, the son in whom he is well pleased.

Well, being a living sacrifice is a conscious, deliberate decision of the will in which we offer all of our life to God. So is our joining with Paul in saying, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, the Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* You know, I used to read that verse and I just felt so confused. It seems like Paul was saying one thing and the other thing, one thing and the other thing, like they're both right and they are. Paul is saying that when we are living sacrifices, then we truly have died to self. Life is no longer about what do I want or what do I need? Life is about how can I do the will of God the Father? Right here and right now. How can I live? Not my will, but your will be done. So when we live as a sacrifice, we die to ourselves. But that's not the end of our story.

When we die to ourselves, the Holy Spirit dwells within us. And he lives through us. So is therefore the risen Christ who is living in us, making it possible for us to love God and serve him, and love others and bless them, no matter what they do or what they say. I think this is one of the other one of these other great paradoxical truths that we find in the Christian life.

Living for ourselves is actually death. Well, dying to self is the way to fully live. I think Jim Elliot got this right. The story of Jim Elliott is amazing. He and some others went down to the Indians, an unreached tribe. trying to reach them. Trying to help them see the truth of the gospel at the cost of their very lives. But before Elliot died, he had written in his journal. ***He is no fool who gives what he cannot quit to gain what he cannot lose.*** And that's the same here, that when we lay down our lives in order that Christ's life might be lived in and through us and seen in us, then we're becoming exactly what Paul's talking about a living sacrifice.

You know, there's a challenging thing about being a living sacrifice, and that is you have to choose to do it yourself. I can't be a living sacrifice for you, and you can't be a living sacrifice for me. It's personal. We are the ones presenting the offering and the offering that we are to present is ourselves. Yeah. According to Paul, this is what is both rational and reasonable as an act of worship.

Remember the Old Testament believers brought an animal with them that they offered, knowing it was going to shed his blood. It was going to die. That was worship. It was bloody. It was gory. It was messy and it was involved. It was hands on by the worshiper and by the priest making the sacrifice. When we come to worship, it's much the same way.

Only we come offering ourselves not as a bloody, messy, gory mess, but as one that's a sinful mess, still needing the sanctifying work of God in our lives. And we come offering our very selves to him, knowing that Jesus makes us acceptable in his sight. I think that's why Paul now directs our attention to the second key point in these two verses, to the transformation of our minds.

Look again in verse two. *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.* Here Paul is challenging us to stop allowing ourselves to be conformed or pressed into the world's way of thinking and living by something that's changing us from the outside.

Yeah, rather, we are to be being transformed or continually being changed from the inside out. I like how JB Phillips translates this verse. *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within.*

Well, the world constantly bombards us with this message, doesn't it? And for the most part, I think it's this message. Life is all about me. If this makes me feel good about me, then it's fine for me to do it as long as I want to do it and it doesn't hurt me. I've hurt someone else a little, but I can do whatever I want. Life is about me. But such thinking sets a trap. It's a trap, I think, actually, in which we might easily fall prey because we are natural imitators, aren't we?

I love the fact that tomorrow I get to see my one year and one day old grandson. Third time I've seen him in his one year of life. You know what I do though with him when he's on FaceTime? Here's Papa making some silly crazy face or sound or noise. And you know what he's doing right back. He's copying me. He's imitating. I can't wait to do it face to face, because then he'll get it all. But you know, we are by nature imitators. Not just children of their parents or their grandparents, but also friends. We tend to flow along in the same stream of thinking as our peers. Teens and adults alike are in danger since we are natural imitators of others, and we do it without giving it much thought.

The culture around us can so easily sweep us into its into its flow, and suddenly we're just going down stream. Well, Paul helps us understand the only thing that's necessary for us to be going downstream. The only thing that's required for us to be pressed into the world's mold is for us to do nothing, to keep it from happening.

You know, when you just sort of back float in a river, you know, where you're going to end up downstream. But if you need to get upstream, you're going to have to flip over, and you're going to have to do the hard work of swimming hard against the current upstream impulse. Helping us understand this, He commands us to stop doing nothing other than allowing ourselves to be dragged down by the outside influences of this world and what it values.

But I like that Paul doesn't stop with the prohibition. He now continues with, if we're going to stop doing A, what are we going to replace it with? He gives us B. So, Paul continues to tell us he's instructing us and what we need so that we might be able to take a stand and make a difference in our lives, in our families, and in the lives of others around us. Having told us to stop allowing ourselves to be fashioned or shaped by the thinking of the world, Paul now says, but be being transformed by the renewing of your mind. Literally. That's how Paul wrote it. That's the literal translation of the original language here. It's a continue to that being transformed. So you being transformed isn't

just a one and done proposition. To be changed is the likeness of Jesus Christ. To be being sanctified requires that we, over and over and over again, are saying, I want the mind of Christ dwelling in me richly, not my will, but your will be done. These are activities that we choose so that the Holy Spirit can then bring us into conformity with God.

So this is both something that is active and passive. Paul is telling us the way that we combat lethargy and apathy is to deliberately reset our mindset. The way we think matters. So he tells us we have to be being transformed. I, like the Greek word for transformed is metamorphosed. Sounds a little familiar, right? Metamorphosis. We know where that one comes from. To be transformed.

Now again, I've got grandkids coming. They're going to be with us for a week. And I know my grandsons, they love these little toys called Transformers. And I know these Transformers. It looks like a rocket. And then it looks like a robot. It's all this fun stuff that they twist and turn and make. But I know it's going to be on the living room floor, and I'm going to have to be careful where I step for the next seven days.

I also know that some of you might be thinking of metamorphosis in terms of that great literary children's book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. You know, the one. He's so hungry. He's a little bit of everything. And then he cocoons himself in. And while he's in this cocoon, the metamorphosis, the transformation takes place. No longer a caterpillar, he emerges as the beautiful butterfly.

Well, I think it's very similar here in Paul's imagery. We become conformed to the world's way of thinking by failing to resist and replace what's faulty in their thinking with God's Word. That lets us be vulnerable to being pressed into the mold of godless, me centered thinking. But we can choose to let ourselves continually be being transformed from the inside out as the Holy Spirit continues his work of sanctification in our lives.

This is what a friend of mine used to refer to as an example of divine human cooperation. We have a part and God has a part. Our part is never near as much as God's part. But it's important because God gave us this part. Listen to what Paul describes it as II Corinthians 3. He says, but we all, with unveiled faces, 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. In this verse, Paul gives us both our part and God's part. Our part. We are beholding. We're beholding the glory of God. Where do we behold the glory of God? We beholding in God's Word, we behold it is. Lives are being transformed, and godliness is becoming what we see increasingly in someone else's life.

We behold the glory of God, and as we behold the glory of God, we are being transformed. See, the more we see God, the more the Holy Spirit can help himself to

our lives, and he can change us from what we were into what we are intended to be. Such transformation takes place. Paul says, as we continually renew our minds.

I'm kind of glad that Paul doesn't cave in to the pressures of giving us some sort of an exhaustive list here. Now, if you just do Abcdef and G, your mind will be renewed. Your life will be transformed. Now he wants us to experience this. He doesn't make it something manageable or more listed. Rather, he leaves it mysterious and vibrant and something that happens only in relationship.

We discover what it means to be being transformed. And by having our minds renewed. As we keep going to God's Word, as we find out personally. God, who are you? What do you want of me? How does this passage apply to me and the way that I'm living? Where am I out of line with your word? When we come to God's Word with an open mind and an open heart, and we are willing to approach His Word as a discovery, a discovery of who God is and what he wants and how we are to live.

That's when our minds get renewed. You don't get a renewed mind by just asking God to show up and make it different for you. You know what? We don't get out of patterns of sin by just saying, God, would you break the pattern? That may sound shocking to you, but you know those patterns of sin that you've persistently dug yourself into until you're a deep in a pit?

God will show up when you ask him. And when you repent. But you know you're going to have to, with God's help, do the hard work of climbing back up out of that pit. He doesn't just make it happen. And it's the same with renewing our minds. To have a renewed mind means I have to change the way that I think. Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus. He didn't exalt himself. He debased himself. Well, that's contrary to my natural thinking. Yet I'm told that that's what's supposed to be there. I'm supposed to have the mind of Christ, my Savior, living in me from day to day. But that takes effort on my part. It is not just a once a day effort. It's not just a once an hour desperate effort. It is a constant effort because the world is constantly in my own sinful nature, is constantly pulling me back down. There's a battle going on within, you know it. It's that war that rages within. It's that war between your desire as a Christian to do what's right to live for God's glory, and then that war within.

Who is your own remaining indwelling sin principle that still wants to drag you down? And Paul says, no, a living sacrifice constantly renews its mind so that it has what it needs to be sacrificed all over again. When we do that, as our minds are being renewed, we increasingly are in position to be able to test every detail of our lives and scrutinize our understanding of what God is doing and what he wants to do through us. Many times we talk about knowing the will of God, and it's good that we talk about knowing the will of God, but we tend to be relegated to only the big things. Lord, I need to know where do you want me to live? Lord, I need to know what job you want me to have. Lord, would you please just show me? Am I supposed to marry? And who am I supposed to marry? These are important things. But Paul's not talking about narrow,

specific things like that. When he talks about the will of God, he is talking all encompassing. What is God's will? But that should be holy. That should be set apart, that you flee immorality, that you yield everything entirely to him, all-encompassing the will of God.

But you know, the more that we are living sacrifices, and the more constantly we renew our mind by going to God's Word, by listening to good sermons which preach God's Word accurately, by reading books that aren't trivial, but they're deep, and they bring us into the truths of God's Word in a life transforming way, by having friendships with others who can lift us up and we can lift them up as well. These are all parts of the puzzle that God has put into our lives, so that we can be being transformed and we can become something we were not. And as we do this, we are now in a position not only to know that what I'm doing right now is what God wants me to do, but also it'll help me go deeper in knowing what he wants me to do next, where he wants me to do it, and how he wants me to do it.

But overall, what he wants me to do is to be a surrendered Christian. The will of God is far more about being than doing. So as we go to God and we look into His Word, that we might know what he gives us, that we can serve and please him, live lives that are pleasing to him. He meets that need.

So this morning with Paul, I want to encourage you even to join me in asking God to show you what his sanctification theme might be for your life this year. If nothing's already come to mind, then I'm going to encourage you. Just take Romans 12 1-2 and ask God to help you be a living sacrifice with a mind that's continuously being renewed, rising above the thinking of the culture of the day.

Because you're feeding it with God's Word, you're anchoring it in the truths of who God is, and you're sharing it as truth, in love with others. Because when we serve God that way, a life that is set apart as one offered as a living sacrifice, and a mind that is characterized as being renewed by God's Word. By saturating our lives with God's Word, we will increasingly know his will.

I think it was just about a year ago. The pastor, Dan Doriani, was standing here and he preached a sermon on the importance of God's Word in our lives. And I apologize that I don't remember the entire sermon, but I do remember the key point takeaways. He ended it by saying, **we are called to read, to meditate, to pray and live out what God reveals in his Word.**

Well, when we read God's Word, it means actually diving in. It's not just occasional. I want to encourage you set up yourself on some sort of Bible reading plan of your own, or there's plenty out there. But get into God's Word not just to check it off the list and get it done, but read God's Word to understand even better. Read God's Word to understand how your life needs to change. So read. Meditate on it. Let it ruminate in you again, over and over. This to this two verse passage, has been coming back to my mind about what God wants of me in this upcoming year. That's called meditating.

Mulling it over. Letting it go deeper into who I am. Pray. Lord, show me more. Don't let me come to your word and miss what you have for me, and then live in light of what you've understood.

You know there's great joy, isn't there, in coming to church and being with brothers and sisters in Christ and lifting our hearts to the Lord. But there's also great danger, because each and every time that we hear God's Word and we go out the door without it changing us, we have failed to be living sacrifices, and our minds have never changed.

Father, I ask that by your spirit you would take the words that have been spoken in your word, O Lord, in these verses, and show us what it means to become living sacrifices holy, acceptable in your sight. Because of the work you have done. And Lord, we are enabled because of your mercies to become living sacrifices, those who die daily to self in order that Jesus Christ may be more clearly seen. And then, Lord, may we also be those who are growing deeper in the sanctification work of your spirit. As we saturate ourselves with your Word, as we continually go to Your Word, not just to check it off that list, but to let it transform the way we think, the way we act, what we believe, and how we live. And then, Lord, let us not do it just individually. Help us do it as a church. Help us do it, O Lord, in a way that is pleasing unto you. That we might be salt and light in this community and see God reaching this community through us in new and exciting ways and more. Thank you will praise you in Jesus' name.

Amen.