

Pastor's Message – 8/27/23  
Romans 12:1-8

Many of you will preview the Order of Worship, the Sunday bulletin, when you come into the Sanctuary or before worship begins, so you may have noticed that I have scheduled the same Bible reading for today that we used three years ago. I hope that you don't think I'm getting lazy and recycling sermons, because that would not be true. You're getting a brand-new sermon on the same passage although a focus on different verses.

As you have read and/or heard Paul's Letter to the Romans, you may have noticed that there are several divisions in Paul's letter to the Romans, breaks where Paul begins a new thought. One of those is between chapters 8 and 9. Another is between chapters 11 and 12. He has been talking about what it means to live as someone in Christ, to live the life of the spirit, to live under the grace of God instead of under the law. Now with chapter 12, he speaks of the specifics of that life.

Many Bible translations say, including the New Living Translation which I normally use, "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 (vs. 1)." A better understanding might be found in our reading today from The Message, "Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering (vs. 1)." Instead, ours is to be the offering of a life lived in thanks, a thank offering. Everything we do, everything we say, every decision we make, every aspect of our lives can be and should be dedicated to serving and worshipping and honoring God. And what that means is that life is not to be lived conforming to this world, but conforming to the will, purposes, and desires of God. Paul is calling us to grow in our faith and to allow God's amazing, sanctifying grace to make us holy, to be transformed, to have the mindset of God.

According to Carol S. Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, there are two understandings of mindsets: the *growth* mindset and the *fixed mindset*.

The "growth mindset" thrives on challenge and "sees failure not as evidence of unintelligence but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities."

A “fixed mindset” assumes that “our character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens which we can’t change in any meaningful way, and success is the affirmation of that inherent intelligence.”

The apostle Paul suggests a third mindset: the *transformative* mindset. This is an attitude that has a passion for improvement, radical metamorphosis, an unwillingness to accept old habits and conventional thinking. It understands that the purpose of growth is transformation.

For Paul, it’s all about mindset. A Christian is something/someone with an extraordinary, unusual, unconventional, and non-conformist way of looking at things. For followers of Jesus, transformation is where it’s at, what it’s all about. The “it” in that sentence is life — the abundant life, the life to which Jesus has called us.

In his Letter to the Philippians, the apostle suggests that we have the same “mind” that was in Christ Jesus (2:5). The transformative mindset can turn the world upside down. Bring together a group of people with this mindset and who knows what can happen?

And what is such a group called? The church!

The other night, at the Dream Team meeting, Marsha led us in brainstorming ideas for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Wesley Center. No idea was out of bounds except for those ideas which did not further and serve our objective to remember and celebrate why the Wesley Center was built and what it’s purpose still is: to be a gift and resource to the community. Perhaps our whole life as church should be about embracing change – to do things differently from the world?

In Galatians 1:4, Paul specifically urges Christians to set themselves apart from the present age and the evil things of the present age which are not of the mind of Christ. What Paul calls Christians to do instead is to “be transformed.” The transformation of the Romans’ “renewed mind” is to be toward the “good,” “acceptable” and “perfect” — that is, toward an image of pure holiness that God offers believers. The first step in this transformation, Paul notes, is a call to humility (v. 3).

It’s not that any one Christian or any one Church are perfect and have all the right answers and the only right answers, it is that we are continually searching after God’s desires for ourselves and for the world. We are called to Gather, Grow, and Go to show and to be God’s hands and feet and voice in the world – to shine a light of God’s love and welcome.

The first Republican Presidential debate was held in Milwaukee this past Wednesday and each of the 8 candidates worked at separating

themselves from the others – to show how they were different and why we should vote for them as President. They were each trying to be non-conformists.

Paul calls Christians to non-conformists too. “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Do not be conformed to this world, we are told. Conforming to the Roman world meant recognizing the emperor as a god, the head of the world economy/community. He’s challenging Christians to reflect on who or what is your god? Whom or what do you worship? Whom or what do you invest your time, money, and energy in? What criteria do you use to make decisions and live your life? “Take your everyday, ordinary life,” Paul says, “and place it before God as an offering.” Maybe I’m preaching to the Choir, because you are here in this worship service, except that we are all called to a life of transformation: life-long growth in the Lord.

Churches sometimes fall into the trap of “We’ve always done it that way.” Routine is comfortable. Even liturgy and the way we do Sunday worship can get into a rut. The Holy Spirit calls us to be spontaneous and move as the Spirit moves.

Sometimes it’s okay, and even good to bend or break the rules. Cautions about conforming to the world aside, maybe we can take some clues from the secular working world about change.

Chelsea Babin, writing for [Camdenkelly.com](http://Camdenkelly.com) (an Information Technology recruiting firm) writes that whether your workplace believes in self-driven workloads or is filled to the brim with micromanagers, following the rules at work seems like a great idea. But here are seven scenarios where bending or breaking the rules is actually okay.

- 1. When You’re Given Permission:** Sometimes bosses will give you a clear set of guidelines and rules to follow but they’ll also give you permission to break them because they trust you and they believe in your talents and skills.
- 2. When You’re Testing New Methods or Systems:** If you’re collaborating with a project team whose methods and systems seem stale, why not propose new methods and systems?
- 3. When Old Habits or Patterns Aren’t Working Anymore:** Often we do things simply because that’s always the way they’ve been

done, and it takes a bit of rule bending to show there's a better way.

**4. Lack of Strict Rules or Guidelines:** Most of the time, unless you're working for a micromanager, you probably won't have strict rules or guidelines along the way. This leaves you room to innovate a little. Be prepared to check back if you feel uncomfortable bending things too far.

**5. When You've Found a Better Way:** If you've found a better way to do what you need to do at work, breaking the rules and following this new path could be a great idea. If you have the authority to change your methods on your own, do it. If not, check with your co-workers and/or bosses.

**6. A Self-Driven Project that Requires Your Creativity:** If you're attempting to complete a self-driven project where innovation and creativity are encouraged, bending or breaking the rules you're familiar with is necessary. Otherwise, you'll end up with run-of-the-mill results that may not be what your employer is looking for.

**7. When You Have Time to Fix Your Mistakes:** If you never take a risk, you'll never learn or improve. But, on the flip side, when you break the rules at work and go off on your own path, you're always running the risk of making a mistake. As long as you have time to fix whatever mistakes you make along the way, trying out a new method rather than following the rules on your next project may lead you to a great discovery!

Our boss, Jesus, will always lead us in the right direction. Adrian Rogers (an American Southern Baptist pastor and conservative author who served three terms as president of the Southern Baptist Convention) once said, "The same Jesus who turned water into wine can transform your home, your life, your family, and your future. He is still in the miracle-working business, and his business is the business of transformation." Jesus is in the transformation business. Transformations can make a difference.

Transformation for the sake of the gospel can change lives, change the world, change our families, change our church, and change our community. "... fix your attention on God," Paul writes. "You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you," God invites us to continue creating and recreating the world into the heaven that is surely to come.