

Romans 12:2 (1984 NIV)
Inside Out: Renewed Mind to Transformed Life

Introduction

Suppose you could change something about yourself, where would you start? Many of us would tend to start with the outside.

I remember this was true of me when I was a teenager. I was really skinny and scrawny then, but fantasized myself as someone big and strong. At that time, there was a very popular hero in Hollywood movies. His name is Hercules. And as a teenager, I would save my pocket money so that I could go and watch every Hercules movie in the cinema. Hercules, as you may know, is son of a Greek god and a human mother in Greek mythology, and endowed with superhuman strength.

Every time I sat in the cinema and watched Hercules, I would fantasize myself as having all the muscles and strength in me to destroy evil, save the weak, and attract the fair and pretty. But Hollywood is Hollywood and reality is reality. After all the cinema going and fantasizing, I was still skinny and scrawny!

We all go through periods when we desperately want to change, at least outwardly. We all want to change in some ways, but we often don't quite know how to do it and where to begin. Often, we try by making outward changes.

But as hard as it is to change on the outside, it seems even harder to change on the inside. Yes, there are times we need to make outward changes. But it is often not the outward thing that trips us. It's the thing on the inside that we can't seem to fix.

Romans 12:2 tells us that we can be changed from inside out as a believer in Christ. But how does that happen?

I. Change from inside out begins with spiritual our transformation (v. 2a).

Paul says in Romans 12:2a, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed ..."

The Greek word for "transformed" in Romans 12:2a is related to the English word "metamorphosis". This is the process by which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. It's a gradual change on the inside that produces a total transformation on the outside. Caterpillars can't fly. But they were born to fly. When the caterpillar has been changed into a butterfly, it becomes what God has created it to be.

Now let's apply this to every believer in Jesus. When we come to Christ, we have the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). As a new creation in Jesus Christ, our born-again nature and character are to reflect the mind of Christ. That's an awesome thought—we who know Jesus as Lord and Saviour have the "mind of Christ". This means that we have the ability to estimate the true value of things from Christ's perspective.

With the mind of Christ, we are to estimate the true value of things not in conformity to the spirit of this age—which is basically the big I-ME-MY attitude. How does this attitude sound like? Just listen to these:

- What do I get out of this?
- What is in it for ME?
- How can I work this for MY benefit?
- Unless there is something in it for ME, I'M not interested!

Ministry and discipleship in the church is more than just about the church meeting our needs. More importantly, it is about joining God's mission to meet the world's need for Jesus Christ. The goal of church ministry and discipleship here on earth is more than just to become large numerically, or rich materially, or powerful socially. Rather, it is to live out the values of God's Kingdom, and to witness to the love and justice of God revealed in Jesus Christ, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions. So the church does not exist to satisfy the consumer demands of believers, but to equip and mobilize them for God's mission in the world.

Jerome Hines was a famous opera singer in America. He grew up in California and was blessed with a good voice. Someone urged him to train it, and so he did. He became possessed by an ambition to be a star in the famous Metropolitan Opera Company. That was what he lived for. He built his life around that, gave up all other activities, all other pursuits, all other pleasures, to give himself to the necessary work of training to become an opera star. It finally came true. He became a star.

One day he heard a man singing. The voice was as good as his. He heard George Beverly Shea singing, "I'd Rather Have Jesus". The words he sang were: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold ... I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."

This song impacted Jerome Hines in a supernatural way. He began to think about it, and out of that incident, he eventually became a Christian. But he didn't quit the opera even though many Christians viewed it as "worldly". Jerome Hines stayed in opera, but everything had become different. He was no longer singing for the advancement of Jerome Hines. He was singing for the glory of God. He dedicated his voice, his songs, his career, and his life to that purpose.

Indeed, God doesn't take us out of the world. Rather He wants us to live in it and impact it with the mind of Christ. Jerome Hines did just that.

(http://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/brnsermons-wp/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2017/03/21193036/Romans-12_1-Living-for-the-Lord.pdf)

Romans 12:2 tells us that we can be changed from inside out as a believer in Christ. But how does that happen? It begins with our spiritual transformation, and ...

II. Our minds are renewed when we are transformed (v. 2b).

Paul says in Romans 12:2b, "... but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

We are to renew our mind into that of Christ. The mind of Christ looks at the world and does not say that all of life is the advancement of self. When it looks at the world, it says that the basis for living, the reason for life, is to serve God and to advance His will. Not our will, but His will be done. This is really what we as God's people are here for. And to maintain that kind of thinking in our kind of world will take a renewed mind.

How do you get your mind renewed? Well, it happens at church, to name one place. This is why we have the exposition of Scripture on Sunday when we come together and hear what God's truths are—e.g. love your enemies instead of revenge; care for others too instead of care only for yourself.

Your mind is renewed in your personal Bible study, when you sit down with the Word of God. This is where we learn that the ways of the Christian are obedience to the Word of God and a heart that expects God to work. With the constant battle of values around us, He wants us to understand how to live and overcome in the name of Jesus.

We need to have our mind renewed because Scripture tells us that by nature it is darkened because of sin. God's estimate of the human mind apart from His grace sounds like this:

- The human mind is depraved and defiled (Rom. 1:28; Tit. 1:15).
- The human mind is filled with evil imagination and wicked thoughts (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 4:14; Matt. 9:4).
- The human mind is hostile to God and filled with sinful pride (Rom. 8:7; Col. 2:18).
- The human mind is filled with empty and worthless thoughts (Eph. 4:17).

That is the truth about the human mind that is not spiritually transformed. It is true about each of us personally—not just about other “bad people” out there somewhere. Apart from God’s gracious intervention, that’s our mind. And this spiritual change of mind begins not with an outward change of doing, but with an inward change of being.

A man once spent days looking for his new hat. Finally, he decided that he would go to church on Sunday and sit at the back. During the service he would sneak out and grab a hat from the rack at the front door.

Come Sunday, he went to church and sat at the back. The sermon was about the 10 Commandments. He sat through the whole sermon and instead of sneaking out, he waited until the sermon was over and went to talk to the pastor.

“Pastor, I came here today to steal a hat to replace the one I lost. But after hearing your sermon on the 10 Commandments, I changed my mind.”

The pastor said, “Bless you my brother. Was it when I started to preach ‘Thou shall not steal’ that changed your mind?”

The man responded, “No, it was when you came to ‘Thou shall not commit adultery’ that I remembered where I left my hat. So, I will not steal in church, but I will get back my hat when I next visit where I have left it.”

That is the truth about the human mind that is not spiritually transformed. The renewal or change of mind must begin with an inward change in our inner spirit. When that happens, we can then move on to change our outward ways and stop doing things not in line with God’s will. This is because ...

III. Our renewed mind will prompt us to seek and do God’s will (v. 2c).

Paul says in Romans 12:2c, “... Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

How then do we test and discern the will of God before we act according to His will?

Let me first share some wrong views related to God’s will:

- One, I must not be doing God’s will because my decision is too humanly reasonable. While it is true that God’s thoughts are much higher than our own, this does not mean that His will for our lives is always contrary to human reason. However, it is our responsibility to

submit our thinking to the truths of Scripture and the illumination of the Spirit so that we will have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Yes, God may at times direct a believer to do something that does not seem to make the best sense, but this doesn’t mean that our decisions must always be against human reason.

- Two, I must give up my happiness if I want to do God’s will. God is not a “kill joy” who is going all out to make us miserable. In fact, His will for us is to lead us to freedom, fulfilment, and joy in Him (Psalm 37:4; John 15:11).
- Three, I must not be following God’s will because my problems are still with me. Obedience to God does prevent and correct many problems, but it does not guarantee a trouble-free life. Also, an obedient Christian may or may not be successful in the eyes of men. God’s standard of success is different from that of the world.
- Four, if I stray away from God’s will, He will never use me again. God does not exempt us from the consequences of sin, but this does not mean that He condemns us to “cold storage” forever when we sin. When we acknowledge our sins, He forgives and cleanses us so that we can be used again in His service (Psalm 51:1-13; 1 John 1:9). Many of the heroes of faith in the Bible had committed grievous sins at some point in their lives (e.g. King David and Apostle Paul).
- Five, I will only be doing God’s will if I respond to every need. God can lead us by bringing us into direct contact with certain needs. But not every cry for help is a call from God to us personally. It is better to do a few things well than to do many things ineffectively as we respond to God’s will in our lives.

Moving on, let me now share some guiding principles for knowing and doing God’s will:

- One, communication: What is God saying through Scripture and prayer concerning this decision?

Many Christians are concerned about knowing the will of God, but not taking and making time to seek Him for wisdom and direction. If we want to know and experience God’s direction, we must communicate with Him through Scripture and prayer. This process of renewing our mind with the Word takes time and effort. And if we do not feed our mind on a daily basis with Scripture, we will find our mind being fed by default with the values of this world. Our lives will soon reflect these values—we become conformed to the things of this world.

- Two, conscience: How will this decision affect my love for God and others?

An option may appear to be sound at the intellectual level, but it may be questionable at the moral level. E.g. a penniless and starving man may consider stealing unsold food in a restaurant as logically

reasonable, but is it morally right? God has implanted within us an intuitive sense of right and wrong. When we have wrongly and wilfully rejected the input of our conscience, the remedial response is to confess it (1 John 1:9), not to cover it. A failure to respond in this way will place us under a burden of guilt and take the joy out of our lives. Even worse, we can become calloused by repeatedly rejecting the warnings of our conscience.

- Three, common sense: Does this decision reflect good judgment?

A Christian may be communicating with God in the Word and prayer, and bearing a clear conscience. But he may still not know which option to choose in a specific situation. It is within this framework that common sense should play an important role in the choices we make. Outside this framework, common sense tends to feed the “me-first” mentality—e.g. if you and I are being considered for the same promotion, will common sense tell me to help you be better than me?

However, common sense has its limitations and it should never be our only criterion for discerning God’s will. There are times when He leads people do things that are contrary to our concept of good judgment. We are often too nearsighted to see the goal God has in mind. Thus, we should always be willing to submit our thoughts and plans to His—e.g. God may want me to forego a well-paying overseas job so that I can be at home to help take care of a sick parent.

- Four, circumstances: How does this decision fit with the situation at hand?

Because of God’s providential care and involvement in the details of our lives, we should be sensitive to the situations in which we find ourselves. Factors like finances, aptitude, education, experience, family, spiritual gifts, and occupation all play a part in God’s direction.

God often works by opening and closing doors as we come to them. But we should be careful not to make this our primary means of guidance. Just because a door is open does not necessarily mean that we should go through it. Why? It is because God may not have opened the door, but I kick open the door because I want so much to get in!

Also, a situation that seems difficult does not mean it must be a close door. David Livingstone—a Scottish physician, pioneer Christian missionary, and explorer in Africa—who lived in the late 19th century once said, “I had rather be in the heart of Africa in the will of God than on the throne of England out of the will of God.” In the same vein, George W. Truett—a respected American Baptist pastor who lived and ministered during the war years of the early 1900s—said, “There is no

failure when you are in the will of God, but no success when you are out of the will of God.”

- Five, wise and godly counsel: What do wise and godly people say about this decision?

Prov. 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.” Thus, if a decision has significant implications, we should not limit ourselves to our own judgment, but we should also seek the perspective of mature and godly people who have wisdom and experience. Good counsel is both instructive and corrective, requiring frankness and not flattery.

But even the wisest of people are finite and biased, and we must avoid the pitfall of uncritically accepting the advice we receive. Thus, we still have to hold on to the precepts and principles of Scripture as our first and final authority in the choices and decisions we make.

- Six, contentment: Do I have peace and assurance about this decision?

God wants us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). If a decision gives us a sense of doubt, distress, or confusion, something is wrong because it is not accompanied by the peace of God.

However, peace by itself is not the all-sufficient principle of guidance. E.g. you remember that Jonah slept so peacefully in the ship in Jonah 1, BUT he was running away from the will of God. Also, an option may have passed the test of the other principles, BUT still fails to provide peace. Then the wisest course of action is to wait on the Lord, and allow Him to provide further input. The option may be right, but the timing may be wrong.

Whenever we have a heavy burden or deep desire in us, the tendency is to want to act on it as quickly as possible. But to act with a renewed mind, we must first test and discern if it is indeed the will of God for us. We must evaluate it in the larger context of communication (Scripture and prayer), conscience, common sense, circumstances, counsel, and contentment.

I Thess. 4:3 excellently summarizes God's will for us this way: “It is God's will that you should be sanctified ...” The will of God for us is that we are to be pure and holy in mind, body and spirit, according to what He has revealed to us by way of communication through Scripture and prayer, conscience, common sense, circumstances, counsel, and contentment.

Conclusion

When Paul says ‘be transformed’, he uses a passive form of the verb. He doesn't say, “Transform yourself”, which would be utterly impossible. I don't

have the power in myself to change my depraved mind into the mind of Christ. Only God can do that for me. That's why Paul says, "Be transformed"—let God do it as you allow Him.

But that doesn't mean I don't play any part. The work of renewing my mind is God's work, and ultimately only He can do it. But He calls me to cooperate with Him by disciplining myself so that the transformation will actually take place. Yes, I need to try hard, but even more important is that I need to pray more as I seek God to help me be changed from inside out.

If there is anything human to be further added, it would be this—godly encouragement to help one another make godly choices in life. That will mean being part of a local congregation, a discipleship Bible class, a small group where we can develop relationships with other Christians in which we can mutually be encouraged and held accountable.

Sadhu Sundar Singh was a devout Sikh who became a committed Christian, spreading the Gospel in India. On one occasion, he and a companion were travelling through a pass high in the Himalayas.

At one point, they came across a man lying in the snow. Singh wanted to stop and help the man. But his companion refused and said, "We shall lose our lives if we burden ourselves with him."

Singh stood firm on his decision, and his friend bade him farewell and went ahead on his own. Singh lifted the fallen man onto his back and moved on with great difficulty. Gradually, the heat of his body began to warm up the frozen man and he was revived. Soon both were walking side by side.

As they moved further on, they found Singh's former companion ... dead and frozen in the snow.

This is what the Bible means when it says that "two are better than one" (Eccl. 4:9).

(<https://www.family-times.net/illustration/Farewell/201622>)

Yes, the church is God's army sent to win lost souls with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yes, the church is God's family of people who belong to God and are to serve Him in love. Today, God wants us to know that the church is also God's refuge for His people to come together so that they can heal, help, and encourage one another.

As we aspire to grow in our Christian life, God is reminding us to think more and more like Christ in a world that is tempting and pressurizing us to think more and more like them.

As we live out our faith, we want to do so with a renewed mindset and a transformed lifestyle in Christ.

- At the personal level: We want to seek the mind of Christ so that we can deal with life issues according to how the Lord Himself would think and act.
- At the Body life level: We want our church to be a refuge where we can experience the love of God and the safety of being authentic as we encourage one another in godly living in a world often hostile to our values.
- At the public level: We want to give hope to the needy and hurting by our acts of compassion, and by pointing them to Jesus Christ in the sphere of influence where God has placed us. We also want to speak and show God's justice and peace in a world troubled by human injustice and conflict.

Let's commit ourselves to let God renew our minds so that we can live transformed lives for Him. Amen!