

Happy New Year! I hope you had a blessed and peaceful holiday season. And now we are embarking on yet another year – 2015. It is my prayer that in this new year we can all go deeper, higher, and farther w/ God than ever before. To help us in this journey, I want to begin our new year w/ a 4-week series in Romans 12 entitled *Elevate*.

What does it mean to elevate? *To elevate is a verb that means to raise or lift something to a higher position; or to raise something to a more important and impressive level.*

And this is what I am praying for each of us – that we all would move to a higher, more impressive position w/ God.

Before we begin, I want to share w/ you about this year and the things we'll be discussing from God's Word and what I hope will occur in our church. A few months ago I asked the deacons to give me three of their favorite Bible passages – 1) their favorite Bible story; 2) their favorite Bible verse; and 3) the verse they'd leave to a friend/family member to encourage them. Their responses inspired me to teach from these passages in 2015. And in the process, I want to invite you to join me and our church leadership in what I hope will prove to be a rewarding spiritual adventure and experiment.

Here is how it is going to work. On Monday AM, we will post a favorite text of one of our deacons on the church website on the **Devotion Spot** page. I'm asking each church leader including staff, deacons, LIFE Group and committee leaders to read and reflect on the passage and then share a comment on what this passage means or says to them. I also want to invite you to participate in this journey to allow God to speak into and thru us to one another so we might **elevate** each other in the faith. Then, on the following Sunday, the focal passage will be taught from the pulpit – today we're going to begin our journey together in one of the deacons most favorite text – read **Romans 12**. (9 times)

Maybe you have read this passage before or maybe it is the first time you can remember hearing it – but safe to say, Romans 12 is easily one of the great texts of the Bible.

Some scholars have labeled Romans 12 as the most critical text in the NT – calling it an **executive summary** of what it means to be a Christ-follower – and I'm inclined to agree. It is certainly Paul's most challenging statement on discipleship calling all of us to a more intimate walk w/ God.

Today we're going to begin by looking at vs.1-2 – and the idea of **surrender** – what **GOES** up – must first **GIVE** up.

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve God's will – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Whenever I read this text, I'm struck by the emphasis on God's will and what it includes. It's God's will we experience His mercy. It's His will we surrender our lives into His plan as an act of worship. It's God's will we live by the economy of heaven instead of earth. And it's His will we live spiritually-focused lives. Meaning... God has a plan and purpose for all of us. And somehow, He works out His plan and purpose while allowing us the "freedom" to make choices – even though our sense of "free" will is held intently w/in His sovereignty. This means we may make wrong choices along the way in time and space, yet we never make one move outside of His Divine perspective. He is never fooled or surprised by our actions. Yet at the same time, I believe He can take our lives, including our mistakes, errors, and sins, and weave them into an amazing mosaic for His glory and for our good – and if we cooperate w/ Him, for the good of other people too.

And yet, for any person, there is no greater sense of calm, dignity, and authority than when they discover Christ and the center of His will. The challenge comes in discovering it.

If two bugs were on an automobile wheel, and one is at the center of the hub while the other is riding near the edge of the tire, which would know the greater turbulence?

Even so, it is imperative for us to live in the *center* of God's will. But how can I get there? Though the question sounds mechanical, it really isn't that complicated b/c God wants all of us to know and experience the center of His will!

It is God's will to reveal His will to anyone who is willing to do his will. *James Merritt*

Did you know there is but one thing that prevents all of us from experiencing and walking in the center of God's will – OURSELVES! When we choose to follow the desires of the flesh instead of responding to the leading of the H.S. – when we choose to live according to our terms instead of His terms, we allow our lives to exist outside of the Father's will.

Before we begin, let me state a truth I refuse to compromise: ***Inside*** the will of God, there is no real ***failure***, and conversely, ***outside*** the will of God, there is no ***real success***.

So how can I know and enjoy God's will? Before we jump into this text, let me remind you of the scope of God's will.

➤ PROVIDENTIAL Will of God (Determined)

The *Providential Will of God* includes those things God has created in time and space and set into motion beyond man's scope, understanding, and influence. This includes decisions God has made by His sovereign choice that certain things have happened, are going to happen, and nothing is going to stop it. No one has influence over these things and no committee was formed to offer their opinions.

God didn't take requests when He put the stars in place or determined how high to make the mountains or which animals to create? He didn't needed out advice on salvation.

➤ PRESCRIPTIVE Will of God (Desired)

The *Prescriptive Will of God* is God's general will as laid out in Scripture. It's where God reveals to us what's right and what's wrong – what is good and what is evil – what's of God and what's not of God. It is where God reveals his progressive plan that we might know Him and will.

But there's a catch. He has given us the Bible to reveal His general will for all people – it is His will for everyone. So when it says, "Thou shall not kill, or steal or lie – it applies to every person in every culture in every age. Thus, we have no influence over God's prescriptive will, but only a choice of whether or not we're going to respond to and abide by it.

➤ PERSONAL Will of God (Distinctive)

This is where we live. And this is the burning question w/in the soul of every person – what is God’s Will for me? What does he want me to do in this situation?

Should I marry this person? Should I take that job? How should I respond to my kids, my spouse or my boss? Should I make this move? Should I buy this house?

BUT – until a person is willing to follow God’s prescriptive will they will never discover His personal will.

How does a person discover God’s will? **SURRENDER**

I Surrender to God in **SALVATION**

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy...

The book of Romans is a doctrinal treatise and an amazing exposition of the Gospel. Thru the first 11 chapters, Paul has systematically explained the basic outline of Christian thought as it pertains to sin, salvation, sanctification, and sovereignty. He has masterfully explained the truth of God’s mercies and the necessity of His love and grace. Now, in ch. 12, Paul turns his attention to the implications of these truths and basically, he says, “In light of what I’ve just shared... here’s how you should live.” *B/c of God’s mercy, you should surrender yourself to God – starting w/ accepting His grace unto salvation.*

Notice Paul's statement – b/c of God's mercy you should offer yourselves to God as an act of worship to God.

This means that the prerequisite to worship is mercy. And we all get that the prerequisite to mercy is doing something wrong (*we're good at doing wrong*). So if you've ever done anything wrong – then you qualify for mercy. And as a result, if you qualify for mercy, then you qualify to become a worshipper of the one who has given you mercy.

So here is our reality – we all are born sinners and we have no ability to save ourselves. So God who is rich in mercy, while we will still sinner – demonstrated His love for us in offering us Christ to die on the cross to atone for our debt of sin. This is mercy. **Mercy is receiving a gift of compassion and pardon that is undeserved and unwarranted.**

We should never allow what is wrong w/ us – keep us from embracing and experiencing what is right w/ God.

So the burning question each of us must answer is have we truly understood and accepted that God **in His mercy** has provided for us His Son to die on the cross to atone for our sin – and have we by faith received this act of grace and mercy when the H.S. prompted us unto conviction.

It is really quite simple and yet it cost God everything. You and I, by virtue of the decisions made by Adam and Eve, have inherited a nature to sin and rebel against God. Yet God in His love has sought to repair and restore this relationship by sending His Son to die on the cross to atone for Adam's mistake and for our corresponding attitudes and actions. So in Christ, God provided the single solution to the problem of sin and requires that we by faith receive Christ as our Savior.

Once we've embraced Christ as our Savior, Paul calls us to:

II Surrender to God in SACRIFICE

*...to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper (**reasonable**) worship.*

reasonable (*logizomai*) or logical – it only makes sense.

The result of this realization is a very reasonable response. B/c God offered His Son to you as a sacrifice, it is only reasonable you offer your life as to Him an act of worship.

Blaise Pascal, 17th century French Philosopher, wrote, *“There are only two classes of persons who can be called reasonable: those who serve God w/ all of their hearts b/c they know Him and those who seek God w/ all of the hearts b/c they don't know Him.”* Everything else is unreasonable.

Thus, for those who've experienced the mercy of God thru salvation... the only reasonable response is to surrender to God by offering your body as a living sacrifice.

offer (*paristemi*) to release. It is a technical term used by priests in the temple when they placed an animal on the altar for sacrifice as an act of worship.

In the Jewish sacrificial system there were several prescribed sacrifices. One was called "the whole burnt offering," so called b/c it meant the entire animal was sacrificed to God. **It required that it all be on the altar – w/ nothing w/held.**

This is Paul's idea here. A Christ-follower is to voluntarily "*release*" his life into God's hands w/out reservations. The tense of this verb means that we offer ourselves as an act of worship and then continually keep ourselves in this sacred position never taking ourselves off the altar.

As such, as God's "holy priesthood" according to *1 Pt. 2:5* – we are to be a living and holy sacrifice.

living – b/c it requires faith, willingness and obedience.

holy (*hagios*) set aside by self to God for His purposes.

While we've been set apart by God by grace thru faith, now we have the charge to live as one who has been set apart.

III Surrender to God in SEPARATION

Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world,

If I am to know and enjoy God's will, I must be **separated** unto Him – *be not conformed to this world*. The Phillips paraphrase says: *Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.*

You see, the unbelieving, godless world has a “shape”, a moral and spiritual “form,” and it is constantly enticing us to conform to its shape.

If Christians permit it, they will suffocate in the spiritual smog that overhangs our civilization. *unknown*

conformed (*suschematizesthe*) squeezed into the mold.

Don't allow yourself to be squeezed into the self-centered, morally bankrupt, godless system of this world. **The idea is while you live in it – you don't have to be a victim to it.**

But notice – again you have spiritual responsibility in this matter – yet it can only be avoided by submitting to God.

Now note the alternative. Instead of being **stuffed** into the mold of the world; you can be **sculpted** into image of Christ.

IV Surrender to God in SPIRITUAL-MINDEDNESS

...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Instead of being carnal-minded b/c you've been stuffed into the mindset of the world, you can be spiritually-minded b/c you have be transformed/sculpted by the Spirit of God.

transformed (*metamorphoo*) metamorphosis – what is on the outside matches what has occurred on the inside.

Transformation happens b/c the inner character w/in has been, and continues to be, changed. **This inward change is so dominant and pervasive it works its way to visibility on the outside – so that the character w/in controls the conduct that emerges on the outside.**

Both of these verbs are passive imperatives which means it is going to be one or the other. If you choose to live life on your terms un-surrendered to God, then the world WILL squeeze you into its mold. But if you choose to surrender to God and live life on His terms, then He WILL transform and sculpt your life *from the inside out* into something that will be pleasing to Him for His glory and your good.

Let me close w/ an illustration from ancient literature. Two Greek heroes, Odysseus, king of Ithaca, and Orpheus, a poet and musician, each by necessity had to sail by the deadly “Isle of the Sirens.” Like sin, the sirens were beautiful but seductive and destructive. In the story, the sirens sang a seductive song which was irresistible to the sailors on both ships. So the two Greek heroes were both faced w/ the same deadly problem. How could they get their ships and sailors past this potentially fatal dilemma? They employed to completely different tactics for resisting the siren’s fatal song. Odysseus filled the ears of his men w/ wax and had himself lashed by ropes to the mast of the ship – and they barely made it past the isle of destruction. Orpheus used another strategy to overcome the sirens. He brought his own singers w/ him, and when his ship approached the “field of temptation”, he called on his own singers to loudly sing their own sweet song! And they sailed freely past the Isle of the Sirens b/c they had replaced their appeal w/ their own music.

This story illustrates the great principle of this text: *Do not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind by surrendering and filling it w/ the Word of God – then you will be able to test and approve God’s will – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

If you want to go up w/ God – it begin by giving up in surrender to Him in salvation, sacrifice, separation, and in being spiritually-minded.