

Grace Church

21 Days of Prayer & Fasting
Daily Devotional Guide 2016

The Beauty of Transformational Living



Romans 12



Focus on Prayer 2016

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A Word from P. Ed...

Hello Grace Church,

This is the fourth year we have designated a time of Prayer & Fasting at the beginning of the year. Over these four years I have watched us grow in this particular ministry. A number of you have expressed how meaningful it has been. Thank you again for participating.

Several months ago we were praying about the focus of this year's P & F time and it seemed to us that being salt and light in our world came to the top of the list. Especially in light of the things that have transpired over the past several years. These could be viewed as a setback for the Church in the United States. Yes, we have lost some ground if we want to judge the current environment by secular standards. However, God has never dictated society or the government to legislate spirituality in a nation. It has always been through His people. People fully devoted to Him, whether it was the nation of Israel or the New Testament Church.

So, the question is, "how can Grace Church best impact its society?" I believe it is best impacted by Christians living "transformational lives". Regardless of the attitude of secular society, God has called every believer to be such a compelling example of the image of Christ that those who are on the outside would give praises to God because of the manner in which Christians live. (Mt. 5:14-16) We could state this as "The Beauty of Transformational Living."

Romans chapter 12 reveals to us how to live this kind of life. We are to present ourselves to God as "living sacrifices." It takes place by "being transformed by the renewing of our minds." (v. 2) This renewal is the work of God in us as we determine to become a living sacrifice. Another way to say this is "together becoming fully devoted followers of Christ!"

When this happens within a congregation, the impact is felt beyond just its members. It penetrates into the work space, into our recreation arena, and our home life. In other words, it has an impact on our OIKOS (sphere of influence). That is what believers all across our nation need to do. We are to live transformational lives. We then become the aroma of Christ to all who are nearby. Rather than curse the darkness we must let our light shine to the glory of God.

Let us join together in this period of 21 days of fasting & prayer. Let's seek God's will together. Let us pray for God to reveal to us where ongoing transformation needs to happen in our lives. May God transform all of Grace Church as together we become fully devoted followers of Christ.

Blessings,

Pastor Ed

Grace Church 21 Days of Corporate Fasting and Prayer

Grace Church's time of corporate fasting and prayer begins on **Sunday, January 24** and continues through **Sunday, February 14**.

Special Dates:

You are encouraged to join us for these special times of prayer:

Night of Prayer – Sunday January 24th at 6:30pm

Transformational Living through Prayer February 13th. The church building will be open from 8am to 1pm for personal times of prayer. You are welcome to come for whatever time God leads you.

Thursday Fasts

During these 3 weeks, the elders are asking that we devote each Thursday to fasting and prayer as a corporate effort to seek God and the Transformational Living He desires for each of us.

Corporate fast dates include . . .

Thursday, January 28

Thursday, February 4

Thursday, February 11

Fasting on each of these Thursdays will involve ***abstaining from food for breakfast and lunch. During the time we would normally spend in preparation or eating the meal, it is important to use that time to pray and to read God's Word.*** For example, if you normally spend 20 minutes preparing and eating breakfast, use that 20 minutes to pray and read Scripture instead.

If you are unable to participate in the corporate fast on Thursdays, you are welcome to choose another day of the week to align your heart with God through fasting and prayer.

What is Biblical Fasting?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline in which believers abstain from food for the spiritual purpose of intensifying our hunger for God and aligning our hearts with His!

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by demonstrating our HUMILITY before Him (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God through our REPENTENCE and CONFESSION of sin (1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by acknowledging our sole DEPENDENCE on Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 4:1-4)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by discerning His WILL and DIRECTION in our lives (Judges 20:26-28; Acts 13:1-3)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by increasing our appetite to PRAY (Mark 1:35)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God increasing our appetite for Him and His WORD (Matthew 4:1-4; John 4:31-35)

What are some different ways to fast?

The following are some suggestions from Dr. Elmer Towns' book
The Daniel Fast for Spiritual Breakthrough (Used by permission)

Daniel Fast Suggestions

Eliminate one meal a day and pray during that mealtime.

Eliminate two meals a day, and pray during their times.

Eliminate all desserts.

Eliminate all rich, superfluous foods eaten only for pleasure.

Eat only necessities, and only during mealtime (no snacks).

Eliminate all drinks except water (no coffee, tea, soda or purchased drinks).

Contemporary Interpretations of the Daniel Fast

No text messaging or Facebook or Twitter communications that take your thoughts away from God.

No secular music; only praise and worship music.

No newspaper or pleasure reading; give that time to prayer.

No television; give that time to prayer.

No recreational sports; give that time to prayer.

No sex. "Both husband and wife to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time, so they can give themselves completely to prayer"

(1 Cor. 7:5, NLT)

Some Physical Aspects of Fasting

If you have specific health issues related to diet, check with a doctor before beginning a fast.

No matter what way you choose to fast make sure and drink fluids including water and fruit juices.

You may need to restrict some of your physical activity during a fast, especially rigorous exercise.

Sudden movements, especially standing up quickly, may cause dizziness or light-headedness.

Expect some physical, mental, and perhaps even some emotional discomfort during a fast.. Headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability often accompany a fast, but don't allow the fast to become an excuse for improper actions or attitudes.

My Time to Pray

*Lord, I will deny myself enjoyment during my Daniel Fast
so that I can seek Your will in my life.*

*I count it a privilege to give up my “pleasant food”
for Your glory and as a commitment of my prayer.*

*Lord, I have made a spiritual vow to You that I will
faithfully fast and pray for 10 days or 21 days.*

*Lord, give me strong outer discipline to keep my outer vow
to You, and give me strong inner commitment
to pray faithfully for the answer I seek.*

Amen.

My Commitment to Fast and Pray

(As a way of bringing focus to your time of fasting and praying, answer the following questions.)

My Goal: I am asking God to

My Fast: (what I will withhold)

My Prayer: (When I will pray)

My Vow: God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to this period of fasting so that God will answer my prayer and give the thing for which I trust Him. Not my will Oh God, but Yours be done.

Lord, I dedicate small things to express the greatness of Your supremacy in all of life.

Lord, I will be faithful in little expressions of my faith for great answers to prayer.

Lord, I vow to fulfill these small expressions of my love to You.
Amen.

Signed _____

Date: _____

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 1

Key thought: The beauty of God's mercy is beyond my full comprehension.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God... Ro 12:1 (ESV)

For eleven chapters Paul has laid out for us three things; 1) Who we are, 2) Who God is, and 3) What God has done for us. Beginning in chapter twelve, he unfolds what the normal response of every believer should be. That response can be summed up in one sentence “impact your culture through transformational living”. Transformational living is only possible because of God's mercy. Paul says “by the mercies of God...”. In other words, “in light of God's mercy”, or “because God has extended mercy to you” every Christian should respond by totally surrendering their lives to Him.

Mercy is one of the attributes of God. It is a part of who He is. His mercy is often described with words like; lovingkindness, pity or compassion. We struggle to comprehend God's mercy because we view it through our eyes. We usually have no problem seeing the good in those we love, even overlooking the not so good. However, when we find the actions of others detestable, it is extremely hard to exercise mercy.

Mercy, love and grace all play significant roles in the forgiveness granted to us by God. Paul states “...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Ro 5:8) Peter says “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Pe 1:3)

The greater our comprehension of what God has done for us, the greater our commitment should be. Practically applied, Christ's gift, meditated on, accepted, taken to heart, is a magnet drawing us to deepest commitment to him. Immense vision will bring immense commitment. That is what Isaac Watts meant when he wrote:

Love so amazing, so divine
demands my soul, my life, my all.

True Christian faith produces genuine compassion and fruit in the form of acts of mercy toward those in need. It was this characteristic of mercy that caused Christ to go among all kinds of people to help. Believers are to

respond to the mercy shown them in the same way. The rest of the book of Romans shows us how we are to live transformational lives as we grant mercy towards others because it is God who first had mercy on us.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. How has God’s mercy revealed itself in your life?
- 2. Lamentations 3:23 tells us that God’s mercies are new every morning. How ought this impact you getting up every morning?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to help you understand the extent of His mercy.
- 2. Ask God to reveal to you those in your OIKOS (sphere of influence) that you need to show mercy upon.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 2

Key thought: Transformational living is accomplished by committing everything I know about myself to everything I know about God.

... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Ro 12:1 (ESV)

It is reasonable for God to require our total surrender to Him. After all, the only way we can have this transforming relationship with Him is because while we were still sinners He granted mercy towards us through Jesus Christ.

This is wonderful news. Christ has already died to pay the price for your sin, therefore God is requiring us to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice”. While at some point we will die physically, we are now alive spiritually. This is God’s doing in our lives. We are now new creations through Christ (2 Co 5:17). This is radical.

Therefor Paul uses radical language to describe our expected commitment to God because He has saved us. We are to become a sacrifice. Everyone who lived in Paul’s day understood that to become a sacrifice meant certain death. Never was it partial in any way. That is what God is calling you to do. He has no desire for part of you, but all of you. This has total surrender written all over it.

The imperative in this verse is “present your bodies”. This is a definitive act of the human will. We come to a place where we give everything over to God. We no longer are living just for us but as a living sacrifice for the glory of God.

Are you able to say that you have made this type of a commitment to Christ?

Questions to Ponder:

1. Take an inventory of the way you are living. Is it transformational in nature? Be specific. How do the various areas of your life align with God’s design for you as a living sacrifice?
2. Think through the following list and ask “Have I given this area totally over to God”?
 - Family
 - Work
 - Recreation
 - Social
 - Finances
 - Other

In Prayer:

1. God please reveal to me any area of my life that I have not given totally over to you.
2. God help me to live in such a way that others see the transformation which you have brought about.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 3

Key thought: God brings about ongoing transformation in the lives of those who are fully devoted to him.

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. Ro 12:2 (ESV)

There are two imperatives in verse two. The first is a command not to be conformed to a non-Christian world-view. The action of the verb is something we do to ourselves. It is an on-going action that must continue through our time here on earth. It is a walk of faith that is continually challenged by the spiritual powers of darkness. Being a non-conformist is walking in step with the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16-25). It is not a once and done deal, yet the beauty of transformational living is that as we step out in faith the Holy Spirit gives the strength to say no to anything that distracts us from becoming fully devoted followers of Christ.

The second imperative, while addressed to the believer, is a passive verb. In other words the believer is not the one performing the action in the sentence, rather the action is done unto them by someone else. We know that someone else is God Himself working through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. However, we are not completely inactive either. We must do our part of “not conforming to the world”.

We have no ability to renew or transform our minds in the spiritual sense God intends in this verse. Yet we must put ourselves in a position to be the recipient of God’s transforming power.

The same idea is present in relation to staying in shape physically. If we want to help the body, we have to work at it. We must eat properly. And we must exercise properly. It’s not a once and done type of thing. Once you are in shape physically you must continue a discipline of physical exercise in order to stay in shape. As we grow physically we are able to do different and more difficult exercises. The same is true in our spiritual lives.

It is God who has placed within your physical DNA the ability to grow stronger muscles if you properly exercise. You did not cause them to grow. As believers, God has changed our spiritual DNA from sinful and separated

from God to being a new creation through Jesus Christ (2 Co. 5:17). It is then the work of God that transforms our minds.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. What spiritual exercises are you doing so that you will not be conformed to the world?
- 2. What are some ways you can become stronger spiritually?

In Prayer:

- 1. Confess any ways you have conformed to this world.
- 2. Thank God for making spiritual transformation possible.
- 3. Ask God to reveal to you the beauty of transformational living.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 4

Key thought: Viewing myself through the lens of God's grace controls my pride and enables me to be used of God.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
Ro 12:3 (ESV)

Most of us have a healthy dose of pride. It is something we are born with and it continues to grow without much urging as we go through life. After all, we do live in the land of the free and the home of the saved.

However, in the beauty of transformational living, pride should play no role. After all, I am not in competition with fellow believers. We each are saved by God's grace and empowered to live by faith for His glory. That is what verse three of Romans 12 points out to us. Therefore "...not to think of himself more highly than he ought but to think with sober judgment...".

In other words, don't think you are better than you really are! How highly should I think of myself? Not much in human terms. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Each of us are more sinful than we could ever imagine.

We combat prideful thinking by using sober judgement (v.3). Be honest in your evaluation of yourself. The way we do this is to use God's standard. That standard is the "measure of faith God has assigned" to each believer. The context is talking about various spiritual gifts and how they are used within the body of the church. They are to be used according to the God-given measure of faith. This "measure" is your capacity to minister to others. Not everyone is given the same capacity and that is ok.

This does not mean it requires different amounts of faith for us to receive God's salvation. He is not talking about salvation in this paragraph. He's talking about the evidences of a transformed life. Of which a primary evidence is whether or not you are relationally connected to the body of Christ as God has placed you in it. You should ask yourself "Am I using the gifts God has given to me to serve the body of believers around me"? This is not according to your ability but supernaturally given by God. We will discuss that later.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. When you compare yourself to other’s abilities, what are your thoughts about how God has gifted you? Are you satisfied?
- 2. Did pride just play a role in your evaluation?
- 3. Understanding “measure of faith” as God’s enabling you to minister to others, what is your spiritual gift? We will discuss this more on day six.

In Prayer:

- 1. Thank God for the “measure of faith” He has given you regardless of how big or small you may think it is.
- 2. Ask God to reveal to you any pride issues in your life.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 5

Key thought: We are uniquely designed for unity

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Ro 12:4–5

It's interesting that God uses the human body to illustrate how the church, also called the body of Christ, ought to function. It is obvious that the human body is vitally connected to itself. You don't say to your hand "okay hand you are no longer a part of the team so I'm throwing you away". The point is, we are uniquely connected. The only way to be disconnected is to chop off some part. That is serious and severe. The results are catastrophic.

Your body has hands, eyes, feet and knees, and the list goes on. But each of these makes up your one body. Each of the parts carry out a different function. If the hand tries to act like a foot it doesn't work so well. Yes, someone might say "I know someone who can walk on their hands". Yes I do too, but it's not natural, and does not function very well.

Just as the human body has various members, so does the church. When a member attempts to operate outside of his or her spiritual gift(s) set, it is not natural. You might accomplish some things but never to the degree when you serve in your God-given ministry.

The local church is designed to function as a total unit much like the human body. So God places individuals within the body of a congregation by specific design. You are not there by happen stance. God has uniquely placed you within a certain fellowship of believers so that you fulfill a specific role. You do that by serving others through the various ministry opportunities God gives. This unique design by God brings unity and health to the whole group.

When the local church functions as God has designed it, transformation takes place. Not only in the lives of church members, but also in the lives of those who are influenced by the church's ministry.

This is the beauty of transformational living!

Questions to Ponder:

1. What do you think it means to be “individually members of one another?”
2. Why did you become a part of the congregation at Grace Church?
3. What role do you feel God has designed for you at Grace Church?

In Prayer:

1. List 3-4 other believers whose God-given design is different from yours and then thank God for their ministry.
2. Pray for the beauty of unity to always be present in Grace Church.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 6

Key thought: Spiritual Gifts...what are they?

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: ...
Ro 12:6 (ESV)

Verses 3-8 are a unit in Romans 12. It can be summarized as “God’s Gifts of Grace”. So verse six brings together verses 3-5. Then verse seven and following presents the gifts in action. Today lets give a brief definition.

Depending on who’s listing of the spiritual gifts you use there can be as many as 23 or as little as 9. We can not describe them all here, but just acknowledge God has uniquely given spiritual gifts to every believer. If you name the name of Christ as savior you have a spiritual gift or gifts. It is likely that each of us has a blend of gifts of which one will be predominant. Each of these gifts play a very important role in the proper functioning of a local congregation.

The Greek word for gifts in verse 6 is “charismata” often translated as “grace gift”. It is from the same root word in verse 3 “...grace given to me..”. So in essence, it is an undeserved ability or capacity God gives to each believer at the moment of salvation. A spiritual gift is not necessarily the same as a natural gift. For example, we may say of someone who is a teacher of high school students “they are a gifted teacher”. Even if this person is a Christian, that does not translate into the spiritual gift of teaching God’s truth to others. Yes, God can use that ability to teach others spiritual truth but this is not the essence of a spiritual gift.

A spiritual gift is a God given ability through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit that enables a believer to minister in such a way others are strengthened in their faith (Ro:1:11-12). In other words, when we exercise our spiritual gift, the Holy Spirit works in such a way that all are edified. This is the beauty of transformational living. It is a God thing.

Pastor John Piper says this concerning spiritual gifts; “A spiritual gift is an ability given, by the Holy Spirit, to express our faith effectively (in word or deed) for the strengthening of someone else's faith.”

Note: The best way to determine your spiritual gift(s) is to set about serving others. Whether your service is a spiritual gift will be the affirmation of others. They will be strengthened in their faith.

In the following days we will see these gifts used to bring about transformation in our lives and the lives of others.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. How would you describe the difference between a natural ability and a spiritual gift?
- 2. What is the intended ultimate result of exercising your spiritual gift?
- 3. Where and when has God used your spiritual gift to strengthen the faith of others?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to help you identify and understand your spiritual gift.
- 2. Pray for opportunities to use you gift to strengthen others.
- 3. Thank God for giving us spiritual gifts.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 7

Key thought: We are to use our spiritual gifts to bless others (part 1)

If service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; Ro 12:7 (ESV)

God arranges us in the body of Christ according to our giftedness. God gives each and every member of Christ's body the spiritual "resources/tools" they need to carry out the ministry He calls them to. As individual members do their work of ministry, the whole church is built up, strengthened, and grows toward maturity.

This may come as a surprise to many of us, but we do not choose what position or activity we will carry out in the body. Whether we preach from the pulpit or serve by making a dish for a potluck, our position in the body of Christ is something God decides and we discern. God alone, with His infinite knowledge and wisdom, as the creator and designer of the church, knows EXACTLY where you and I belong in His church.

Our spiritual gift(s) are given to us for a purpose. 1 Corinthians 12:7 tells us what the purpose of our spiritual gifts is, "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common good**." Our gifts may be different from others, but we are to USE THEM (Rom. 12:6) to bless others.

According to verse 7, serving and teaching are two gifts that can be used for the common good to bless others . . .

SERVICE: The word "serve" literally means to "wait at tables". The ministry of service in general is "work done that benefits another". To illustrate what it means to be great in the Kingdom Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Jesus Christ served by laying down His life for others, giving us the perfect example of what it means to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

TEACHING: Teaching is the ability to impart skill or knowledge to another. In the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:19 Jesus said concerning the Old Testament law to those who would be His disciples, "whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." The ministry of teaching involves understanding God's Word and

communicating it clearly to others. You don't have to stand behind a pulpit or stand in front of a class to teach. You simply have to love God, love His commands, love His Word, and be willing and prepared to share it with anyone who is ready and willing to listen.

Whether serving or teaching, we are to use these spiritual gifts of God's grace for the benefit of others.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. Do you enjoy doing things that are a blessing or benefit to others?
- 2. What ways do you feel led to serve in your marriage, family, church, or communities?
- 3. Do you enjoy studying God's Word and sharing what you have learned with others?
- 4. Who are some people in your OIKOS that you feel led to share your knowledge of God's Word with?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to help you see and experience the greatness of serving.
- 2. READ: Matthew 28:20 and ask God to help you fulfill the great commission of making disciples by "teaching (others) to observe all that Jesus commanded you".

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 8

Key thought: We are to use our spiritual gifts to bless others (part 2)

The one who exhorts, in this exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Ro 12:8 (ESV)

The past few days we have learned that we are to use the spiritual gifts given to us for the common good of the body of Christ. In addition to prophesy, service, and teaching Paul gives four more examples of spiritual gifts we can use to bless or benefit others . . .

EXHORTATION: The word exhort means to “encourage” or “comfort” another. Whereas teaching is aimed at the mind, exhortation is aimed at the heart or the will. In John 14:18 Jesus tells His followers that, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Holy Spirit)”. The word translated “exhort” in Ro 12:8 is the same word translated “Helper” in John 14:18. An exhorter plays a similar role as the Holy Spirit in someone’s life, a godly presence who is able to bring a word of inspiration or comfort at just the right moment when it is needed.

CONTRIBUTING: The word contribute means to “share” or “give” a portion of our possessions. Acts 2:45 says that in the early church there were those who were, “selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:18 that the rich in this present age are to “be generous and ready to share”. We do not have to look far to see others in need, contributors are ready to give some of what they have so others don’t go without.

LEADERSHIP: The word lead means “to be in charge of guiding or directing”. For the believer in Christ, leadership is not the CEO mentality of, “I’m in charge, you do what I say.” Jesus’ leadership was the hard work of self-sacrifice that led Him to the cross. This type of leadership is not popular. And yet, this is the type of example and leadership that is needed within the church. Those who want to lead are ready and willing to suffer for the cause of Christ (Philippians 3:7-11).

MERCY: The word mercy means “to show kindness of compassion or concern”. We have already learned that being a living sacrifice is our

response to God's mercy in our lives (Ro 12:1). Those who have received the mercy of God in their own lives are ready to offer the same type of kindness and compassion to others.

The spiritual gifts that God has given to us are powerful tools to transform our lives and the lives of those we come in contact with. We must know what our spiritual gifts are and be ready and willing to use them for the common good of others within the body of Christ and to expand God's Kingdom on earth.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Do you know what your spiritual gift(s) are?
2. What are some ways God has exhorted you through the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?
3. READ: 1 John 3:16-18 Is your heart open or closed toward contributing to those in need?
4. Do you aspire to be a leader because of the high position you might gain or because you are willing to set the example of what it means to be a living sacrifice?
5. How has receiving mercy from God helped you know how to be merciful toward others?

In Prayer:

1. Ask God to reveal to you what your spiritual gifts are and how to use them.
2. Ask God to help you see opportunities to use your spiritual gifts within the body of Christ.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 9

Key thought: A transformed life is characterized by genuine love.

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Ro 12:9 (ESV)

We live in a world filled with insincere love. We use the word love to describe how much we like ice cream in the same way we use the word love to describe a person we care about deeply. Our culture upholds a superficial and temporary type of love. A love that is self-serving and quickly thrown away for the next and newest thing that makes us happy. This is not the kind of love that God had in mind when He said to His disciples in John 15:12 that we are to “love one another.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describes love that is true and without hypocrisy, “love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” These are characteristics of genuine God-designed love. These are characteristics of love that are exhibited by a life that has been transformed by God’s mercy.

Let’s flip a few of these characteristics around. In contrast to love designed by God to be genuine and true there is love that is insincere. Insincere love speaks the words “I love you” but is not patient or kind. Insincere love is attracted to outward beauty while envious and resentful. Insincere love speaks the words, “until death do us part”, but does not endure all things and comes to an end. Genuine love is an unconditional choice exhibited through daily actions and deeds.

Only when we “abhor evil and hold fast to what is good” will we be able to love others genuinely.

ABHOR EVIL: We must hate what God hates and not allow ourselves to relate with others in a way that God would consider evil or sinful. We must be repulsed by offering to others insincere love that is lacking true faithfulness and commitment. A life that is untransformed does not abhor what is evil.

HOLD FAST TO GOOD: In contrast, a transformed life binds itself to what is good. The characteristics of loving others that God has declared good we should permanently join ourselves to. We must never allow ourselves to be separated from the acts of love that God wants us to exhibit toward others. We should hold fast to what God has declared GOOD and love others in a way that God would consider righteous and good.

When our love is genuine, others will be drawn to God and can have their lives transformed as well!

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. What are the characteristics of genuine love?
- 2. READ: 1 John 4:7-21 Where do we get our ability to love others in a genuine way?
- 2. Who are those in your life that God is calling you to love?
- 3. What ways do you exhibit insincere love to others?
- 4. What is one characteristic of genuine love that you feel God is leading you to work on?

In Prayer:

- 1. Use Ephesians 3:14-19 as a guide to pray and ask God to give you the strength to comprehend the love of Christ.
- 2. Ask God to help you abhor what is evil and remove any actions or behaviors of insincere love from your life.
- 3. Ask God to help you hold fast to what is good and commit to living out the characteristics of genuine love

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 10

Key thought: A transformed life is characterized by brotherly love.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Ro 12:10 (ESV)

I (Pastor David) have a brother Andy who is 2 years younger than me. I have quite a few memories of sitting on my brother's chest, pinning his arms down with my knees, and torturing him with the threat of spitting on his face. I was cruel to my brother. I liked sports, my brother liked tractors. Andy and I did not have a lot in common and so we did not always get along, but we did share a **love for one another as brothers**. I loved my brother, but I rarely showed or demonstrated it in any real or tangible way. I remember a moment when my affection became more than a love between brothers. In 1997 I asked him to introduce me when I preached my senior sermon in chapel at Lincoln Christian University. He had a perfect opportunity to crack a joke or get back at me for all that I had done to him growing up, but instead, he displayed his love for me by speaking kindly and with deep respect for me. My brother displayed a love for me in that moment that only a brother can display.

1 Peter 1:22 says, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a **sincere brotherly love**, love one another earnestly from a pure heart". As those who have been purified ("saved" 1 Peter 1:8-9) we enter into a unique family relationship with other believers. In other words, God saves us FOR brotherly love. The word translated "brotherly affection" in Romans 12:10 is φιλαδελφία. Philadelphia, PA is the city of brotherly love. Φιλαδελφία is a compound word from the words φίλος which means "friend" or "someone we regard with fondness and affection" and αδελφος which means "(biological) brother". When φίλος and αδελφος (φιλαδελφία) are brought together they express the natural closeness or kinship that brothers share because they are family. Biological brothers share a "liking" for one another because they share common parents. Once we have experienced salvation, and are reborn into God's family, we should also experience φιλαδελφία with others who have experienced salvation as well. Whether we like it or not, saved sinners are spiritual siblings. Saved sinners who are spiritual siblings "out doing one another showing honor". This means to ascribe high value or worth to another. Showing

honor means putting ourselves beneath others in importance, behind others in priority, and less than others in value. There is no room for pride, arrogance, or selfishness in our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Loving others in this way means resisting attitudes of pride, arrogance, and selfishness and humbly lowering ourselves by putting the needs and interests of others in front of ours in all circumstances.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. What is unique about your relationship with your biological family compared to others you are in relationship with?
- 2. Do you consider other saved sinners your spiritual siblings or do you not allow them to be that close to you in relationship?
- 3. When you relate with your brothers and sisters in Christ, do you put yourself beneath them in importance, behind them in priority, and less than them in value?
- 4. How do you allow pride, arrogance, and selfishness to get in the way of relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to help you see other saved sinners as your brothers and sisters in Christ.
- 2. Ask God to help you ascribe high value and worth to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 11

Key thought: We live a transformed life by serving the Lord.

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Ro 12:11 (ESV)

Who do you work for? That is a frequent question that we are asked. Many of us would be quick to answer, “State Farm”, “Country Financial”, “Growmark”, etc. The answer to the question of who we work for is usually whoever writes our paycheck. We are slaves to our job expectations. If we are needed to change shifts, we are obedient and change shifts. If we are needed to work late, we are obedient and work late. We are slaves, and therefore obedient, to whoever is our master.

Being a good, obedient, hard worker is not a bad thing. It’s just sad that the work we do that pays our salary is the first thing that comes to mind when we think of the work that we have to do. We forget that there is an **even greater work** that we have to do as those who are living transformed lives. Romans 12:11 says that those who live transformed lives are to, “serve the Lord”. The word serve here means “slave”. Our relationship with God is described in terms of a slave and a master. We are to obediently submit ourselves to the work that God has for us in life. And the work that God has given us to do is to make fully devoted followers of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20).

Colossians 3:23-24 says, “whatever you do, **work heartily, as for the Lord** and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are **serving the Lord Christ.**” In everything that we do we are to work at it as if we are working for the Lord and not motivated by man. In everything we do we are to be working at making more fully devoted followers of Christ. So, whether at our job, on the athletic field, in the choir, whatever we do, we are to be working heartily for the Lord while trying to make more fully devoted followers of Christ. This is hard work, but deeply meaningful and eternally satisfying work.

Working for the Lord means we are not slothful. We are not to be lazy, reluctant, or without motivation to serve the Lord. Rather, we are to be fervent in spirit. We are to be enthusiastic and to be completely committed to what we are doing. Serving the Lord is a full time job for all those who have experienced the transformational mercy of God in their lives.

The next time someone asks you the question, “who do you work for?” answer, “I serve the Lord”! See if your response doesn’t invoke a response that opens up the opportunity to share Christ. It’s the most important work you have to do.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. What would you consider your most important work in this life?
- 2. In what ways are you serving the Lord?
- 3. Whatever you are doing, do you work at it with the motivation to serve the Lord, or man?
- 4. What is an area of serving the Lord where you have been slothful?
- 5. What is an area of serving the Lord that you are most enthusiastic about?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to give you an enthusiasm for the work of making more fully devoted followers of Christ.
- 2. Ask God to help you think of all your work as doing it for the Lord and not for man.
- 3. Ask God to help you not be slothful in your service to Him.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 12

Key thought: We live a transformed life by depending on God.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Ro 12:12 (ESV)

“Kids Say the Darndest Things” was a television show hosted by Bill Cosby from 1998-2000. The premise of the show was that Bill would ask a question to a child about anything from dead goldfish to love letters in anticipation of an unpredictable or “cute” response. For example, during one interview Bill Cosby asked a little boy, “who was George Washington’s wife?” and the boy replied, “Miss America”. Cosby asked another boy, “how would you make marriage work?” and the boy replied “Tell your wife that she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck.” Children definitely have an honesty and innocence about them that is sweet, charming, and irresistible. It is these, and many other characteristics, that God loves!

The characteristics that make children unique is their *dependency*. Children rely 100% on others for all of their most basic needs for living. Children are delightfully vulnerable, helpless, weak, and powerless which requires them to be dependent. Mark 10:15 says, “unless you become like a child you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.” Living transformed lives means becoming like dependent children and Romans 12:12 gives three ways that we as God’s children are to depend on Him . . .

REJOICE IN HOPE: Children will believe just about anything an adult tells them. Adults make up stories about Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny and children will count on it for their happiness. 1 Peter 1:3-4 says, that , “according to His great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” Sounds like an imaginary promise, but this promise is true and His children can rejoice in hope knowing that our inheritance is in heaven.

PATIENT IN TRIBULATION: When children are going through a difficult time they want to be near someone who will protect them. Patiently waiting on God in the midst of difficult circumstances is a characteristic of those who are living transformed lives. James 1:2 says, “count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the

testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Patience in tribulation displays our dependence on God and is what God uses to grow us into a more fully devoted follower of Christ.

CONSTANT IN PRAYER: Children look to adults when they need guidance and direction. Prayer is God's children's way of communicating with Him. We are to remain in constant communion with God through prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "pray without ceasing." Our conversation with God must never be interrupted. Our dependence on God must motivate us to stay in communication with Him throughout every minute of every day of every year.

Whether we recognize it or not, we must continually depend upon God. We can depend on God by finding our joy in the hope of our eternal inheritance, patiently waiting on Him as we endure tribulation, and constantly praying to Him for guidance and direction.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Would you say that you depend on God like children depend on adults?
2. What is an area of your life that you struggle to depend on God?
3. What is an area of your life that you find it easy to depend on God?

In Prayer:

1. Ask God to help you depend more and more upon Him each and every day.
2. Ask God to help you be more childlike in your relationship with Him.
3. Tell God the areas of your life you are struggling to depend on Him.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 13

Key thought: We are to be intentional in meeting the needs of our fellow believers.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Ro 12:13 (ESV)

When I (Pastor Andy) was in high school, an unknown visiting missionary family showed up on our front porch. They were traveling from house to house sharing the good news of Jesus. My mother was so impressed by their lives of faith she invited them to park their RV in our driveway and stay with us for an indefinite period of time. Needless to say, this teenager wanted nothing to do with these “radical Jesus freaks.” The Williamsons stayed in our home for the next three months. After a while, my heart began to soften as I witnessed the authentic passion and zeal they had for the Lord. Even though I was a student leader in our church youth group and thought of myself as a pretty good Christian young man, I had never seen this type of devotion. Over the years, their example has continued to be a humbling reminder to me of a sold-out life for Christ. I am so proud of my mother (without my initial approval) for risking intentional hospitality toward these servants of our Savior.

The passage above reminds us that there will be many times in our lives that other brothers and sisters in Christ need our help. The emphasis here is personally taking initiative to do something to meet the needs of others – which could include giving things away, offering our time and assistance, helping financially and a myriad of other services for the sake of the Gospel. The passage further adds, “seek to show hospitality.” The implication is the sharing of a place under one’s own roof. The Greek term (philoxenos) is more expressive than the English word. It literally means “love for strangers.” Paul was encouraging his readers to extend this personal courtesy to traveling believers, even if they were unknown. Without this type of kindness the spread of the gospel would have been greatly hindered. Future Christian leaders needed places to stay and people who would care for them on their missionary journeys. These early “churches in a house” also knew that receiving and entertaining the traveler would be opening their hearts to receiving and entertaining the risen Christ also.

This lavish giving and loving guests has been a part of the authentic Christian life for thousands of years. Let us continue the Gospel call to give and give and give some more. It will transform our lives as well.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. In what ways have you been on the receiving end of someone in the church giving and showing hospitality to you?
- 2. Is there a person or family that you are aware of that has a need you could fill?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to give you eyes of faith to see the needs of those around you.
- 2. Ask God to help you take the initiative in meeting the needs that He revealed to you.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 14

Key thought: We should bless others no matter what they have done to us.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Ro 12:14 (ESV)

We live in a culture where appropriate revenge is almost applauded. Movies, TV shows and the latest lyrics from hit songs abound with stories of people who have been wronged by their spouses, coworkers, companies that let them go, the criminal justice system, even our own government. The list could go on and on. Nobody likes to see violence, but if you have ever been wronged by anything or anyone it seems only natural to want to get even. When in doubt, sue!

According to Paul, we are never to seek revenge. And as we will see later in this chapter, all vengeance is reserved for the Lord alone. (Ro 12:19) He uses the strong word “persecute” in this passage to help us see how counter-cultural the transformed Christian life really is. No matter what others do to us, bless them anyway. We, in the American church, are far removed from the reality of persecution across the globe. North Korea, Somalia, Iraq and other countries continue to hunt down and kill Christians simply because they have embraced Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And unbelievably, the call of this same Gospel is not to retaliate but to bless.

Paul knew what persecution meant. He, himself persecuted the early church and Jesus even uses the same word when He confronted Paul on the Damascus road conversion. (Acts 9: 4,5) “And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”.

Later, Paul would do a complete turn around and reiterate in this letter to believers in Rome the very essence of Christ’s words from the sermon on the mount found in Matthew 5:43-44. “You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”

Of all the imperatives in scripture this is one of the hardest to follow. In fact, without the power of the indwelling Spirit of God it would be impossible. This same attitude is at the heart of other bible passages as well. Here we read the Apostle Peter’s thoughts on how to treat difficult people. “Do not repay evil with evil or insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9)

Some of you may remember the “Blessings” series we did this last fall. May these lyrics from our theme song echo in your hearts once again ... “This day, You set life, You set death right before us. This day, every blessing and curse is a choice now. And we will choose to be a blessing for life.”

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. In what ways have you felt persecuted for your faith?
- 2. Have you ever wanted to retaliate for a personal injustice?
How did you respond?
- 3. How have you been blessed by other people?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to keep your attitudes and thoughts toward kindness when you feel you have been wronged.
- 2. Ask God to help you have a spirit of blessing with whomever He brings across your path.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 15

Key thought: We should share one another's joys and sorrows.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Ro 12:15 (ESV)

Throughout life, we will encounter many different kinds of people on many different paths. This passage reminds us that we are to enter into a shared partnership of joy as well as sorrow. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to concentrate on ourselves at times. Paul is telling his readers to see other people in whatever circumstances they find themselves and walk along side them. He uses these two opposite phrases to encompass all of life's ups and downs.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice"

This command may seem simple and easy. When a fellow believer is rejoicing in all that God has done in their lives, we can affirm the blessings from the Lord and rejoice with them. There is almost a party-like atmosphere implied here so that the joy is shared with others continually. However, there is another part of this "rejoicing" that may be difficult. Sometimes, people around us will seem to have the favor of God on them all the time. Nothing seems to go wrong and we are caught in the "wave" of their happiness. Envy may rise in our hearts. This is where we must trust that God is working all things together for our good. (Ro 8:28)

"Weep with those who weep"

When our family lived in Phoenix, Arizona, I was the worship pastor at Trinity Bible church. One of our long standing choir members had the most difficult Thanksgiving Day of her life. I still remember the early morning phone call. Her husband had been killed in a head on collision sometime around 6 am. She was watching the morning news and recognized her husband's truck during the breaking report. Even before the official call was made, members of our choir came and surrounded her with shared tears and sorrow.

We live in a world full of pain and suffering. As members of Christ's body, we are not immune to the troubles of this life. Instead, we are to be His

hands and feet with those in the midst of heartache. And sometimes the most holy thing we could do is weep together.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. In what ways have you been able to “rejoice with those who rejoice”?
- 2. In what ways have you entered into someone else’s pain to share their tears?

In Prayer:

- 1. God please help me to partner with the joys and sorrows of others.
- 2. God allow me to share my journey so I can be ministered to as well.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 16

Key thought: Loving others in community begins with a spirit of humility.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Ro 12:16 (ESV)

Denise and I (Pastor Len) have the privilege of being the parents of five children. Though they are all adults now, I have vivid memories of all seven of us living under the same roof. Seven very different personalities, interests, perspectives and expectations made 'living in harmony' a challenge at times!

As Paul wrote the words of this verse; "Live in harmony with one another", he knew what a challenge that would be! The first step in living this harmony out is replacing our tendency to be prideful and self-focused with a spirit of humility and graciousness. He gives us four phrases that help us see how this can be done.

- 1) "Live in harmony" - Focus on the essentials that define who we are as fully devoted followers of Christ. Then be gracious in those areas of life that are less important. Seek to understand others, not judge them.
- 2) "Do not be haughty" - do not think you are better than or more important than others.
- 3) "But associate with the lowly" - God does not classify people by rank, social or economic status... and neither should we!
- 4) "Never be wise in your own sight" - Do not think you are smarter or wiser than others. Do not be judgmental or attention seeking, but put others before yourself.

While teaching the Disciples in the Upper Room in John 13:34-35, Jesus said that others will know we are His disciples by the way we love one another. Paul gives us a picture of what this looks like—loving each other in community with a spirit of humility. When people around us see this loving community, they are seeing the beauty of transformational living. And as Jesus said in Matthew 5:16; "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven".

How is your relationship with others reflecting the character of Jesus and bringing glory to our Heavenly Father?

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. As you read the four phrases Paul uses in Romans 12:16, which one do you need to grow in the most? What steps could you begin to take?
- 2. Is there anyone you need to think of or treat differently in light of this verse?
What are a couple of specific adjustments you need to make?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to help you grow in humility and the ability to accept others more graciously.
- 2. Think about 2-3 people you find difficult to get along with.
Now pray for God to bless them, and for Him to teach you how to be more loving and accepting of them.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 17

Key thought: When wronged by others, respond by giving them what is godly, not what they deserve.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. Ro 12:17 (ESV)

Will Rogers, an actor, author and humorist who lived in the early 20th century once said. “I never met a man I didn’t like.” Well, either this Mr. Rogers was not being fully truthful or he was a very rare individual! If we are honest with ourselves, most if not all of us have known people we did not especially like. All of us have experienced being mistreated by someone as well. If we are going to fully experience the beauty of transformational living, we are going to have to learn how to forgive those who have hurt us. Beyond that, we are going to have to learn how God’s grace can enable us to return good and blessing to those who have mistreated and hurt us.

God surely knows this returning blessing for being wronged is beyond our natural ability to do. It is an issue addressed by many of the New Testament authors. Within these verses lie keys to developing this gracious spirit of forgiveness.

Jesus said:

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Luke 6:27-28 (ESV)

Peter wrote:

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Peter 3:8-9 (ESV)

And Paul added:

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

1 Thess 5:15 (ESV)

When someone wrongs or mistreats you, respond with a Christ-like spirit by:

- Praying for them, seeking ways to respond with goodness
- Asking God to bring His blessing into their life
- Using 1 Cor. 13 as a guide, look for ways to express Christ’s love to them.

When we choose love over revenge and retaliation, we are experiencing the beauty of transformational living!

Questions to Ponder:

1. According to Luke 6:32-36, who do we look like if we repay evil for evil? Who do we look like if we repay evil with love, grace and mercy?
2. Think about a time when you mistreated someone else, and they responded with kindness and/or forgiveness.
How did their response affect you?
How could this experience motivate you to do the same?
3. Are there people you need to forgive? How could the other actions we looked at, showing kindness, praying for God to bless them and showing them Biblical love help you forgive?
How would doing them help you to restore your relationship with them?

In Prayer:

1. Ask God to enable you to be more forgiving and loving towards those who offend and hurt you.
2. Thank God for the mercy and forgiveness He has extended you.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 18

Key thought: When I do everything within my power to be in healthy relationships with others, I can have a clear conscience, regardless of their response.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Ro 12:18 (ESV)

As we begin to look at this verse together there are two observations I would like to make.

The first observation is this: Paul does not write, “Live peaceably with all”, and I am so very glad he didn’t! All of us have had people in our lives who refuse to be in a right relationship with us, no matter how hard we try; no matter how graciously and kindly we treat them. So Paul makes sure we understand we are only responsible for our own attitudes, words and actions by writing, “so far as it depends on you”.

The second observation is this: The context of the verse is dealing with people who are our ‘enemies’. These are individuals who have hurt us, mistreated us, attacked us. So when Paul says ‘with all’, he means everyone! From our closest friend to our most vehement enemy.

So, how do we live out this piece of transformational living? Here are some insights from Scripture.

1) Pray for the grace to desire what God desires in this verse.

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

Phil 2:12-13 (ESV)

2) Ask God to enable you to live as a peacemaker with others.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matt 5:9 (ESV)

3) Ask the Holy Spirit to grow His fruit and His love in you.

Read Gal 5:22-24 and 1 Cor 13.

4) Offer the same forgiveness to others as Christ has given to you.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,

forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Eph 4:31-32 (ESV)

5) Ask God to give you the love and humility of Jesus for others.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
Phil 2:1-5 (ESV)

Living out Romans 12:18 takes God’s enabling Grace and our intentional determination to place ourselves before Him as living sacrifices, living not for ourselves, but for Christ and His Kingdom. But when we do, we lay aside hurt, anger, bitterness and fear and put on Christ and the beauty of transformational living!

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. What attitude adjustments do you need to make in order to be a ‘peacemaker’ in your relationship with others?
- 2. Are there specific individuals you need to do more to ‘be at peace’ with? What step do you need to take?

In Prayer:

- 1. Pray through the 5 Scriptures listed in the devotional, asking God to grow you in each one.
- 2. Ask God to enable you to do all you can to be in right relationships with others. Now entrust those relationships to God.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 19

Key thought: When wronged by others, trust God to deliver justice, in His way and in His time.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' Ro 12:19 (ESV)

Have you ever been hurt so deeply by someone that you wanted them to experience being 'payed back'? That usually means you want them to be hurt in a way that is similar to how they hurt you. We have a variety of ways we deliver that pay back. We give them the 'silent treatment'; we make sure others know what they did to us with the goal of our hearers taking up an offense on our behalf; we assert ourselves and let them know they have violated us and we will not put up with it, just to name a few. While these may bring a sense of satisfaction over the short term, we are often left feeling frustrated and maybe even a bit guilty over the long term. The one thing that does not happen is any restoration or resolve. In addition, God is not honored either.

So what are we to do with the hurt done to us? The full answer will cover the rest of chapter twelve. As Paul begins here in verse 18, he tells us to resist the urge to do pay back ourselves. Leave justice to God. I cannot explain this any better than Chuck Swindoll does in his commentary on the book of Romans.

"Note the reason we are to set aside our revenge. It is to 'leave room for the wrath of God'. At first, I took that to mean something like this: 'Don't seek to harm your enemy in return for an offense. Let God do it for you because He can hurt'em a whole lot worse than you can!' And chances are good you have heard that kind of teaching before. However, the wrath of God is always redemptive, never retaliatory or spiteful. The wrath of God during this age of grace pursues the sinner, cuts off his escape, confronts her with the consequences of sin, chastises him, and makes her continued sin miserable. Why? To bring the individual to repentance. To give him or her grace. To redeem our enemy as He has redeemed all believers." Insights from Romans p. 265

When you and I place ourselves before God as living sacrifices, He begins to transform us by renewing our minds. This means we set our own world view, priorities and values aside and surrender to God's world view,

priorities and values. One way we experience this is by setting aside our desire to be vindicated when wronged and embrace God's priority of grace and redemption. By deciding to exercise restraint and grace when wronged, we become an instrument God can use to reach and transform someone else. We trust that God knows best how and when to respond to our being wronged. If that person does choose the path of repentance, they will experience redemption! If they choose the path of rejection, then in time God will bring about the proper judgement. Either way, we leave it with God.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Why do we find it so difficult to practice verse 19?
How does remembering how God has treated us with grace help?
2. Verse 19 is vitally connected to verses 17 and 18. How can applying them to our lives be part of living out verse 19?

In Prayer:

1. Ask God to give you His heart of love, grace, mercy and redemption for people.
2. Is there someone who has hurt you whom you have to forgive?
Take a few minutes to pray for the grace to do that, and for God's work to be done in their life.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 20

Key thought: When mistreated, we are to go beyond tolerance and respond with acts of kindness.

To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”
Ro 12:20 (ESV)

I recently read a story that took place in a Concentration Camp in WWII. It seems there was a tall, muscular man in one of the barracks who asserted himself over the other inmates. This included taking food, blankets and seats next to the small stove that provided heat. One small, quiet young man was a favorite target. Day in and day out this young man tolerated the mistreatment without complaint. One afternoon, our brawny friend incurred the anger of a guard, who beat him and then sent him to the barracks without food. The quiet inmate slipped his one piece of bread under his shirt, walked into the barracks, and handed the crusty slice to his antagonist. Looking the other man in the eye, he said, ‘I give this to you in the name of Jesus’ and simply walked away. Though the bully never said a word of apology, his behavior was altered, especially towards his quiet benefactor.

As we saw in verse 19, it honors the Lord when we resist the urge to retaliate when wronged and leave justice in His hands. However, as we come to verse 20, Paul urges us to move beyond simple tolerance and respond to those who wrong us with acts of kindness.

The picture Paul is painting is of a stranger entering a small town or family compound. Inviting him or her to share a meal with you was more than an act of hospitality and kindness. It was an invitation to friendship. If you did not want to express this to the person, you simply and quietly walked away, and they got the message! However, once invited to share a meal, that person became a welcomed friend for life.

Like Jesus in many of His parables, Paul raises the bar! Not only are we to offer food and drink to friendly strangers and friends, but to enemies as well. For as Jesus Himself said, what do we prove when we offer kindness to our friends? Even those with no belief in God will do that. However, when we offer kindness to those who have hurt us, then we reflect the love and kindness of God our Father. (Luke 6:32-36)

Returning kindness for insult does more than reflect the heart of Jesus. It also can be used by God to bring conviction, repentance and a change of heart and behavior. That is what Paul means when he says, ‘you will heap burning coals on his head’. This phrase meant to bring conviction and contrition. The goal of this is not to gain an apology, though when one comes it is nice! The ultimate goal is to bring that person to God for the Lord’s touch and transformation.

And when we return kindness for hurt in the name and love of Jesus... we experience the beauty of transformational living.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. When was a time when you received an unexpected act of kindness? How did it affect your attitude and actions? Has there been a time when you extended kindness to one who had hurt you? What was the other person’s response?
- 2. What does God need to do in your life to give you the heart to practice verse 20?
Are you ready to respond?

In Prayer:

- 1. Ask God to give you the desire to be more like Christ when it comes to responding to difficult people in your life.
- 2. Ask God to touch the lives of others through your love and kindness towards them.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 21

Key thought: As fully devoted followers of Christ, we are to be impacting the people and culture around us through godliness, kindness and grace.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Ro 12:21 (ESV)

Have you ever been overcome, overwhelmed, deflated by an evil done to you? I have, in fact more than once I am afraid. It came out in a burst of angry words, the decision to withdraw from a person, days spent dwelling on the hurt or one of a number of other responses. The one thing all of these responses had in common was this...they didn't help a bit. In fact, they made me and the situation worse.

Writing about the importance of forgiveness, Neil Anderson pens:

"Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. You're going to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness"

Anderson could have said, "You are going to be overcome with the evil done to you or overcome the evil done to you with God's goodness." When we decide to become overcomers through God's grace, kindness and love, we do more than withstand the wrong done to us. We redeem it for God's glory and use.

God is in the process of redeeming His creation, especially people, who have been made in God's own image. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is reclaiming us from the evil one, and adopting us as His own sons and daughters! As Paul writes in Colossians concerning Jesus:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him," Col 1:19-22 (ESV)

When we choose to live in the beauty of transformational living, we become partners with God in His ministry of reconciliation. Yes, responding to hurt with grace and kindness is freeing for us. However, it is also used by God for His work of redemption as well. We have overcome Satan and sin

and their influence in the world around us by becoming an instrument in the hands of God. An instrument of grace, love and mercy that leads others to repentance and the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

So, take a long look at the many ways God has poured His mercy into your life and get on the alter as a living sacrifice. Allow the Word of God to change your way of seeing life and be transformed into a reflection of Christ. Lovingly serve your brethren in the church and those outside of the family of God. And, when wronged, resist the urge to retaliate and instead be a conduit of God’s love, kindness and compassion. Then, you will experience the words of Jesus:

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 (ESV)

Questions to Ponder:

- 1. Is there a person whose mistreatment has been overcoming you?
How can living out verses 17-21 bring you the peace Jesus is talking about?

In Prayer:

- 1. Think about those who have wronged you, and as needed, pray for them, for God’s blessing and work in their lives.
- 2. Ask God to make you an instrument of His love, mercy and kindness to everyone around you, believer and not-yet believer; friend and antagonist. And that through your life, others might be drawn to Christ.

How will I put this into practice?

The Beauty of Transformational Living

For Kids!

21 Days of Prayer & Fasting
Daily Devotional Guide 2016



Addendum Devotional for Parents and Grandparents
Each day's musings correspond with
the adult theme for the same numbered day.

Miss Kelly

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 1: The beauty of God's mercy is beyond my comprehension.

Romans 1-11 covers Who God is (the perfect, holy, loving Creator of the Universe), Who We are (His beloved made-in-His-image creation), and What He has done for us (Created, Loved, Saved, Forgave and Restored). Here is Chapter 12, verse 1, we start to focus on the effect and beauty of His mercy!

Ask your children to talk about the most beautiful "thing" they can think of. Then talk about the fact that qualities can be beautiful, too. If they are old enough for this abstract thought, ask them to talk about a beautiful quality of someone they know.

A great companion story for this verse for children is Matthew 18:23-35, The Unforgiving Servant. The beauty of God's mercy should make us want to be merciful. (Remind the children that we are ALL the one who has been forgiven MUCH!)

Day 2: Transformational living is accomplished by committing everything I know about myself to everything I know about God.

There is a difference between dying sacrificially (a noble thing, for sure) and living sacrificially! Remind the children that Joseph, Mary's husband, lived sacrificially: he took Mary as his wife even though she was pregnant with God's (not his) baby; he protected Mary and Jesus; he listened to what God told him to do, and he DID IT! We don't know how long Joseph lived and reared Jesus (at least through Jesus' 12th year), but we do know that he must have been very special to do so. Matthew 1:18-2:15

Day 3: God brings about ongoing transformation in the lives of those who are fully devoted to Him.

Not conforming is hard for children and adults alike. Talk about “conforming” which means *to form together*. Good kinds of conforming would be the way a pair of tennis shoes becomes really comfy as they conform to your feet! Bad kind of conforming is when we form together with someone/something we shouldn’t. Your children will most likely be able to come up with lots of examples of this! Transform means to change across or beyond. The classic example of transformation is a caterpillar to butterfly. Look up with your children the story of Zacchaeus (you could even sing it together!). Let the children list ways Zacchaeus changed. Luke 19:1-10

Day 4: Viewing myself through the lens of God’s grace controls my pride and enables me to be used of God.

The Herods were really rotten guys. This was the ruling family of Idumeans (not Jews). The word Herod means hero-like, it represented kings. Herod the Great was the one who ordered babies killed when he couldn’t find Jesus. Herod Antipas had John the Baptist killed. Herod Agrippa I was also horrible. He is most likely the one who had James put to death, and he did have Peter imprisoned. Unfortunately for him, his pride got carried away with him. Share Acts 12:20-24. Instead of looking at himself through the lens of God’s grace, He let people call him god!

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 5: We are uniquely designed for unity.

These verses are really easy for children to understand, but have fun with it! You could draw a character with toes for ears and a mouth where the belly button should be - whatever tickles the children's fancy. Talk about the function of our body's parts and what happens without one of them. Talk about people you know at Grace or other ministries and what they do. Imagine what it would be like without those special people. Ask your children what are ways they can serve. The idea, obviously, is to see that every single thing we do for Jesus is important.

Look at the story of Dorcas (Tabitha in Hebrew, means Gazelle) in Acts 9:36-43. She used her sewing talent for her community.

Day 6: Spiritual Gifts...what are they?

We learn in the adult materials for today that "Grace-Gifts" or Spiritual Gifts come to a person with conversion. Some of your children may have already accepted Christ, and others may not have made that decision yet. It is exciting to help our children to discover their Grace-Gifts as well as their natural giftedness. We can help them with this by getting them active in service. Young children can serve their family members: "Will you please find Brother's pacifier?" They are a perfect match for serving older people and grandparents, too. Watch for joy in their service—these may be places where the Lord will gift them when they accept Christ.

Remind children that they have something to offer to God at even the youngest age! Read Matthew 19:13-15 together.

Day 7: We are to use our spiritual gifts to bless others (part 1)

(See the Connect@Home Front Porch for materials on Children and Gifts of the Spirit)

Children understand “Serving” and “Teaching” (and especially being taught!) very well. Have them talk about ways that they can do these things for others. Remember that the focus is serving and teaching people in order that they might know the Lord. Talk about service which brings us glory compared to service that brings Christ glory. Brainstorm ways which your family can serve someone, perhaps anonymously. Another activity for families is to write a thank you note to someone who teaches your children about Christ—AWANA leader, Sunday school teacher, etc.

Look at another cool guy named Joseph, called Barnabas (Son of Encouragement) in Acts 4:36-37 & 9:26-27.

Day 8: We are to use our spiritual gifts to bless others (part 2)

Many times we know that a child has a natural bent toward some quality. You may have a child who is always encouraging others, or Exhorting them. Another child may be constantly Sharing with his siblings or friends. The child who is always Leading is not hard to miss, and the child who is forever Showing Mercy is surely a blessing. Help your children to see these qualities in each other. Talk about times when each of them showed one of these Spiritual Gifts.

Set the example by exhorting your children - write each one a note detailing how you have seen them show Spiritual Gifts.

Read John 6:1-16. What did the boy in the story do to make this miracle possible? Brainstorm things you can share!

Help your leader children to learn gentleness. Remind your merciful child of Matthew 5:7.

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 9: A transformed life is characterized by genuine love.

Read the Romans verse; the three points go together: we can share genuine love by hating evil and holding onto good. Ask the children who are some friends they are called to love? Perhaps there is a troubled child in their classrooms? Talk about loving those people and helping them to see goodness. Talk about how it would not show love to them if we joined with them in evil. (As I write this, one granddaughter pulled the pacifier out of the mouth of her younger sister and popped into her mouth a vintage toy she illicitly likes to chew on!)

A fun illustration of this can be done with a pair of children and a roll of toilet tissue. One child can wrap the other about the chest and down the legs. This represents evil and how it binds us. Talk about how joining someone in evil makes him/her stuck in sin. Now let the wrapping child help the other one break out of the bonds of evil. This is genuine love setting us free from sin!

Day 10: A transformed life is characterized by brotherly love.

If you are the parents of more than one child at some point you will surely have had to talk about “loving your brother (or sister)!” We humans are generally pretty naturally selfish, so this can be a struggle. Remind yourself of the story of Jonathan and David and share it with your children. (Jonathan was next in line to be king of Israel after his father, Saul. When David was anointed next king by Samuel, Jonathan could kiss his kingdom goodbye! Even though Saul unkindly pointed this out to Jonathan time and time again, Jonathan held on to his love for David over his desire to be king. 1 Samuel 1-5 and 1 Samuel 20. Talk about how we can have this kind of love and what it means: putting others first.

Day 11: We live a transformed life by serving the Lord.

I write this day's devotional to myself! The BEST way for us to help our children learn to serve the Lord is by doing it ourselves - cheerfully! That means not saying, "Oh, I don't want to go to this meeting." or "I HAVE to do this and that for church." We need to make our focus JOY in serving the Lord and let it shine. My grown children will tell you about the summer of 2005 which we spent at a former church, every day painting, and decorating and working hard on a major remodel. It was so much fun! It was fun because we had joy in what we were doing. Of course, there are some days when we don't feel it, but remembering that it is our Loving Lord we are serving helps. This day just begs for a study of sloths—check out YouTube videos or library books about sloths. You can make a game of being sloths, which is fun if you aren't the one waiting on the sloth to get something done! (Be sure that you (grand)parents are sloths doing something the children want done - maybe dishing ice cream!) Pray about not being sloths in our work for God!

Day 12: We live a transformed life by depending on God.

We depend on a lot of things in America 2016 - electricity, technology, automobiles, weather forecasts. These are good things (except maybe weather forecasts) but if we are too dependent, or we forget that they are provided by God in the first place, we don't depend fully on Him. The exercise for today will remind us all that God is our Light (John 1:1-13) and Power (John 1:14-18). On this evening, I encourage you to disconnect from human sources of light and power. Turn off all of the lights. Turn off your phones. Read by candlelight. Play a game. PRAY together. Depending on the ages of your children and the needs of your household, spend your evening like this and go to bed in this mood of sweet reflection. Be sure to talk about the fact that Jesus is Light and we derive everything from Him!

The Beauty of Transformational Living

Day 13: We are to be intentional in meeting the needs of our fellow believers

This is different than ministering to non-believers. Talk with your children about this. Pastor Andy used the word “lavish” in his devotional. That’s a great word. Talk also about the difference between giving lavishly and giving the bare minimum!

2 Kings 4:8-37 tells the story of a widow who lavishly took care of Elisha.

The challenge for this day is to make a plan to lavishly meet a need of some believers! Brainstorm this and make a plan for enacting it. Be sure to talk about the importance of being discreet and anonymous!

Day 14: We should bless others no matter what they have done to us.

Look at Matthew 27: 33-50, the account of Jesus’ crucifixion is the ultimate time when someone (the ONE) blessed others despite what they had done. Depending on the age of your children, talk about the fact that Jesus not only had to be hanging there in dire pain, naked in front of people, but every unkind thing that was said to Him and every blow and every mockery was also a sin that He had to have on Him to wear to the grave. It is truly overwhelming.

No one can ever do anything as bad to us as we have done to Jesus. He is our example and we are to strive to be more like Him, no matter what others do. This is a deep and difficult lesson. This day should be a contemplative and somber reflection that ends with a prayer of thanks and JOY that God was willing to let Jesus come and take our place!

Day 15: We should share one another's joys and sorrows.

Provide supplies for your children to make a bunch of greeting cards. Help them to think of people who are going through joyful times and those who have had recent sadness. Help them to write a Scripture verse in side and to sign them. Let them address and stamp and put in the mailbox! This is a fun way to share in others' joys and sorrows. You might also make a loaf of bread or breakfast casserole and share it with someone who is going through a rough time. Talk about appropriate things to say when someone is grieving. That is a life-skill that will allow them to bless people throughout their lives.

Read John 11:1-44. Focus on Jesus' sharing the grief of Mary and Martha.

Day 16: Loving others in community begins with a spirit of humility.

"Humility isn't thinking less of ourselves; it's thinking of ourselves less." It is not humility for a person who is a phenomenal cook to think or say, "Oh, I can't cook very well." It is truly ok to be good at things—God made us to have abilities and to use them for Him. The danger lies when we get caught up in ourselves and what WE can do. Instead, we as adults need for ourselves and to help our children to take what we can do and do it for someone else for God's glory. Talk about how they can put others first. (So not our human nature!) Practice this and set this as an example. In the Kidzone, I see all kinds of behaviors which are the exact opposite of humility. As parents, this area needs much prayer for all of us. Ruth is the classic example of someone who put other people ahead of herself. It is a short book, you could read it as a family!

The Beauty of Transformational Living

**Day 17: When wronged by others,
respond by giving them what is godly, not what they deserve.**

Joseph in the OT comes to mind here! His is truly a story of NOT getting even! We will spend the next three days studying his story! Read together the story of Joseph from a children's Bible or select from Genesis 37. Talk about ways we can be like Joseph, who was like Jesus, and not get even with people. This is an especially relevant message for siblings! Talk about the betrayal he felt when his brothers sold him to slavery.

**Day 18: When I do everything within my power to be in healthy
relationships with others, I can have a clear conscience,
regardless of their response.**

Today we pick up the story of Joseph in Genesis 39-41. Here he is falsely accused of bad behavior he did not do, AND he gets thrown in jail for his trouble! We find out that he needed to be in jail in order to meet two other prisoners and ultimately to meet Pharaoh!

Talk about the benefit of having a clear conscience, even when things don't go our way.

**Day 19: When wronged by others, trust God to deliver justice,
in His way and in His time.**

Let's finish the story in Genesis 42-46. It's a lot of material, so a children's Bible might be helpful, or read the material and "tell" the rest of the story.

It is important to talk about the fact that not every righteous person gets a "Happily Ever After" on earth. Sometimes really bad stuff happens to people and it doesn't get better until heaven. The truth is, though, there IS heaven, and we don't deserve it. Even really righteous people don't deserve it. Thankfully, God overlooked justice in making us pay for our own sins and let Jesus do it. This is a great day to talk about accepting that gift, if your children haven't yet. Pray for those who are waiting for justice in this world.

**Day 20: When mistreated, we are to go beyond tolerance
and respond with acts of kindness.**

When Paul and Silas were imprisoned unjustly, God sent an earthquake to shake up the prison and set them free. Instead of holding a grudge against their jailer for keeping them in shackles, they rush to save his life! Read about it in Acts 16:25-34.

Talk about being kind to others who may treat us badly. It is possible that there are children at school with your children who are known to be unkind. They may need help thinking of kind responses to unkind behavior.

The Beauty of Transformational Living

**Day 21: As fully devoted followers of Christ,
we are to be impacting the people and culture around us
through godliness, kindness and grace.**

For this last day, I suggest making somewhat of a ceremony of blessing your children - charging them with behaviors you want them to exhibit for God. Make this twofold: first praise God for an attribute He has given them. "Father, thank you for making Abbey so joyful; she encourages others and it is a lovely and loving thing."

Then ask Him to bring about a change in an area that needs changing - NOT in a critical or "point-out-flaws" way! Something like this: "Father, we look forward to watching how you will grow Ebenezer in working hard this season. It is exciting to see him understanding how important this is and watching him become more like you in this area."

If you are stuck in how to do this, ask your small group members or one of the pastors or me for help!

Another way you can do this is to take the letters of your children's names and use them for qualities you know they have and qualities you want them to grow. Write or type it prettily and present it to them each.

Make this a big deal and a celebration. No matter how you do this, it will be special! Of course, include prayer!

My Notes...

*The Beauty
of Transformational Living*